A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF THE MOTIVATIONS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN A TRANSITIONAL AND DEVELOPING ECONOMY:

THE CASE OF CHINA

Submitted by Yan Wen-Thornton, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Management Studies.

March 2013

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature: Yan Wen-Thornton
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Abstract

This research is a pioneering longitudinal study of Chinese women entrepreneurs that focuses specifically on the government economic reform period of 1980 to the present. The study makes a significant contribution to entrepreneurship studies and it contributes to our knowledge of women entrepreneurship in transitional economies.

The study investigates the drivers that influence and factors associated with Chinese women's entrepreneurial success in China. The research also explores the motivations of Chinese women entrepreneurs in starting-up their business in the reform periods across the last three decades.

A total of nine Chinese women entrepreneurs in three groups who set up their own business in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s were investigated for an in-depth interview, using narrative approaches, in a qualitative research methodology. How Chinese culture, government policy and massive domestic market demand have influenced Chinese women’s entrepreneurial identity and motivation are the main outcomes of the project. Additionally, the barriers, family issues and effects of relationships were uncovered during this research.

Key words: China, Women, Chinese women entrepreneurs, Entrepreneurship, Motivation.
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List of Abbreviations

CCP Chinese Communist Party
CAWE China Association of Women Entrepreneurs
GMD Guo Ming Dang
MECD Ministry of Entrepreneurial and Community Development
MWFCF Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development
SOE State-Owned-Enterprise
WF Women Federation
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The world today is paying more attention to the economy of the People’s Republic of China (hereinafter cited as China) due to its growth and internationalization (Deng et al. 2011). After three decades of sustained market transition from monolithic state run enterprises to privately run businesses, domestic entrepreneurial activity is currently booming in China. The new Chinese entrepreneurial epoch sweeps through the whole country. The great ambitions of many Chinese people in China are to be rich and successful by starting their own business and to be masters and mistresses of their own destiny. There is a famous Chinese saying ‘Women hold up half of the sky’, which means women not only make up nearly half of the total population, but also play an equally important role with men in daily life, national construction, social development and business. China’s economic reform and open policy has not only brought opportunities for Chinese men but also for Chinese women.

The number of Chinese women entrepreneurs in mainland China has significantly increased in the last three decades since the economic reform of 1978 in China. According to the All-China Women’s Federation (2007), in the 1980s, Chinese women entrepreneurs only accounted for 10% among the total number of Chinese entrepreneurs. Since the 1990s, economic development and technological advancements in China have given rise to a strong momentum of women entrepreneurship and China has over 29 million women entrepreneurs, about 25 percent of the national total, among whom 41 percent are self-employed and private business owners (Xinhua, 2011). However, the research on Chinese women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship is still in its infancy (Deng, 2011). The major focus has been on qualitative descriptions of the main achievement and simple quantitative analysis of the entrepreneurial
phenomenon. This thesis contributes to the literature and methodology by providing a three decades longitudinal study using a narrative approach.

The aim of this first chapter is to provide a general background to the thesis and give the reader a clear outline of the investigative aims and overall objectives. This first chapter is structured into three main sections. First, by starting with the researcher's own life narrative, the chapter introduces the reader to the researcher's entrepreneurial story and experience and describes the main reasons why the researcher is interested and involved in investigating Chinese women entrepreneurs in China. Second, it is to state the research aims and objectives of the thesis. Third, to explain the thesis structure and aims of each chapter prior to moving to Chapter 2 Literature review.

1.2 The researcher's narrative

I realised at an early age that I come from an entrepreneurial family. My interest in the study of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship is both academic and personal. As the title of this thesis indicates the research is about women entrepreneurs in China. I have chosen to use a narrative approach to investigate women’s’ lives through collecting individual's personal life stories, for which a large degree of critical empathy has been essential. As Bruner (1990) states, people’s experience of life are profoundly influenced by the stories we tell, as well the stories told about us. As human beings, we organize our experience in the form of stories. Narratives or personal stories provide opportunities for interpretations and meanings and further invite a telling of the multiple stories that can be told about an individual’s life. I still remember my family experiences as a young person and my personal life story, even through these experiences have passed more than three decades ago.
Narratives are constructed and involve thinking more than memory (Neisser 1994). They include feelings and emotions as well as thoughts and reflections. My personal narrative involves much more than remembering occurrences and incidents and begins with a memory of an emotional feeling. In order to support my study in school and pay for my schooling fees, in the early of 1980s, my mother ran a small business. She was a street vendor, selling homemade snacks for breakfast and I can vividly remember the embarrassment I felt when my friends ostracised me. They laughed at me and did not want to speak to me because my mother was an entrepreneur. Although her small business was a success she became seriously ill and she had to close her business and spent most of her hard-earned savings for my education and her medical treatments.

Every morning my mother had to get up at around 4 o’clock to start to mash the dry soya beans by hands and boil the mash to make the soya milk soup. She also prepared steamed dumplings for sale in the street for Chinese people’s breakfasts. My mother just wanted to feed her children and pay their educational tuition fees. I can recall the many times, usually in the night, when my mother suddenly becoming ill and my father had to take her to the emergency hospital. There were many tears and much frustration brought to the whole family. Even when my mother had to go to hospital, next morning she still returned to the kitchen to start to prepare her food for her small business. Seven years later, after I started at the university, she closed her business due to her continuing health problems.

In the mid of 1990s, my brother finished his college study, but unlike most of his contemporaries he did not choose to work for someone else. Straight after leaving college, he set up his own art and printing design business. His motivation was very simple, he wanted to earn more money to support my family and look after my parents as they were getting older. My brother’s decision
caused much argument between my mother and my brother as my mother disliked him becoming an entrepreneur. She said she would prefer he worked for a company and obtained a stable and regular salary. My mother’s experience and the hardship she suffered during her time in running her own business greatly influenced her and made her want to deter my brother. However, she was not successful and my brother still runs his own business today.

Time moved on to the year 2000 and I decided to leave my secure and salaried job in the bank to start and run a training company in Beijing. My mother felt very disappointed with my decision and she tried to persuade me not to leave my job. However, I did not agree with her and there were many arguments with her, even though I tried to make her understand my motivation was to be like her, an entrepreneur. My motivation was strong and no one could dissuade me. On reflection, my motivation differed from my mother’s, because I was seeking self-recognition, which I felt was lacking in my job at the bank. In my case, the work in the bank was boring and I realised that I would never have opportunities to be promoted into a higher position. However, my mother did not understand this and the main point of her argument was that I would never go hungry because the bank provided me with job security and a regular salary.

According to Maslow’s (1943) theory of motivation, there are five classes of human needs and that they are hierarchically organized (see Table 1.1).
Physiological needs are on the bottom of the hierarchy followed by safety, love/belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization needs. Each level is a pre-requisite of the next higher level. Physiological needs must receive sufficient satisfaction before safety needs emerge, safety needs must receive sufficient satisfaction before belongingness needs emerge, and so forth. The value of his theory, if true, is that it can act as a guide for living. It suggests that early in life one should establish a basis for physiological survival and security, and once these are accomplished, one should seek friends, followed by achievements and finally self-actualization, if Maslow’s theory is a universal reflection of human development, it should apply in every culture and nation. I can empathise with Maslow’s theory as it was applicable in my own family’s case. My mother was motivated by basic needs and survival, my brother sought to improve both his and his parent’s standard of living, and I was looking for self-performance.
Whether Maslow understood his hierarchy as being achieved in social groups and across generations is a moot point, but this is certainly my experience.

In 2009, after nine years of practical business experience, I decided to start my PhD study and these family stories have motivated me to carry out this research. Based on my personal experience and interest, along with my understanding of Maslow’s motivation theory, I aimed to develop a deeper understanding about the experience of entrepreneurs. The outcomes, research aims and objectives for this study are outlined in the next section 1.3.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

Based on the researcher’s personal and family entrepreneurial experience and life stories as described above, the broad aim of this research is to investigate the drivers and motivational factors that have influenced Chinese women entrepreneurs, leading to success, in the three decades of transition and economic development in China. The specific objectives of this research are:

- To explore the motivations of Chinese women entrepreneurs in starting-up their business in the reform periods across the last three decades from the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s and correlate the findings in both the decade as well as over the three decades.

- To uncover the factors that led to Chinese women becoming successful entrepreneurs.

- To identify the barriers, obstacles and effects on the work-life balance faced by women entrepreneurs in setting up and running their businesses.

- To assess the future plans and prospects of women entrepreneurs.
1.4 Structure of thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters in total, from chapter 2 to chapter 7, the content of each chapter starts with an introduction and ends with a conclusion. This thesis is constructed as shown in Table1.2

Table 1.2 Structure of thesis

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Source: author
As stated earlier, the aim of chapter 1 is to identify research aims and objectives, the rationale to investigate this study and to explain the structure of the whole thesis and give readers a clear outline of this thesis.

The aim of chapter 2 is to conduct a comprehensive review and analysis of studies previously carried out into the factors motivating entrepreneurial activity, more especially women entrepreneurs. The review is organised systematically in order to identify any gaps in the research and to identify critical concepts and methodologies which may be relevant and useful to this study of Chinese women entrepreneurs.

The aim of chapter 3 is to determine the most suitable research methodology, assess the use of narrative approaches in qualitative research and meet the research aims and objectives by focusing on the characteristics of women entrepreneurs based in China, taking into account the culture in which they work and live.

The aims of chapters 4, 5 and 6 are to achieve the research objectives and to present the motivational factors and drivers that influenced Chinese women entrepreneurs who started their own business in 1980s, 1990s and 2000s through their own stories and narratives. The construction of the three chapters 4, 5 and 6 follows the same structure for each time period, adopting a longitudinal approach to create a similar format for the analysis of the three entrepreneurs’ stories respectively, which are followed in each chapter by the researcher’s interpretations and commentaries.

In a final concluding chapter, the nine women entrepreneurs stories in three time periods 1980s, 1990s and 2000s will be compared and reflected on using a framework analysis to facilitate further discussion prior to summarizing the
research outcomes and findings, followed by an analysis of the research contribution and limitations of the thesis in light of the conclusions offered.

Chapter 2  Literature review

2.1 Introduction

Entrepreneurship has long been accepted as playing a significant contribution to the wealth and job creation of a country and it is a subject that has attracted many researchers from different cultural and economic backgrounds for several decades (Cornelius et al, 2006). The academic study of entrepreneurship can be approached in various ways. Traditionally, studies of entrepreneurship have focused on the individual characteristics of successful entrepreneurs and seek to explain why a person decides to become an entrepreneur and start a new business (Lee et al, 2004). Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to concentrate on a review of studies previously carried out on entrepreneurs, in order to identify gaps in the research and to identify critical concepts that may be relevant to the study of Chinese women entrepreneurs.

This chapter is structured in four sections. First, to introduce and review the generic definitions of entrepreneurs, taking into account psychological, sociological and economic factors, in order to provide a holistic understanding of entrepreneurship. Second, to identify and analyse studies previously carried out on women entrepreneurs with a particular focus on drivers and motivations. Consideration is also given, in this section, to any factors that have received minimal treatment in the literature, but which have been identified as leading women to establish their own businesses. Third, to identify and analyse previous studies carried out on Chinese entrepreneurs with any particular focus on Chinese women entrepreneurs. In the last section, to formulate a conclusion and establish a generic description of an entrepreneur, ascertain the general
characteristics of entrepreneurs and identify gaps in the previous research carried out on Chinese women entrepreneurs.

2.2 Review of Entrepreneurs

2.2.1 Aim and Structure

Scholars have attempted to define the entrepreneur from many perspectives ever since the word entrepreneur originated from the French language and was first coined by the economist Richard Cartillon (1730.) Cartillon defines an entrepreneur as a person who has possession of a new enterprise, venture or idea (Rumball, 1989). These attempts to start a new enterprise were regarded by some writers as an obsession (Bull and Willard, 1993). As a result, there are several definitions of entrepreneurs, which bear a family resemblance. Various definitions offered by scholars reflect respective disciplines such as psychology, sociology and economics (Selleh et al, 2007). Therefore, the aim of this section 2.2 is to examine and review previous studies including management studies which focus on the multiple definitions of entrepreneurs and to understand theories of entrepreneurship in general.

In the following section I first explore some general definitions used in entrepreneurship studies. Second, I will provide an overview of psychological perspectives on entrepreneurship. Third, I provide an overview from sociological perspectives on entrepreneurship. Fourth, I examine economic perspectives, before finally summarizing the several perspectives brought forward.

2.2.2 Definitions

It is difficult to provide a single definition of the term entrepreneur. Based on various combinations of characteristics that are typically ascribed to entrepreneurs in everyday language use, it has been a common practice for researchers to create their own definitions. Cromie and Hayes (2011) defined entrepreneurs as individuals who start new businesses, which they own and
control. Moore (1990) describes entrepreneurs as those who take an active role in decision-making and risk taking for a business in which they have majority ownership. Solymossy (2005) prioritizes the participation of the person in business and defines an entrepreneur as an individual who is the actively involved principal of the business, even if not maintaining one hundred percent ownership. Hechavarria and Reynolds (2009) define the entrepreneur as one who initiates new activities intended to culminate in the start-up of a viable business. Adnan (2004) defines entrepreneurs as individuals who actively form or lead their own business and nurture them for growth and prosperity. Herbert and Link (1989) focus on three main characteristics of entrepreneurs which are uncertainty, creation and adjustment. In order to have a further understanding with the concept of entrepreneurs, the three main streams of research from psychologists, sociologists and economists will be selected for this literature review.

2.2.3 Psychological Perspective

From the psychologist’s viewpoint, the study of entrepreneurs concentrates on the person in the course of action, it is like a dancer in the dance and a core in the theoretical process (Smith-Hunter et al, 2003). Churchill and Lewis (1986) state that there are more empirical studies investigating the characteristics of entrepreneurs than almost any other subject. Such empirical studies usually fall into two groups: those which attempt to associate various characteristics with entrepreneurship and those that attempt to use characteristics to predict the entrepreneurial performance. A number of studies have concentrated on researching personality and motivation and MacNabb et al (2010) raises the issue of cognitive dissonance, the feeling of discomfort when simultaneously holding two or more emotional reactions which may sometimes make people feel frustration, guilt or anxiety. They suggest that for some women, values ascribed to the entrepreneur will conflict with conventional feminine values.
According to the work on entrepreneurship by American psychologist David McClelland (1988) on achievement motivation, he identifies two characteristics of entrepreneurs. Doing things in a new and better way and making a decision under uncertainty.

McClelland stresses that people with high achievement orientation and a need to succeed, are more likely to become entrepreneurs. Such people are not influenced by money or external incentives but they consider profit to be a measure of success and competency. According to his theory, a person has three types of needs at any given time, which are: the need for achievement and success through one’s own effort; the need for power, to dominate and influence others; the need for affiliation to maintain friendly relations with others. This suggests entrepreneurs have a strong desire for achievement and an inner feeling of personal accomplishment. Rather than a need for social recognition or prestige, although association with others appear to be a requirement.

2.2.4 Sociological Perspective

Theories based on sociological aspects suggest that socio-cultural factors have a substantial influence in creating entrepreneurs (Katz, 1991). It has been suggested that cultures which place a high value on innovation, risk taking and independence are more likely to produce entrepreneurial events than a system with contrasting values (Alam et al, 2003). Max Weber, the founder of modern sociology, wrote that capitalism in northern Europe evolved when the Protestant ethic influenced large numbers of people to engage in work in the secular world, developing their own enterprises and engaging in trade and the accumulation of wealth for investment. He suggests that the Protestant ethic was a force behind an unplanned and uncoordinated mass action that influenced the development of capitalism. Furthermore, a person’s work was regarded as a calling in the very literal rendering of the concept of vocation. Moreover, the experience of financial
rewards from one’s work was regarded as a manifestation that one was blessed by God (Weber et al, 2002).

Other sociologist's studies of entrepreneurs have stressed the effects of the external environment such as political climates, state policies (Hurley, 1999), culture (Shane, 1993), ethnicity and social class (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Light and Rosenstein, 1995). These studies suggest that entrepreneurial behaviors are very complex and as Berger (1991) states, entrepreneurship is likely to be incentivised in a particular social culture. Social values, religious beliefs, group affiliations, customs and taboos influence individuals in a society to become an entrepreneur and a role performer according to the role expectations of the society.

Weber et al (2002) argues that Confucianism is an anti-enterprise ideological system. He suggests it lacks the religiously systematized utilitarianism of the Protestant faith, which promotes reinvestment of earnings as the crucial element of capitalism. However, Hofstede et al (1993) consider that Confucianism is pro-enterprise. Most countries of East Asia have common cultural roots based on Confucianism and in these counties entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs flourish and abound in significant numbers; therefore, Weber’s opinions appear to lack credibility. Nevertheless, Franke et al (1991) identify cultural values as factors influencing entrepreneurs and economic performance. While collectivism is an asset for economic performance and performance is accepted and even facilitated by Confucian theory, innovation is not. Confucianism stresses thrift, perseverance and hierarchical relatedness with individualism viewed as a liability.

2.2.5 Economical Perspective

A review of economists’ research into studies on entrepreneurs and economic growth can be traced back to the early works of Joseph Schumpeter (1934). His
research and conceptual ideas have become a benchmark on entrepreneurship theory studies. Schumpeter believes that the behaviour of entrepreneurs is essential to any understanding of the process of development in an economy and he argues that entrepreneurs are the ones who are innovative, creative and have foresight. He suggests that innovation occurs when the entrepreneur introduces a new product, develops a new production method, finds a new source of raw material supply, introduces a new organizational form or opens up a new market. The Schumpeterian entrepreneur seeks to create new profit opportunities through ‘his’ innovative activities referred to as creative destruction (Schumpeter 1934). However, Schumpeter downplays the capacity for risk taking and the organizing abilities of entrepreneurs.

Similarly, Baumol (1968) defines the entrepreneur as an innovator, an inspirer and developer of economy. Leibenstein (1968) notes that in the presence of market imperfections, entrepreneurs are needed to search, discover, and evaluate opportunities, marshal the financial resources necessary for the enterprise, make time-binding arrangements, take ultimate responsibility for management and be a bearer of uncertainty and risk. Furthermore, in recent research, Audretsch et al (2006) emphasize that entrepreneurs have played a decisive role in the promotion of economic growth, for example the European industrial revolution owes a great deal to entrepreneurs for their contribution to the growth of economies. More recently and with specific reference to this research, entrepreneurs have made a significant contribution to the growth of the Chinese economy and the emergence of small firms (Peng, 2005). The formation and growth of private firms appears to be underpinning the continual expansion of the Chinese economy.
2. 6 Summary

An analysis of the research and study material concludes that most contributors to this subject have focused on the generic characteristics of entrepreneurs. The focus appears to be on male entrepreneurs with little reference related to women entrepreneurs. Schumpeterian theory ignores the risk taking and organizing abilities of an entrepreneur. Schumpeter’s entrepreneur is a large scale businessman and no specific mention of business women. Early work reflects the researchers own sociological background and there is a strong focus on western developed economies with little material on developing economies such as Asia. Most of the theories based on western society and culture begs the question, will it suit a developing economy such as Far East countries, where culture, custom, history and beliefs differ?

Therefore, it will be necessary to review additional previous studies specifically focused on women entrepreneurs to identify if this generic research applies. Moreover, does the generic and specific research or conclusions apply to Chinese women entrepreneurs? Are there preconceptions about women entrepreneurs based on assumptions that the barriers and obstacles are similar to both genders? Does the theory on cognitive dissonance apply to female entrepreneurs? A research methodology such as a narrative approach may enable in depth interrogation of the issues and identify or challenge any prejudices?

2.3 Review of Research into Women Entrepreneurs

2.3.1 Aim and Structure

It is accepted by many economists that entrepreneurship symbolizes innovation in a dynamic economy and women entrepreneurs have been recognized as a major force for innovation and job creation (Orhan and Scott, 2001). The growing number of women entrepreneurs around the world, and women’s
entrepreneurship, are important contributors to economic development, which explains why there is a growing body of research into the motivations for business start-up by women. Women’s entrepreneurship has been a focus of several studies in the West and the majority of studies in western countries have found similar entrepreneurial motivations between men and women, with both genders looking for independence and the need for self-achievement (Hisrich et al., 1996).

The aim of this section is to identify and analyse any studies previously carried out on women entrepreneurs with particular focus on motivations, to consider any other factors which lead women to establish their own businesses. Furthermore, to examine if the early studies of women entrepreneurship concentrated mainly on the motivations for start-up and whether women entrepreneurs have to work harder to become successful, given a range of factors that have been identified as having a deleterious affect on women’s ability to succeed in their own business (Hisrich and Brush, 1983; Goffee and Scase, 1985; Scott, 1986).

The structure of this section will follow a time period from the 1980s to the present day and establish generic traits as well as a focus on specific gender differences as outlined below: Motivations, Culture, Family, Networking, Financial Capital and Government, to establish any gaps and form a conclusion.

### 2.3.2 Motivations

Schwartz (1976), one of the earliest researchers into women entrepreneurship, explored 20 American women entrepreneurs to identify their individual characteristics, motivations and attitudes and she found the primary motivations for women in their own business were the need to achieve job satisfaction, economic payoffs and independence. These appear to be the same motivators as men. Hisrich and O’Brien (1982) studied 21 American women entrepreneurs
and arrived at a similar conclusion to Schwartz (1976). Furthermore, Butter and Moore (1997), and Orhan and Scott (2001), argue that women’s motivations for business initiation are similar to men in so far as women seek independence, autonomy, high income and the opportunity to be their own boss. However, some researchers present differing conclusions. McKay (2001) argues that there is a difference in emphasis between men and women in their motivation to start a business. He states that men often cite economic reasons, whereas women often cite family needs.

Furthermore, Scott (1986) argues that male entrepreneurs always stress the desire to be their own boss, whereas women are concerned more with personal challenges and the satisfaction of supporting the family. This may be one of the main reasons many women create their own business in services industries such as food, retailing, restaurants and hotels etc (Smith-Hunter et al, 2003).

Certain previous theories on women entrepreneurs have classified motivations into categories of push and pull factors (McClelland et al, 2005; Schjoedt and Shaver, 2007). Push factors are elements of necessity such as insufficient family income, dissatisfaction with a salaried job, difficulty in finding work and a need for flexible work schedules to accommodate family commitments. Pull factors relate to desires for independence, self-fulfilment, entrepreneurial spirit, desire for wealth, social status and power (Brush, 2000). Therefore, push factors are characterized by personal or external factors and often regarded in a pejorative sense. Pull factors are those that draw people to start businesses, such as seeing an opportunity. The research concluded that pull factors have been found to be more prevalent than push factors (Shinnar and Young, 2008). However, the situations of women entrepreneurs are frequently diverse and there is rarely a clear-cut selection between pull or push factors, with the factors often combined (Brush, 2000).
Exploring these differences, research concludes that the motivations of women entrepreneurs are often varied and explicable in reference to socio-economic factors. For example, the impact of the Pull-Push factors varies between developed and undeveloped countries (Alsos et al, 1998). They can also vary between individuals within the same country. For example, Scott (1986) reveals that women entrepreneurs in developed countries are generally motivated by the need for achievement (pull factor). Dhaliwal (1998) found that push factors tend to be dominant in the developing countries. Orhan and Scott (2001) argue that women entrepreneurs in the developing countries are motivated by a combination of push and pull factors. Hisrich and Ozturk (1999) carried out extensive research of women entrepreneurs in developing countries (such as Turkey), and their results indicate that while women entrepreneurs exhibited many similarities with their counterparts in other countries they differed in their reasons for starting a venture and the problems they encountered.

These differences reflect in part the effect of a different social culture, a predominantly Muslim country and in a developing economy; particularly, the impact of occupational gender segregation, wage disparity and participation in a non-supported sector of the economy. Their findings suggest that the push-pull theory needs to be carefully examined before being applied to developing economies. Jones and Lefort (2006) examined the extent of challenges facing women entrepreneurs in developing countries and they state there are higher rates of women entrepreneurship in developing countries than developed countries. Financial necessity is often the main push driver in lower income countries. They explored the challenges facing women arising from social inequality, including lack of educational provision and difficulties in securing funding.
In a study conducted on Filipino women entrepreneurs, Chu et al (1998) explored the issue of how Filipino culture affected the manner by which several primary strategic entrepreneurial decisions are made. The study generated several interesting findings. Filipino women entrepreneurs enter into self-employment because of the potential to earn money. This is attributed to the poor economic conditions existing in the country and limited job opportunities for the poor, unskilled, and uneducated population.

Additionally, Licuanan (1992) uses a regional survey of successful women entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia (including Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand, all developing economic countries) and finds that sixty-six percent of women entrepreneurs doing business are primarily motivated by the desire for autonomy as well as the freedom and flexibility offered in running their own business. The remaining thirty-four percent are motivated by cultural influences such as personal issues, social considerations and family loyalty. The researcher concludes that the majority of Asian women are motivated by pull factors.

Therefore, based on these previous findings and arguments, a number of interesting questions arises for this research. First, what are the motivations of mainland Chinese women entrepreneurs? Second, are their motivations similar or different to their male counterparts? Third, are Chinese women entrepreneurs motivated by push or pull factors, or perhaps a push-pull combination? Fourth, to what extent does the Chinese history and culture play a formative role in the lives of Chinese women entrepreneurs?

2.3.3 Culture

The influence of culture on entrepreneurship has been of continued scholarly interest for over three decades and researchers have explored the relationship between cultural variables and entrepreneurial behaviour and outcomes.
How does culture relate to levels of entrepreneurial activity? This question was first explored by the observations of economists (Schumpeter 1934), sociologists (Weber, 1930), and psychologists (McClelland, 1961) who noted that countries differ in levels of entrepreneurial activity. Entrepreneurial activities are considered an important source of innovation (Schumpeter, 1934) and economic growth (Hayton et al 2002). To understand the influence of culture on entrepreneurship is of considerable value?

Hofstede et al (1991) broadly defined that culture is a collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. He regards culture as a collective phenomenon that is shaped by the social environment. Cultural differences are the result of national, regional, ethnic, social, religious and class distinctions. Moreover, women entrepreneurs, as a result of cultural differences, have been found to have different traits from their male counterparts and yet they grapple with similar business issues including the need to continuously change and innovate (Idris, 2008). This suggests that culture may affect the way men and women approach business differently and may determine the success factors. Chen et al (1994) incorporates culture as an explanatory variable for entrepreneurship and they describes some minority groups as having cultural characteristics that are conducive to small business development. Min and Jaret (1985) link cultural characteristics to entrepreneurial success among Koreans. They found a strong correlation between success and adherence to the cultural values of frugality and the work ethic.

Similarly, Hossain et al, (2009) finds several cultural factors to be significant in developing countries, which influence womens’ decisions to become an entrepreneur, including religious values, ethnic diversity and marital status. This supports the findings of Weber (1958) who argues that Culture is greatly
influenced by religion since religion determines a person’s basic values and beliefs. However, Carswell and Rolland (2004) argue no relationship between the cultural factors such as religious values and ethnic diversity and the level of business start-up rates. Their findings are similar to Hofstede (1991) who argued religion alone does not shape culture and culture is a set of shared values, beliefs and norms of a group. Regarding the success of Chinese women entrepreneurs, Wu and Tseng (1985) identified some Chinese cultural values: a high propensity to save and reinvest business earnings; a universally strong desire to secure a better education for their children, who would then be expected to carry on the business. Dana (1995) found a strong sense of loyalty and mutual obligation within the Chinese extended family, as an important factor rather than religious beliefs.

For every successful entrepreneur there are many more who have sadly failed the entrepreneurial challenge. Different nations and communities have varying tolerances to business failure which may be relative and linked to their culture values. For instance, in the USA, having started a business and failed is almost seen as a badge of honour (Prone, 1993). In Ireland, there is a social stigma attached to failure, like a tattoo on the failed entrepreneur’s forehead (Prone, 1993). In the UK, banks and business advisers view failure less negatively (Morrison et al, 1999). In their view, someone who has built up a business once can, even if it failed, have learned much from the experience. Consequently, their chances of success a second time around are much improved. In this sense, failure is seen as the key to future success and it could be argued that without failure, there is no success. In this respect, Gilder (1971) asserts that entrepreneurs need a willingness to accept failure, learn from it, and act boldly in the shadows of doubt.

Regarding the attitudes of people toward entrepreneurial failure in China, there is a belief that it is natural and unavoidable since there are a great many storms
in the market ocean and it is impossible to avoid drinking ocean water occasionally (Liu, 2008). Therefore, when someone has failed in their business, while he/she does go up the seaboard, friends and family are often supportive and hope that he/she will be able to re-launch the enterprise in the future.

In conclusion, the weight of research evidence appears to suggest that cultural factors contribute to and influence people’s desires for self-determination. Whether religion in the cultural background influences the success factors of entrepreneurs and especially women entrepreneurs, as much as gender differentiators, is less well established. This research, which will focus on a culture where religion was suppressed for nearly two generations and where the state was promoted as more important than self or family, will make a valuable contribution and add further evidence in this valuable study area.

2.3.4 Family
Research has highlighted that although women and men’s motivations for business initiation are quite similar, men often cite economic reasons and generally see entrepreneurship as a business decision, whereas women often cite family needs and view the business mostly as a life choice and a way of integrating family and career needs (McKay, 2001). Therefore, married women entrepreneurs have to assume multiple roles and this often gives rise to family and business conflict, which can become an obstacle in managing their business. From the research on women entrepreneurs and their family life, it appears there are many negative issues to counter the positive ones. Furthermore do successful women entrepreneurs experience more family and work conflict than their male counterparts?

Buttner (1993) concludes that women appear to experience greater family and work conflict than their male counterparts and women entrepreneurs reported that they come home from work too tired to engage in family activities and that
they have difficulty relaxing at home. Work and family conflict for women entrepreneurs has been identified by Kim and Ling (2001) who studied 102 married Singapore women entrepreneurs and discovered that working and family conflict was divided into three parts, i.e. job-spouse conflict; job-parent conflict; job-homemaker conflict. From the discussion of their findings, they suggest there is a need for greater support from family members, flexibility in work and family schedules and full-day school or child care would help to alleviate work-family conflict. In addition, a spouse’s emotional support and maintenance of good marital relations are important in reducing marital conflict and increasing well being in women entrepreneurs.

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) stress that the spouse’s emotional support refers to the display of sympathetic and caring behaviour such as taking interest in the wife’s work, willingness to listen and giving advice. Further studies emphasize the spouse plays an important part in women entrepreneurs’ support relations and spouse support is a major asset for women entrepreneurs (Hisrich, 1989; Carter and Cannon, 1992; Buttner and Moore, 1997). Moreover, Kim and Ling (2001) found women entrepreneurs receiving support from other people such as parents and domestic assistants, which can help to relieve work-family conflict as they share the responsibility for household chores and childcare. However, Longstreth et al (1987) had earlier stated that their investigation on women entrepreneurs and family support, concluded that self-employed women often do not have much support from their family in terms of household chores and support from spouse and children is minimal.

Therefore, are women entrepreneurs more successful if they have family support? Whatever the conclusion, we might conjecture that this support will be dependent on social and cultural norms, structures and traditions. For example, is there a difference between Western and Chinese women entrepreneurs who have children and those who do not? Furthermore, do Chinese women spend
less time in their domestic role as they often have parents who are happy to continue to play the role of raising grandchildren and allowing more Chinese women to run a business or follow a professional career? Moreover, Ltuonggren and Kolvereid (1996) also identified the importance of family networks in business decision-making. The importance of the family network compared to the business network in the success of Chinese women entrepreneurs is under researched and forms a key enquiry within this research project.

2.3.5 Networking

The entrepreneur’s network is and has been a key factor in entrepreneurial success as it can be a way for an entrepreneur to gain access to resources needed for initiating and operating a new venture. Buttener (1993) and Kirkwood (2009) suggest that new start ups often struggle to succeed without access to networking and the resources those networks can provide. It is important, therefore, to compare how men and women develop social networks that support entrepreneurial activities.

The research by Buttner (1993), finds women entrepreneurs have different approaches to establishing networks than men, who are more instrumental in seeking personal gain. Women are more affective in social relationships and take account of personal considerations. Therefore, Butter concludes, women may have more difficulty than men in putting personal feelings aside in business relationships. Male entrepreneurs like to rely on outside advisors such as bankers, lawyers or accountants for information, advice and support, whilst their spouses play a secondary role. However, women entrepreneurs would also like to use their husbands support to gain access to important sources of information advice and guidance.

In another study, Smeltzer and Fann (1989) suggest that women’s networks are more formally organised and focused more strongly on role models,
problem-solving and sharing information, and they argued women entrepreneurs were more likely to use other women as information sources. Hisrich and Brush (1987) suggest women entrepreneurs are embedded in different personal and social networks than men and the importance of support systems, in particular, business associates and friends were identified as being important in providing moral support. Women's participation in trade associations and women's groups was related to business guidance only.

In addition, more women entrepreneurs consider joining a professional women's association to find a supportive network for their ideas. Affiliation to associations that facilitate networking appear to play an important role in women's entrepreneurial success. Furthermore, women's business networks often counsel, teach, encourage and inspire women entrepreneurs. Dragusin (2007) concludes that start-up success for women is highly dependent, not only on spouses, friends and other women, but also on better networking and social organizations.

2.3.6 Financial capital

Accessing financial capital for start-up and business growth provide problems for all entrepreneurs and especially for women entrepreneurs, regardless of the size or the type of industry in which the business operates. There is no doubt that having access to financial capital, whether through loans, revolving credit, lines of credit or overdraft accounts, is a major concern for women who start their own business. A number of studies have indicated that women entrepreneurs are more likely than their male counterparts to experience this difficulty (Moore and Buttner, 1997).

In looking at the source of start-up funds for women entrepreneurs, eight options are given by Smith-Hunter (2006). For example, personal savings, gifts from family members, loans from family or friends, loans from previous owners of the business, credit card or personal loans, bank loans, money from business
partners or other sources. It is discovered that the majority of women entrepreneurs are more likely to use their personal savings. One reason is their lack of ability to access finances from financial institutions. Another is a lack of belief by others in their dreams and ambitions. Therefore, women entrepreneurs are likely to have friends and family who are able to assist to obtain capital to set up and also support the business growth. In a study of Canadian women entrepreneurs, Fabowale et al 1995 note that women are less satisfied with their banking relationships although they are no less likely to be granted loans. Similarly, Walker and Joyner (1999) observe that women continue to feel that they are discriminated against in their attempts to secure funding although empirical studies do not support that.

Coleman (2000) uses the data from the Federal Reserve Board and the United States Small Business Administration to assess the issues surrounding start-up and operational financial capital for male and female business owners. The author finds that women-owned businesses are less likely to use external funding for the start-up and operation of their business and that they are more likely to rely on their personal funds. However, Coleman contends that lenders (i.e. banks and financial institutions) do not discriminate against the women business owners because of their gender, but rather because of firm size and age, and that holding such factors constant resulted in males and females having the same level of access to external credit.

Therefore, due to the financial capital limitation, it is often reported that the start-up size of business run by women is smaller than that of business run by men (Carter and Rosa, 1998), and that women often start in sectors with low capital requirements, such as the retail and service sector industries.

2.3.7 Government

Governments in general at a national level have played a key role in the development of female entrepreneurship and strongly effect women’s decisions
on whether or not to become entrepreneurs. In some countries flexible
government support encourages women’s involvement in the challenges of
business start-up. Scholars have paid much attention to the policies of
governments and carried out research in different countries around the world.

In the U.S, several governments have launched local enterprise centre networks
for women and a variety of flexible training and development programs to
encourage women to become involved in business. One established an office of
Women’s Business Ownership in 1979, which had a formal office in the
Government Small Business Administration (Hisrich and Brush, 1986). In Europe,
there has been recognition of the importance of women entrepreneurship by
several governments (European Commission, 2000). Many European countries
support women entrepreneurs, such as Italy, which has a law that focuses upon
women entrepreneurs and in Spain, which has legislation in place and laws
regarding gender (Johnston, 2007). Similarly, the Australian government has
developed a range of business programs aimed at supporting the business
growth of women entrepreneurs. Business policies within Australia are made at
three levels of government- Federal, State and Local government. Each
develops specific policies aimed at supporting their growth agendas
(Farr-Wharton and Brunetto, 2007).

Naser et al (2009) states that financial support from the government, especially
in the form of start-up capital, is a significant factor contributing to women’s
decisions to become entrepreneurs. Government should, so the saying goes,
encourage their citizens to fish rather than feeding them with fish. Hisrich and
Brush (1987) mentioned several US governments were instrumental in
supporting women business owners by exerting pressure on commercial banks
to make larger pools of debt capital available to women and encouraged banks
to review their lending criteria (Greene et al, 2003). Meanwhile, Hisrich and
Oztuk (1999) suggest that the government should start to support women
entrepreneurs by offering special credits to women who want to set up a new venture. For example, Halk Bankasi, a state owned bank, offered a credit line of 20 trillion Turkish lira for housewives in Turkey and the bank also established an information centre for guiding women on how to start a new venture.

In Asia, governments also play an important role in supporting women. In Japan, the government developed a plan for gender equality by using child allowances, longer maternity leave, interest-free loans to cover childbirth costs and creating an environment that encourages women to marry and have families while continuing a career (August and Tuten, 2003). Government support is also considered a cornerstone of the development of women entrepreneurs in Malaysia, initiated by the Ministry of Entrepreneurial and Community Development (MECD) established in 1999, and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) established in 2001. These ministries, together with other supporting government agencies, provide support to women entrepreneurs in terms of funding, physical infrastructure and business advisory services (Teoh and Chong, 2007). The Singapore government has done much in recent years by offering incentives for women in terms of providing more options for childcare facilities, tax rebates and subsidies for childcare fees and a range of schemes offering assistance with household matters as well as offering recognition to support their entrepreneurial visions in helping women entrepreneurs attain their goals (Ang, 2009).

The Chinese government has played an extremely active role in developing a distinctly Chinese form of entrepreneurship since China started to reform and open-up to the world in 1978. China has actively promoted the employment of women and women entrepreneurship, and has not only made gender equality policies, but also incorporated the development of women into the overall plan for national economic development. Whether this has resulted in a positive
outcome for women will be discussed in depth in the following section 2.5, review on Chinese women entrepreneurs.

2.3.8. Summary
The review of published literature has identified there is a broad range of research into entrepreneurship and some specific research into the motivations of women entrepreneurs conceptualised through push-pull theory. Although some success factors which affect women entrepreneurs are highlighted, as along with some of the barriers, there appears to be little detailed research into the motivations and drivers of business start up by women in China and limited research into the social, cultural and financial barriers or to the impact on society, culture and the economy of China by women entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the generalisations from the findings are not specific to China or to women in China and we are unable to predict with confidence whether these aspects of entrepreneurship apply in mainland China. It is to be expected that gender differentials will exist as well as geographic influences which suggests that we need to conduct further research in locations where women entrepreneurship is experiencing growth. Moreover, in developing economies where the concept of entrepreneurship is new, a longitudinal approach may prove more appropriate than conducting cross-sectional research.

2.4 Review of Chinese entrepreneurs

2.4.1 Aim and Structure
The aim of this section is to identify and analyse previous studies on Chinese entrepreneurs. What are the gaps in the previous research with specific focus on the drivers, barriers and success factors?

The analytical structure will first focus on the historical, cultural, political and economic background that are conditioning Chinese entrepreneurs. Second, I move on to review and analyse the previous research on Chinese entrepreneurs
in the first decade of the reform period (1980s). Third, is a review and analysis of previous research on Chinese entrepreneurs in the second decade reform period (1990s). Fourth, is a review and analysis of previous research on Chinese entrepreneurs in the third decade reform period (2000s). The aim in this fourth section is to identify the gaps in the research and to formulate a summary, before moving to the next section, 2.5, which focuses on Chinese women entrepreneurs.

2.4.2 Background

China is set to become the dominant business power of the twenty-first century and has just taken over Japan to become the world’s second largest economy with a GDP of 8.7 percent growth in 2009 after United States (OECD, 2010). However, China is still in transition and the largest developing nation in the world. After three decades of sustained market transition and domestic entrepreneurial reform, private business is booming in mainland China. According to the recent report from National Bureau of Statistics of China, China has seen an 81.4 percent rise in the number of private enterprises from 2004 to 2008 and by the end of 2008, China had 3.596 million privately-owned enterprises, 1.614 million more than four years ago (China Economy, 2009). The new Chinese entrepreneurial spirit sweeps through the whole country. The great ambitions of many Chinese people in mainland China are to be rich and successful by starting their own business and to be their own boss. As Malik (1997) states, contemporary Chinese entrepreneurs exhibit great entrepreneurial and management skills and Chinese entrepreneurs are contributing more than ever toward the economic development of China. However, are entrepreneurs in China different from those in more advanced western countries?

First of all, the concept of private entrepreneurs is unique in the Chinese context of entrepreneurship. While entrepreneurship takes place in the private and public sectors, entrepreneurs are commonly defined as individuals who take the
risk of starting-up a business, using their own resources in most cases, which means that their businesses are privately-owned. In the Chinese context, entrepreneurial activity in the private sector is categorized into two types. The first type is generally called getihu in Chinese, which literally means individual business household. According to the Chinese regulations, a getihu is allowed to hire only one or two helpers and several apprentices. The number of employees should not exceed seven. The other type of private business is the private enterprise called siying qiye which is defined as a profit-making economic entity that employs at least eight persons with its assets owned by private individuals (Chen et al, 2006). Whilst this research will examine both groups, the focus will be on the siying qiye group, being much larger in size and more influential in the Chinese private economy growth than getihu.

Secondly, as we know, with the demise of communism in Russia, China is the largest communist country remaining on Earth today. After the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) victory in 1949 over the Guo Ming Dang (GMD), the CCP, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, destroyed private entrepreneurship by means of the San-fan and Wu-fan campaigns during 1950s and the ten years of the culture revolution during 1966-1976 further suppressed entrepreneurship. With the end of the Maoist period, in 1978 China started to reform and open up to the world under the new leadership of Deng Xiaoping. Chinese people in mainland China were allowed to set up their own business and the development of Chinese entrepreneurship has seen enormous growth with entrepreneurial Chinese characteristics in the ensuing 30 years.

However, has the apparent contradiction between socialist ideology and private ownership been resolved? Marxist ideology is still the very foundation on which the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is based. Although the present political, social and economic situation is a long way from the Maoist period,
China still upholds the four cardinal principles which is the adherence to the socialist road, to the leadership of the CCP, to the dictatorship of the proletariat and to Marxism-Lenism and Mao Zedong thought. Consequently, Chinese entrepreneurship has been described as an oxymoron (Liao & Sohmen, 2001).

Thirdly, the Chinese economic culture in mainland China, both traditional and communist, greatly impacted the whole society at the beginning of the reforming era. To fully appreciate the impact, it is necessary to understand traditional Confucian theory, which disrespects individual business people. Typical Confucian statements read as follows: Respect farmers, despise merchants; Respect obligations, despise benefits; Respect collective interests, despise individuals (Xiang, 2009). Confucianism traditionally describes private business owners as tricky, cunning and unscrupulous merchants, who are always planning their own individual profit-making and do not consider the benefit of collectives. Therefore, merchants occupied the bottom rung of Chinese society and this position was reinforced under the second period of Maoist persecution of the bourgeois (Liao and Sohmen, 2001). Under a heavy barrage of Mao’s government-sponsored propaganda against the private entrepreneurs, Chinese citizens learned to scorn private ownership and depend on state authority.

Accordingly, when the private entrepreneurial activities were allowed at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of 1980s, it was not welcomed by various factions of Chinese society in mainland China, which made Chinese entrepreneurs feel ashamed and to possess a low-social status. It took considerable time and effort for the new Government of Deng Xiaoping to persuade and convince the masses that private entrepreneurial activities were good for the nation’s economy. It actually took until the eightieth anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party (July 1, 2001) for entrepreneurs to be fully embraced by Chinese culture, when the Party leader, Jiang Zemin announced
that outstanding private entrepreneurs were allowed to join the CCP. He claimed entrepreneurs were a new social stratum making significant contributions to the country’s development and modernization and therefore deserved a place in the ruling party. Jiang’s announcement promoted entrepreneurs to the CCP to enhance their social status and encourage private business in the new changing post 2000 era.

Although Chinese societal attitudes to entrepreneurs have improved and are gradually changing, there still exist people in the rural, remote and undeveloped economy areas who have strong negative perceptions about starting one’s own business. Therefore, Chinese entrepreneurial activities are strongly linked to political attitudes and CCP government policy. It therefore follows that the government could destroy entrepreneurship, as in Mao’s time, or equally encourage and develop entrepreneurship as in Deng’s era.

China’s entrepreneurs, therefore, are very sensitive to politicians and always look to government officials for direction and security. This background information needs careful consideration when analysing the Chinese entrepreneur’s characteristics, motivations and development. Therefore, with economic reforms taking place during three main periods in China’s past, this literature review will be divided into three corresponding decades, the 1980s, 1990s and the post 2000 periods.

2.4.3 The First Decade Reform Period (1980s)

Historically, The Third Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP’s) 11th Central Committee, which convened in December 1978, was a great milestone in Chinese socio-economic development and gave the non-public funded economy a fresh start. This Plenum distinguished itself by marking the beginning of the official revival of private business. Although the Plenum itself did not make any special announcements concerning private business, it signified the official
adoption of economic modernization and growth as the paramount concern of the CCP. It emphasized economic development and individual incentives, which gave impetus to the revival of private business.

Before this Plenum, the mainstream society considered private and individual business activity to be the root of evil behaviour, the so-called Capitalist tail, which should be cut down by revolutionary thought (Liu, 2008). After this Plenum, there was a rapid increase in individual and private activities, which had a strong experimental development emphasis. However, during the period this sector was still thought to play a narrow and marginal role in the national economy, a supplement to the state and collective sectors. In reality, private business played the role of filling the gap in the national economy, particularly in the distribution of consumer goods and services and in increasing employment. During the early stage of the decade reform period, the main component of private sector was the individual business household (getihu) as mentioned and described previously.

The getihu was recognized as a new business category in China at the beginning of the 1980s. It consisted of very small-scale activities in retailing and services such as street vendors (like my mother’s business type), perhaps more accurately referred to as self-employed rather than entrepreneurs. Those involved in getihu were of low social status and included released criminals, illegal migrants and those from groups with low education. The main driver for these individuals to start out on their own, was their exclusion from the state market system. Some achieved success beyond their expectations, but for most, business was a means of subsistence (Liu, 2008).

By the late 1980s, more highly educated individuals, such as engineers or State-Owned-Enterprise (SOE) managers, began their own businesses, operating on a larger scale and out of choice rather than necessity. These
businesses, known as saying qiye, operated in all sectors, ranging from services, such as hospitality, to industrial manufacturing and transportation. During this period, a series of central and local regulations on the licensing and controlling of individual and private businesses were introduced. Taxation, product quality and hygiene were introduced and the free market private economy was legitimized by 1988 (Chen et al, 2006). As a result, the number of individual business and private enterprises grew rapidly from 1978-1988 (Liu, 2008). It was estimated that by the end of 1988, there were 500,000 private businesses in China which might be called private enterprises (Liu, 2008). However, the research on Chinese private business and Chinese entrepreneurs was ignored by western scholars and it is difficult to find research papers on Chinese entrepreneurs. Moreover, there is no western research which refers to Chinese women entrepreneurs. It makes this research specifically worthy and necessary to explore the motivations of women entrepreneurs who started up their own business in 1980s.

2.4.4 The Second Decade Reform Period (1990s)

As stated in the previous section, the number of private businesses and private enterprises were growing rapidly from 1978-1988, however, from 1989-1991, the number of private and individual business declined, due not only to the market rectification during this period, but also due to the effect of leftist thinking from dogmatic Marxist (Maoist) perspectives. Additionally, the Tiananmen incident happened on June 1989 and people became concerned and even scared that the CCP government would change their policy on economic reform. Of the three reasons for the decline, in practice, market rectification campaigns became an opportunity for the left to attack private business. In this period, private and individual business activities were injured by the requirement that back taxes should be paid by these individual businesses and private firms. As a result, private sector businesses and enterprises activities declined significantly.
The rebirth of private sector development in China restarted after Deng Xiaoping’s South Touring Talk in April 1992. Under the guidance of Deng’s theory that prioritised growth and forward development as the first principle in China, private and individual business activities were encouraged by his famous phrase ‘to get rich is glorious’. In accordance with Deng’s theory, the governments, both central and local, started to implement expansionary policies for encouraging private business development. These policies included encouraging the movement of foreign capital into China and the expansion of investment of domestic private capital (Liu, 2008).

Therefore, during 1990s, one could find several books published and articles appeared in the English journals such as *Entrepreneurship theory and practice* and *Journal of small business management*. However, the majority of research in the 1990s focused on the political environment for private enterprise and concerned the attitudes and behaviours of Chinese entrepreneurs. Little research was related to, or focused on, the motivations of entrepreneurs and even factors of success. For example, Young (1991) based his work on information gained from the secondary sources, media content and a series of interviews with administrators, researchers and 50 private businesspeople. The research was undertaken in the south west region of Sichuan province and Guangdong province in southern China. It was found that the changing reform environment had affected attitudes towards the private sector in mainland China. Most Chinese entrepreneurs in this period felt insecure (i.e. the CCP government would take their wealth away) and their low social status led to having no confidence in their future.

Other research was similarly conducted by Rashid Malik (1997), who investigated 33 Chinese entrepreneurs in Tianjin, (developed as a coastal port for goods coming from the sea to Beijing and the third largest city after Shanghai
and Beijing) with his own research methods, which were quite different from the conventional methods of performing research in the west. At that period, he was teaching at the local Chinese university and he gave students free English lessons in exchange for favours. The author taught them English and they helped him to establish contacts with local entrepreneurs and the author also used his wife to make friends with Chinese people. After spending several months to make personal relationships with entrepreneurs, he eventually interviewed 30 male entrepreneurs in face to face meetings.

Understandably, during the interviews in the research by Malik (1997), entrepreneurs were very cautious and chose to answer questions carefully and seemed designed not only to give the researcher information but also to please the government officials and save the government officials face in front of a foreigner. It was found that China’s entrepreneurs have two characteristics deeply rooted in tradition. First, the Chinese entrepreneurs look to authority for direction and security; second, Chinese entrepreneurs often suffer from a lack of confidence and security. Also, it highlighted the importance of having a good knowledge of political culture as well as an understanding of the history of China and its people. It concluded that without knowing Chinese history, it is impossible to understand present day China.

Entrepreneurs in different societies behave in different ways. All societies, whether capitalist, communist, socialist or mixed economies have entrepreneurs. In communist societies, especially like China with the strong indoctrination by communist political propaganda, the beginning of economic reform and the infant entrepreneurial stage, created an atmosphere of uncertainty. Private entrepreneurs in China were always cautious about their business because they were unsure of the future and their attitudes and behaviours were restricted by government policies. This caused entrepreneurs to be less active in the
economic development of society, in contrast to western countries, where entrepreneurs play a more active role in the economic development of society and where there is continuous interaction between buyers and sellers.

2.4.5 The Third Decade Reform Period (2000s)

With China’s rising global influence there is now an increasing interest in the study of the country’s economy and the fast-growing class of Chinese entrepreneurs. According to Lu (2002; 2004), this new group of entrepreneurs have been ranked as the third largest social class after government officials and managers of state-owned enterprises in mainland China. Therefore, in the post 2000 era, the research into Chinese entrepreneurs and Chinese entrepreneurship has increased and been actively promoted.


Goodman (2008) confirms private entrepreneurs’ activities have inspired more research, which has identified that their social, economic and political influence is disproportionate to the size of private enterprises. They have wielded a particularly strong influence at local levels and Chinese entrepreneurs have played a central role in the transition of the formerly centrally planned economy to a market economy. Therefore, the emergence of private entrepreneurs has been regarded as one of the most dramatic changes post 1978 (Kim, 2005).
It is broadly accepted that Chinese entrepreneurship has followed the western model and can reasonably be classified into three generations in China according to industry type (Xiang and Bling-Sheng, 2007). The first was in the manufacturing sector in the period of the 1980s. The second became active in the 1990s, most of whom were well educated and went overseas for advanced study. This second generation were concerned with the service sectors and business model innovation. The third generation of entrepreneurs are regarded as undertaking global activities in the twenty-first century such as Internet and ICT as well as the stock market.

Goodman (2008) is one of the limited pieces of research to look at the period from 1980 to the present. He divided Chinese entrepreneurs into three different groups in terms of the political reform period. The first group to emerge from market reforms was the small-scale individual business people (getihu) during the late 1970 and early 1980s, but his research is not in depth nor does it explore gender as a category of investigation. Goodman identified that the second group to emerge from the late 1980s and the early 1990s were based in rural township and village enterprises who rapidly developed China’s manufacturing base. The third group of entrepreneurs emerged from the construction and resources industries in the late 1990s until the present. They were rapidly followed by others engaged in more speculative activities such as real estate, finance and especially the stock market and the Internet.

Goodman restricts his research to give a brief overview on the Chinese entrepreneurs development characteristics. He suggests many private entrepreneurs are involved in small-scale businesses that do little more than clear their costs. In the early years, individual business were smaller and less complex than the private enterprises emerging during the late 1990s and into the
The relationships between enterprises and politicians and between entrepreneurs and the state are both narrow and ambiguous.

Previous research, including Goodman’s work, focuses on male entrepreneurs over the three periods, taking account of the three groups with three differing characteristics of Chinese entrepreneurs. These studies do not carry out in-depth research into the motivations and success factors of entrepreneurial activity. Moreover, research suggests that few scholars have made studies into the factors associated with Chinese women entrepreneurs’ success and motivations. This is the significant gap which this research area intends to fill.

Only the research on the success of China’s entrepreneurs has focused on their personal attributes and mind-sets. Such attributes as hard work, resilience and self-help are highlighted by Chen’s studies in early 2002. Some scholars have argued that the hardships of the pre-1978 era produced a generation of entrepreneurs who were committed to hard work, willing to endure hardship and eager to pursue opportunities (Yang, 2004). With diligence and attention to regulations, business trends and competitors on an ongoing basis, they have been able to seize business opportunities, provide for new customer needs and make new resources available. Yang (2004) and Tomba (2004) found the successful Chinese entrepreneurs appear passionate, committed, observant, driven, talented and relentless. They have been invariably described as self made men and women.

Furthermore, it is often stated that guanxi building is important for success of Chinese entrepreneurs (Lee and Anderson, 2007). Literally, the Chinese phrase guan-xi consists of two characters; The character guan means a gate or a hurdle, and xi refers to a tie. Guanxi therefore could be considered to mean pass the gate and get connected (Lee & Dawes, 2005). It has its roots in the Chinese
cultural philosophy of Confucianism, which considers society as a dense network in which a person plays different roles. This is important, because in Chinese culture the collective has long been considered more important than the individual. Usually, *Guanxi* is translated into English as relationships, connections or networking, meaning that individuals connect with each other to facilitate the bilateral flow of a transaction.

Of course, business networks and relationship building are important and are developed in every country. However, *guanxi* has special meanings in Chinese society and is a complex social phenomenon in China, being the most dominant single factor in Chinese business activities. For Chinese people, the notion of *guanxi* in the form of personal relations seems to be all decisive for success (Chen, 2001). Chinese people do believe in the Confucianism saying who you know is more important than what you know (Lu & Baert, 2008). This observation about the importance of social ties, of course, has been a major theme in western research into business success in the work of Granovetter (1982, 1985, 1992a).

Liao and Sohmen (2001) argue that knowing the right people can accelerate growth and even trigger success, especially for a fledgling business with little history or experience. Chen (2001) also suggests that *guanxi* and its associated *mianzi* (its meaning is reputation) are the most prominent cultural characteristics for business to succeed in China. Drinking alcohol is seen as a necessary behaviour for developing *guanxi* and delivering business success (Hao & Young, 2000) and drinking is seen as facilitating social exchange and easing tensions among Chinese business people. Sharing alcohol is believed to help maintain good relations (Hao et al, 2005). Therefore, in what forms does *guanxi* exist, how does it assist Chinese women entrepreneurs in their business life, and to
what extent is guanxi a condition of their success? Exploring these questions form an important part in this research.

**2.4.6 Summary**

Given the limited research literature on Chinese entrepreneurs, we can demonstrate that few researchers have explored entrepreneurial motivation, even less on identifying gender differences. Research is lacking into the setting up of business and also the success factors affecting individual entrepreneurs, especially women. It appears that researchers have been concerned more with the political environment vis-à-vis entrepreneurs’ attitudes and behaviours towards the government and society than exploring motivation. This research intends to conduct some exploratory research into the motivations of women entrepreneurs, examining why they set up their business during this difficult period and where they found the social, cultural and emotional resources to proceed as pioneer entrepreneurs.

**2.5. Review of Chinese women entrepreneurs**

**2.5.1 Aim and structure**

The aim of this section is to identify, read and analyse previous studies on Chinese women entrepreneurs, to identify the gaps in the previous research with specific focus on the drivers, barriers and success factors. Before conducting the analysis it is necessary to understand Chinese women prior to understanding about Chinese women entrepreneurs.

The structure of this section is first to explain the historical and cultural background of the changing role and status of Chinese women. Second, to provide an analysis of the previous research on Chinese women entrepreneur studies, third, to show the gaps in the previous studies and finally, formulate a summary.
2.5.2 Chinese women in the past and present

China’s society has been and to some extent, still is, strongly influenced by the moral and intellectual codes of Confucianism (Campion, 2005). Within ancient Chinese society, classic Confucian values treated women as lesser beings, completely inferior to their male counterparts. An important element of traditional Confucianism is filial piety, which prescribes specific forms of conduct for men that define how men must pay respect to their parents. A Chinese woman must not only show filial piety to her parents, but to her parents-in-law, her husband, all male relatives and even to her own sons. For women this meant complete subjugation first to her father, then her husband and finally to her sons.

Under this subjugated rule, women were not allowed the freedom to pursue their own goals in life. Even after the death of their husbands they were bound by the tradition of filial piety to remain loyal to him and either live life as a widow or commit suicide. In fact, it was considered better for a woman to commit suicide, as this showed the greatest filial piety towards her husband (Campion 2005). Although women may have been able to find some small ways to control their lives, such as through control over children and servants, for the most part they were always at the mercy of the will of others in society (Zhu 2011). Under this Confucian model, the role of Chinese women was to serve husband, please husband and to bear him sons.

One typical social custom which demonstrates the subjugation of women was the use of Foot binding. Foot binding was the practice of binding the feet of women, starting when they were young girls, so that the arch of the foot breaks and toes were forced under and squeezed together until the entire foot was only three inches in length. This practice was extremely painful but it became an important status symbol as only those with the money and resources could afford to bind their daughter’s feet (Wang, 2000). The appeal to men of the
bound feet was partially due to the fact that it made women even more fragile and dependent upon men than in their natural state. The women with bound feet were able to walk only short distances or unable to stand without considerable effort and discomfort, therefore they became closely tied to their home and family due to the basic fact that they were physically unable to leave the home for any extended period of time (Wang, 2000). Had this practice continued, it is highly unlikely women would ever have become entrepreneurs.

With the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the status of women in China changed dramatically. The Chinese Communist Party and the people's government recognized that the liberation of women, who constituted half the population of China, was necessary for the country to realize complete emancipation. The communist government promulgated a series of laws, policies, and regulations that protected women. The Chinese Constitution of the early 1950s stated clearly that Chinese women should have equal rights with men in political, economic, social, cultural, and family life. The state protected women's rights and interests, practiced equal pay for equal work, and provided equal opportunity for women's training and promotion. China's Marriage Law eliminated arranged marriages, stipulating that both women and men were free to choose their marriage partners, and widows were allowed to remarry. The Inheritance Law recognized the equal right of women to inherit family property. The Labour Insurance Regulations Law of 1951 guaranteed women 56 days of maternity leave with full pay. The Land Reform Law of the early 1950s provided rural women with an equal share of land under their own name, thereby protecting their economic independence (Heng, 1990)

Until the passage of the economic reform policy in 1979, the government's protective policy toward women enabled Chinese women to maintain jobs whilst becoming mothers and raising families, which improved women's status and
reduced household responsibilities. For example, mothers working in many industries were allowed to take their children to work with them and place them in work-run childcare centres. The result was that most Chinese women did not stop working when they had babies. Also, according to tradition, Chinese grandparents helped to raise children and support Chinese families. Whilst the common practice of three-generations living under one roof began to change, grandparents, especially those in cities, non-the-less travelled to their daughter’s homes to act as child-minders to their grandchildren. Grandparents transported children back and forth to school, made their meals and packed their school lunches. Furthermore, in this new reformed modern China, domestic help was and continues to be readily available and relatively inexpensive. Also, women’s federations and neighbourhood committees have been established where individuals operate home service companies that take care of babies, young children, the elderly and disabled at a reasonable charge.

In 2010, Chinese women make up approximately 49% of China’s population and 46% of its labour force, a higher proportion than in many Western countries (Wong, 2012). Mao Zedong, who famously said that ‘Women hold up half the sky’, saw women as a resource and launched a campaign to get them to work outside the home. China is now generally acknowledged to offer more opportunities to women than other East Asian countries (The Economist, 2011).

2.5.3 Research on Chinese women entrepreneurs

China’s economic reforms and policy to open-up since 1978 has not only brought opportunities for Chinese men but also for Chinese women. Much research has been done on the role and status of Chinese women (Kitching et al, 2005), however, this has not focussed on Chinese women entrepreneurs running their own private businesses and western scholars have overlooked this important nascent group in China.
In the west, research into women as business owners is increasing and also is focusing on a wide range of issues including studies focused on the background, motivations, characteristics and business ventures of women entrepreneurs as well as management practices (Deng, 2011). However, research into women entrepreneurs in China is still in the infancy stage and it is rare to find previous published literature on Chinese women entrepreneurs as only a few studies have been published in recent years, see table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Major research on Chinese women entrepreneurs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hisrich &amp; Zhang (1991)</td>
<td>Business status</td>
<td>Survey of 50 women entrepreneurs around China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen (2007)</td>
<td>The role in family and politics</td>
<td>Qualitative interviews with 170 women entrepreneurs in three regions in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qi (2008)</td>
<td>The leadership of Chinese women entrepreneurs</td>
<td>Qualitative six case studies in large cities in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitching &amp; Woldie (2009)</td>
<td>A comparative study of women entrepreneurs between Nigeria and China</td>
<td>Quantitative &amp; Qualitative sample of 100 women entrepreneurs around China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deng at al (2011)</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship research rather than research into entrepreneurs</td>
<td>Single case study using secondary resources and qualitative data.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

The earliest study into mainland Chinese women entrepreneurs was Hisrich and Zhang (1991), who present the business status, individual background and
social context of China’s women entrepreneurs by analyzing the information from a survey of 50 women entrepreneurs around 27 provinces, cities and autonomous regions of China. Their research covers the first decade of reform policy in the 1980s, which offered women equal opportunities to men, with a large number of women being on the leading edge of business rather than a neglected force in China’s economic construction. The research revealed that a high percentage of Chinese women entrepreneurs were involved in clothing, printing and textiles industries. A number of women entrepreneurs worked in areas that were regarded as traditional sectors for female workers, such as raw material production, instrumentation, electrical engineering and machine building.

Hisrich and Zhang (1991) found that most Chinese women entrepreneurs have a professional and technical background, which is a distinguishing feature of Chinese women entrepreneurs in the 1990s compared to the 1980's. It is also an interesting comparison to other parts of the world, where most women entrepreneurs come from more traditional areas such as retailing, catering and hospitality. Hisrich and Zhang (1991) found that all 50 women entrepreneurs in their sample had spouses and children. Of these, 90 percent felt that the support and understanding of family members, especially their spouses, played an important role in their success and they also discovered a further distinguishing feature. Most women entrepreneurs were born and grew up in difficult conditions during the austerity periods of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution and their early childhood experiences allowed them to handle the hardships and the long hours of hard work needed for success.

Another research study on Chinese women entrepreneurs was made by Minglu Chen, a scholar from the University of Technology, Sydney, who has published her PhD thesis in 2007. During her fieldwork, Chen explored 171 Chinese women entrepreneurs, who were running business either on their own or in
collaboration with their husbands or taking leadership management positions in the enterprise. During the 1990s and the beginning of 2000, women were entering these position in the tertiary industries, such as retailing, advertising, the theatre, dispensaries, welfare services, education, hotel and restaurant businesses, as well as insurance. In three different cities they were operating in the traditionally male dominated manufacturing sector, Jiaocheng county in North China, (an area of low foreign economic involvement but nonetheless considerable non-state economic development), Qiongshan District of Haikou city in the south sea island of China, and Mianyang city, which has a light industrial base specialising in white goods and televisions (in the south-west). These three areas have different economic features and different administrative levels in China.

Chen (2007) found these women to have extremely strong connections with the party-state and the successful women seem to be able to set aside their domestic responsibilities to some extent, with various sources of help including both family members and hired maids. A comparison of the situation of interviewees in the three research localities helps to better illustrate the power of wealth and political privilege. For example, the majority of wealthier Mianyang women, doing business in the electronic, chemical, biological materials industries, were more substantially involved in local politics. On the one hand, they appeared to be more actively seeking connections with the Communist Party to reinforce their entrepreneurship, on the other hand, these womens’ significant business success had certainly attracted more political appointments from the local government as an effort to co-opt and motivate the development of the private sector.

Comparatively, Qiongshan women entrepreneurs were running smaller scale businesses, engaged in the less significant sectors of retail and service, and showed that they had the least political involvement. In Jiaocheng, where the
women entrepreneurs were wealthier than those in Qiongshan, but poorer than those in Mianyang, the new rich successful women were similarly of a middling level of political activity. Wealth seems to have been the element that releases women from the leash of household tasks. The greatest entrepreneurial successes were associated with the ability to obtain help from family members and the means to hire domestic help to assist with housework. The comparatively less successful women entrepreneurs had to carry more domestic responsibilities on their own shoulders. Therefore, it could be argued that for women involved in business, the conflict between work and domestic role is a universal problem for women, whether in a developed country or developing country.

Research into Chinese women entrepreneurs by Qi (2008) uses qualitative case studies with six women entrepreneurs to explore women’s leadership and empowerment traits. In the large cities of China, Qi (2008) found that there exists a link between the leadership by women entrepreneurs’ and empowering women through leadership. Qi argues that women entrepreneurs apply empowerment in their management style. Qi, using previous research by Burns (1978) suggests that women entrepreneurial leadership is characterized as transformational leadership which tends to apply empowerment to management. All six case studies strengthen the understanding of women entrepreneurs whose approach to leadership is determined by their personal characteristics and personality.

A couple of papers published by Yu (2011) and Deng et al (2011), examine whether there are gender differences in personality traits and decision making patterns among Chinese private entrepreneurs. Yu and Deng appear to use data from a 2004 national-wide survey of 3012 private firms in China show that there is no gender difference in education level between women entrepreneurs and their male counterparts, however, the data states that women entrepreneurs have smaller family size and work longer hours in their firms than male
entrepreneurs. The issue of family size may cast some doubt on the robustness of the data as government policy has dictated family size since 1978 through the one child policy. Consistent with what was found in the developed countries, firms owned by Chinese women entrepreneurs are significantly smaller in term of the numbers of employees, revenue and profit. Moreover, women entrepreneurs in China are more likely to make important decisions together with their major managers compared to their male counterparts.

The research of Deng et al (2011) develop a model of entrepreneurship using institutional factors and analyse the evolution of the Chinese economy and the context for female entrepreneurs in China. After taking the specific factors affecting women entrepreneurship in China, the research concludes with an example of a successful women entrepreneur as an illustration. Women at first chose to enter industries which had low barriers to entry. Women also tended to use their own savings or loans from relatives. No matter whether pull or push factors were at work, Chinese women’s personal characteristics, most notably tolerance, persistence, human heartedness, thrift and hardworking were cited as essential to their business success (Hu, Chu, and Liang, 2002).

Furthermore, it has been found that women in China may still have fewer opportunities than men in manufacturing, high tech and other high skill sectors. The research findings indicate that the average age of female entrepreneurs is younger than male entrepreneurs while their education level is higher. The time-frame of both Deng and Hu’s research is concentrated after 1995, and entrepreneurial capital usually comes from internal sources as opposed to external financing. As for industry of choice, women entrepreneurs prefer to choose sectors such as restaurant, wholesale and retail, or information services. The Eastern cultural core values and personality traits of Chinese women,
integrated with modern education, influences Chinese women's entrepreneurial success.

It could be argued that Deng's research is limited in two ways, first, the study is only intended as a critical review of the development of Chinese women entrepreneurship. Second, only one case was employed to demonstrate the development path of Chinese women entrepreneurs in an ever-changing institutional environment, thus the developed framework is not tested, rendering a limit on the breadth of generalization.

As previously highlighted, there is an absence of research materials focused on women entrepreneurs in China. I have therefore had to look at an extended area and include Hong Kong and Taiwan. Although the political systems and social backgrounds are different from mainland China, there are traditional cultural similarities to mainland China. The research carried out by Chu (2004), who studied 20 men and 20 women entrepreneurs in the clothing industry in Hong Kong, found Chinese men and Chinese women differ in their motivations for starting a business. Men do it mainly as a strategy to tap business opportunities. Women, on the other hand, do it essentially as a strategy to fulfil family-life obligations. Some women entrepreneurs in Hong Kong are often seconded more as dutiful daughters and supportive wives than willing participants. They display strong attachment to conventional gender roles.

Chu's research found a disproportionate number of women entrepreneurs in Hong Kong, are either single or divorced. It appears that business success and family harmony are not always compatible. This is contradicted by Hisrish and Zhang's (1991) findings, that most mainland Chinese women entrepreneurs have spouses and children. It can be argued that the differences of political background and social environment between mainland China and Hong Kong, has led to a different concept. Hisrish and Zhang's (1991) work was conducted nearly 20 years ago in China, therefore is it still the case today and does this
reflect the rapidly changing business and social environment in China? Also, does Chu’s (2004) work about Hong Kong women entrepreneurs realistically apply to Chinese women in mainland China?

Empirical research suggests that obtaining capital is one of the most significant barriers to entrepreneurship anywhere in the world. In a study focusing on Taipei Chinese women entrepreneurs was conducted by Simon (2003), the researcher found many Taipei women business owners complained about the difficulty of getting bank loans and other institutional forms of credit, especially if land and housing are registered in their husband’s names and cannot be used as collateral for their business loans. This supports the common belief that Taiwanese women face gender discrimination in the credit markets. Therefore, it appears that most women entrepreneurs get financial help to start-up from their relatives and friends. In mainland China, the government appears eager to develop entrepreneurship with both men and women, but do Chinese women entrepreneurs in mainland China have the same principal obstacles as in Taiwan and are there any other barriers? Could it be easier to get Chinese bank finance or are Chinese women entrepreneurs in mainland China also facing gender discrimination?

Focussing on this question, a paper on the Proceedings of Hawaii International Conference on Business by Kitching and Woldie (2004) mentioned that private business is still discriminated against in China with respect to access to capital and security of investment requirements. As the comment is deficient in detail, the data may be unreliable and further investigation into this specific area will be carried out as part of this research. Moreover they state that Chinese women entrepreneurs face more difficulties than men in obtaining support. Again, research will be conducted to substantiate or refute this assertion as government policy has long since declared equality between men and women. Whether this
equality policy has extended to the business sector needs establishing and will be covered in this research.

2.5.4 Summary

There are significant research gaps in our knowledge of Chinese women entrepreneurs and it appears that the existing research is limited in scope and short on detail. Very little comparative research has been conducted with several authors publishing unsubstantiated opinions. There appears to be little previous work done on identifying the motivations of entrepreneurs, either men or women. Few researchers have focused solely on women entrepreneurs. Analysis of the barriers, drivers and success factors of Chinese businesswomen are almost non-existent. There is no detailed research into the social context of start up, family issues and financial capital affecting women entrepreneurs. The economic and political background is not analysed in respect to women’s decisions to start an enterprise. Where work does exist, uncorroborated comparisons are made between Hong Kong, Taiwan and China, which may or may not hold true.

2.6 Conclusion

The conclusions drawn from the review of previous published material suggests that most contributors to this subject have focused on the generics of entrepreneurship with a bias towards male entrepreneurs. The early works often reflect the researchers’ own gender and the sociological background of western developed economies with little material on developing economies such as Asia. Several previous studies have concentrated on the all-encompassing topic of entrepreneurship with the individual entrepreneur as the sub-topic (Smith-Hunter et al, 2003). However some studies of entrepreneurship have focused on the individual characteristics of successful entrepreneurs and there have been various studies on the determinants of entrepreneurship.
The review has identified minimal specific research of Chinese women entrepreneurs. The majority of research into women entrepreneurs focuses on generic aspects of entrepreneurship and little evidence that the specific research or conclusions apply to Chinese women entrepreneurs with the possible exception of the push-pull theory. There appears to be limited research into firm formation, business growth or the effects on the Chinese economy. The literature previously produced, provides support to the theory that analysis of entrepreneurs should be multidimensional.

The main conclusion of this literature review is that there are significant research gaps in the area of Chinese women entrepreneurs, which include limitations in scope and detail for the three decades since 1978, namely: Little previous research carried out on identifying individual motivations; few studies that focus solely upon women Chinese entrepreneurs; no analysis of the barriers, drivers and success factors of women’s business start up activity; no research into the social context, family circumstances and financial capital issues affecting women entrepreneurs.

This research into Chinese women entrepreneurs has both the advantage of being an open field, but the disadvantage of not being able to build on and make comparisons with other relevant studies. Consequently, using the story-telling narrative approach to collect accurate data will be necessary, productive and informative. Furthermore, this detailed research will focus on the characteristics of Chinese women entrepreneurs and not entrepreneurship in general and will include the motivations and drivers to business start up. Moreover, the specific research into the social and financial barriers experienced by women in China and the effects of society, culture and economy in China over the last three decades will enable the aims and objectives of this research to be achieved. Therefore this ground-breaking research will enable subsequent research
papers to further inform and extend the debate in to this fascinating phenomenon.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Selecting a research methodology to study entrepreneurs is challenging and requires careful consideration, especially when dealing with an Eastern culture. The literature review in chapter 2 identified that both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been applied by previous researchers into entrepreneurship studies, typically in western countries. Given that the study of Chinese entrepreneurship, in particular Chinese women entrepreneurs, is a new area of research, choosing the most appropriate methodology is critical to the successful outcome of identifying the motivations, drivers, barriers and success factors in becoming an entrepreneur. Moreover, it is important for a researcher to know and clearly understand the various data collection methodologies and tools available before selecting those which are most suitable for the research area and societal culture, in order to achieve the research aims and objectives.

The aim of this chapter is to determine the most suitable research methodology, assess the use of narrative approaches in qualitative research and meet the research aims and objectives, see table 3.1, by focusing on the characteristics of women entrepreneurs based in China and taking into account the culture in which they work and live.
Table 3.1 The research aims and objectives related to the methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Primary Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Explore motivations of Chinese women entrepreneurs in starting-up their business in the reform periods across the last three decades from the 1980s-2000s.</td>
<td>Narratives, qualitative</td>
<td>Storytelling, interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Uncover the factors that led to Chinese women becoming successful entrepreneurs.</td>
<td>Narratives, qualitative</td>
<td>Storytelling, interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Identify the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs, in setting up and running their businesses, including the effects on their work-life balance</td>
<td>Narratives, qualitative</td>
<td>Storytelling, narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Assess the future plans and prospects of women entrepreneurs.</td>
<td>Narratives, qualitative</td>
<td>Storytelling, narratives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

The structure of this chapter is to explain the rationale for selecting a qualitative approach and more specifically, a narrative methodology, to generate and analyse the primary data used in this research.

First, to provide a discussion about research methods, contrasting quantitative and qualitative approaches, before considering the suitability of narrative approaches to explore entrepreneurship. Second, to present the research strategy for selecting nine Chinese women entrepreneurs involved in this investigation. Here I critically assess Chinese cultural and language issues which could affect the research, followed by an explanation of the narrative methods used to obtain detailed information. Third, to present the rationale for
the operationalisation of the methodology and describe how the research narrative data was transcribed, coded and analysed, in order to make the research process more transparent and also how the information was translated and interpreted into robust data. Fourth, to discuss the quality of the research data and proceed to examine, reflect and assess the criteria of trustworthiness in qualitative research.

Finally, a conclusion of this chapter is provided that identifies the key contributions of this methodology to the project aims and objectives, but also into entrepreneurship research more generally.

3.2 Methods discussion

3.2.1 Contrast between quantitative and qualitative

Many researchers have described the differences between quantitative and qualitative research methodology. For example, Bryman and Bell (2007, p426) contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research indicating that qualitative research is concerned with ‘word, contextual understanding, rich deep data, micro samples and the researcher is closer to the respondent’. This is in contrast to quantitative research which is suggested as being concerned with ‘numbers, generalization, hard reliable data, macro samples and the researcher is distant to the respondent’, see table 3.2, which contrasts the key elements of the two research methodologies.
Table 3.2 Common contrasts between quantitative & qualitative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>Words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point of view of researcher</td>
<td>Point of view of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher distant</td>
<td>Researcher close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory testing</td>
<td>Theory emergent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured</td>
<td>Unstructured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalization</td>
<td>Contextual understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard, reliable data</td>
<td>Rich, deep data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro</td>
<td>Micro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artificial settings</td>
<td>Natural settings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bryman and Bell (2007, P. 426)

The strength of qualitative research methods resides in their seeking a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon (Silverman, 2000; Berg, 2007; Creswell, 2009). They aim to study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings and experiences people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) and to provide complex contextual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Qualitative methods such as narratives can be effective in identifying intangibles as they provide an opportunity for the research
participants to give more detailed responses and produce richer and deeper contextualized information even if the research sample is relatively small.

Quantitative research, by contrast, aims to obtain data from a large number of samples through structured questionnaires and surveys, typically asking all participants identical questions in the same order. In contrast, qualitative research methods are more flexible and allow greater spontaneity and adaptation in the interaction between the researcher and the study participants. Participants are free to respond in their own words and the relationships between the researcher and the participant is often less formal than quantitative research.

Conversely, quantitative researchers criticize qualitative research as being ‘too subjective, difficult to replicate, causes problems of generalization and there is a lack of transparency’ (Bryman and Bell, 2007, P. 423-424). For example, it is often suggested that the scope of the findings of qualitative investigations is restricted due to conducting interviews with a small number of individuals in a certain organization or locality. Quantitative researchers argue that it is impossible to know how the findings can be representative of all cases and applied to a larger population.

Furthermore, quantitative researchers often argue that these tendencies are even more of a problem because of the difficulty of replicating a qualitative study with its unstructured nature and hardly any standard procedures to be followed. Moreover, in qualitative research, the investigator is the main instrument of data collection, so that what is observed and heard and what the researcher decides to concentrate upon, may be a product of the researcher's preconceptions.
Additionally, quantitative researchers criticize qualitative research as being too impressionistic and subjective because they use close personal relationships to contact and find participants to be studied and use open-ended questioning to gradually narrow down research questions or resolve problems (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

However, the selection of a suitable research method should consider social differences and the cultural belief system which could have important effects on the selection of research results according to Ann (2003). As described in Chapter 2 Literature review, an important aspect of Chinese society is *guanxi*, which translates into trusted relationships and connections, usually of friends and/or family. The social structure differentiates groups in the Chinese society, friends and family from strangers (Blackman, 1997) and the Chinese might not be willing to deal with strangers unless it is through referral from a friend or an established associate (Ann, 2003), see figure 3.1 which highlights the convergence of the three elements as being the most trusted.

Figure 3.1 The structure of Chinese society

![Figure 3.1: The structure of Chinese society](http://brasilmaislindo.blogspot.com/2010/03/china.html)
Therefore, research in China has a much higher rate of success by relying on personal networks and relationships (Ann, 2003). In Western democracies, people are generally familiar with questionnaires and surveys in quantitative research and in many cases most likely to welcome the opportunity to give feedback to institutions and corporations or researchers but would this apply in every society? In the context of China, many Chinese people will not be comfortable in responding in the same way as western respondents. China has an inherent mistrust of formal interrogation and is a strong relationship-oriented society. This mistrust of establishment was exacerbated during the period (1966-1976) of the Culture Revolution (Lu, 2004). Quantitative researchers may encounter difficulty in recruiting suitably large numbers of candidates through cold-calling or unsolicited mailings as Chinese people do not respond well to strangers and can be suspicious of officialdom (Lee and Pawes, 2005).

Crucially, choosing a research method should always be selected to best fit the research aims and purpose. As previously explained, the aims and purpose of this research is to investigate three groups of Chinese women who are involved in private business in three different periods of Chinese political and economic reform. This research focuses on individual persons and to investigate their motivations and gain an insight into feelings and experiences. These participants may have suffered personal deprivations or struggled with bureaucracy and officialdom in their attempt to set up their businesses and may therefore be reluctant to disclose relevant information.

It is therefore necessary to take account of the need to establish trust before conducting an in-depth interview in order to gain accurate information resulting in robust data. If the researcher wants closer access to participants and wants to hear women entrepreneurs’ experiences through their own stories, how best to achieve this goal. Obviously, these factors would tend to support the use of qualitative research methodology. A narrative approach in qualitative research
appears particularly well suited as shown earlier in the table 3.1. In the following section, the advantages and limitations of using narratives and who have used narrative approaches in the studies of entrepreneurs will be discussed.

### 3.2.2 Narratives in qualitative research

Narrative approaches have previously been used as a discipline within qualitative research (Elliott, 2009) and the term, narratives, are often used to mean stories (Riessman, 2008). Stories have different associations and understanding for different people. As humans, we are interpreting beings (Morgan, 2000), and we all have experiences of events that we seek to make meaningful. The stories we hold about our lives are created through linking certain events together in a particular sequence across a time period and finding a way of explaining or making sense of them. We give meanings to our experiences constantly as we live our lives. A narrative is like a thread that weaves the events together, forming a story (Morgan, 2000). The study of narratives is the study of the ways humans experience the world. In other words, people’s lives consist of stories. Therefore, a narrative approach is the process of gathering information for the purpose of research through listening and analysing stories (Gartner, 2007).

**The advantages of using narrative approaches**

The application of using a narrative approach is suitable for smaller groups and is relatively straight forward to obtain samples (Riessman,1993) through personal contacts and relationships. This approach is also suitable for intangible research areas such as emotion, feelings, motivations and goals (Lieblich et al, 1998),and are therefore more appropriate to these research aims and objectives. Furthermore, narrative approaches generally use open-ended and flexible questioning techniques and allow researchers to access inter-subjective issues such as motivations and experience, which are less likely to be achieved from questionnaires or closed question interviews (Byrne, 2004). It is more likely to
encourage narrating and not just supply short answers to questions in order to obtain more details of research data. It also gives the entrepreneurs the freedom to narrate whatever s/he wants and is considered by the interviewee as relevant and interesting to relate (Mishler, 1986).

Moreover, narratives allow researchers to provide a more in-depth understanding of an individual’s life (Lieblich et al., 1998) and focus on the inward and outward experiences of people’s feelings, reactions, attentions to the environment, retelling of past events and speculations about future prospects (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). It enables the researcher to gain a deep personal and contextual understanding of the experiences and decisions made in their lives (Riessman, 1993). Analysis of people’s stories allows deeply hidden phenomenon to surface and by listening to people’s voices and observing body language, a greater sense of importance can be established. My efforts to investigate Chinese women entrepreneurs using narrative approaches allowed me to discover the structure of their feelings and emotions and to better understand them as individuals through questioning their motivations and their goals. Being a Chinese woman and having lived though the three decades being researched, I was able to fully contextualize their stories and experiences.

As described in Chapter 1, my family background and my personal experience of being a woman entrepreneur in China has given me a strong insight into the problems and pressures of setting up a business as well as enabling me to make comparisons between the different environments and how cultural differences apply. This knowledge and cultural understanding allowed me to sympathize and establish rapport which gained trust from participants. In Elliott’s (2009) research, he suggests that trust is an important element of successful narrative approaches in qualitative research. Furthermore, my empathy and understanding of issues such as family and financial pressures enabled me to
bond with the interviewees and allowed me to stimulate conversation. In addition, by recalling which issues had affected my own decision to set up a business and the issues which created both frustration and sense of achievement, I was able to probe deeper or more precisely where necessary. This resulted in the cohort treating me as a member of their peer group and not as a stranger or outsider. Therefore, I fully concur with Riessman (1993), that the researcher’s role and identity requires the composition and alignment of the interview for practical, theoretical and psychological reasons.

**The limitations of using narratives approaches**

It must be acknowledged that there are limitations applying to narrative approaches. For example, narratives are not suitable for studies of large numbers of population as this approach is slow, painstaking and large time commitments are required and are considered as limited portraits (Piessman, 1993). In my experience, the interviewing time can last from one hour and up to five hours, depending on the participant’s narrative abilities and eloquence, as was evidenced several times in my own interviews.

Furthermore, as narrative approaches require close collaboration with participants it should be recognised that the constructed narrative and subsequent analysis illuminates the researcher as much as the participants (Bell, 2002). Moreover, narrative approaches require the researcher to have linguistic skills and cultural understanding. Polkinghorne (1988) suggests the researcher’s role and identity is very important and should know how to stimulate conversation and which questions to ask and how and when to ask and respond.

However, it is suggested that even though there are some limitations in using narratives approaches to conduct research, it has been becoming popular in recent years in entrepreneurship studies (Johansson, 2004). In the next section recent published papers have been selected and reviewed.
3.2.3 Narratives in entrepreneur research

Early narratives research methods have been developed by Steyaert (1997); Pitt (1998); Wahlin (1999); Lindgren and Wahlin (2001); Rae and Carswell (2001) all of which adopted narratives in entrepreneurship studies. In his PhD thesis, Steyaert (1997) used narratives to investigate the experience, memory, feelings and identity of entrepreneurs through their stories in high-tech businesses.

Pitt (1998) studied two entrepreneur’s stories who set up and ran small companies supplying industrial goods and services in Britain and explores how they developed their business to reach personal goals. Wahlin (1999) applied a narrative approach to study eight entrepreneurs whose stories reveal how they changed their professional careers to start their own enterprises in Finland. Moreover, Lindgren & Wahlin (2001) used narratives to explore six women entrepreneurs setting up private schools in Sweden, making visible their stories and the motivating factors that them to start their businesses.

More recent work has been published by Hytti (2003), Johansson (2004), Rae (2005), Hamilton (2006) and Kuivaniemi (2010), see table 3.3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Sample size (Location)</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hytti (2003)</td>
<td>8 (Finland)</td>
<td>Motivations</td>
<td>Narrative interview</td>
<td>Content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johansson (2004)</td>
<td>9 (Sweden)</td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Narrative interview</td>
<td>Content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rae (2005)</td>
<td>3 (Britain)</td>
<td>Learning &amp; Practicing</td>
<td>Narrative interview</td>
<td>Thematic, discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton (2006)</td>
<td>3 (Britain)</td>
<td>Family business</td>
<td>Narrative interview</td>
<td>Discourse, content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuivaniemi (2010)</td>
<td>6 (Finland)</td>
<td>Motivations</td>
<td>Narrative interview</td>
<td>Content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: the author

Hytty (2003) used narratives to explore eight stories of Finnish entrepreneurs in his doctoral research and focused on the personal identities and motivations underlying their desire to become entrepreneurs. Following this, he has selected three women entrepreneurs' stories from his previous work (2003), published in (2010), to stress a particular type of career transition into entrepreneurship driven by dismissal or unemployment. In a similar vein, Johansson (2004) selects some points from his earlier PhD thesis, which was conducted in 1997, when he investigated nine entrepreneur's stories to uncover hidden meanings in the concepts used by entrepreneurs and to understand entrepreneurs as individuals in a social context.
Rae (2005) explores stories of three entrepreneurs in a creative and media sector in Britain to build up an entrepreneurial learning model. Hamilton (2006) used narratives to study stories of founders and the succeeding generations of three family businesses in Britain and focuses on the complex relationships of entrepreneurial behaviour and processes in family businesses. More recently, Kuivaniemi (2010) uses narratives to investigate six entrepreneurs to understand entrepreneurs’ motivation and choice of business in the sex industry. All of these researchers’ studies suggest that when dealing with intangibles such as emotion and feelings a more detailed understanding of a wider context has to be considered.

The literature review as shown in table 3.3 suggests the majority of previous research into entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship was conducted with small samples using storytelling to generate research data. Therefore, I decided to adopt this methodology and conduct face to face interviews and I am especially drawn to Bryman's (2008) suggestion that storytelling methods enable the researcher to see through the eyes of the people being studied.

3.3 Data generation

3.3.1 Sample selections

Narrative approaches are generally accepted as not being useful for studies of large numbers in a study group as described by Riessman (1993), but are considered suitable for smaller groups to provide the researcher with a more in-depth understanding of the subjects (Lieblich et al 1998). Meanwhile, as stated in the previous section, the literature review and the aims and objectives of this research, is to focus on three groups of women entrepreneurs who started their business during the three reform decades through 1980s, 1990s and 2000s respectively. Accepting that the choice of geographic location, cost and timeframe are limiting factors in my research, I therefore selected nine Chinese
women entrepreneurs based in the capital city, Beijing, which reduced the need for extensive additional travel and gave me a sample of three in each of the three periods as well as a realistic total comparative sample. Furthermore, by selecting a sample of nine in the same region, the comparisons are not influenced by other external regional issues such as the creation of special economic zones.

All women are married and have children. Their ages ranged from 35 to 60 with an educational background ranging from secondary school to university, and with no qualifications to Masters Degree. The business areas covered range from services industries to manufacturing, including retailing, wholesale, investment, IT, engineering, textiles and a fabric factory and restaurant, see table 3.4.
Table 3.4 Sample framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Business type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>Ruibin</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>Manufacturing (environment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shuying</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Manufacturing (plastic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hua</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>Catering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>Xiling</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Masters degree</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Wholesale (flowers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lixin</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>IT service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xuemei</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Manufacturing (fabric)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>Jian</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>Manufacturing (furniture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sumei</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>Media investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Medical treatment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

As previously explained, the choice of these women for interview was based on their location as well as my research aims and objectives in particular taking account of the three periods of establishing a new business. They have the same main characteristics which are gender, all married and have children.
However, there are differences in the education they have received, from only a basic education to others who have gained degrees at university. Seven women run SMEs with two running large companies and their age range being 35 to 60.

The sampling strategy in this research can be categorised as convenience sampling. Although this sampling strategy has been described by Patton (2002) as the least recommended approach, because in his opinion, it has low credibility and that the sample is not representative of the entire population. However, this sampling strategy has been championed by researchers such as Cole and Knowles (2001), who argue that when studying people’s life experiences, a researcher is opting for depth over breadth, and that the idea behind these selection procedures is to locate individuals from whom the researcher is likely to learn most about their topic of inquiry. It is a sampling technique where subjects can be selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. As previously explained, I used convenience sampling because it was the fastest way to recruit for the study and because it allowed me to spend significantly more time with each interviewee and thereby obtain in-depth information and detailed data.

The use of narrative approach in the sampling strategy is also prioritised by Elaine Ann, who is the founder of Kaizor Innovation, a strategic innovation consulting company uniquely positioned to help develop appropriate innovation strategies, research and designs for the emerging China market. Based on her research experience in China, she argues that China is a relationship-oriented society and Chinese people do not respond well to strangers as the social structure differentiates in-groups (friends and family) from the out-groups (strangers), unless the out-groups are referred by someone trusted. Looking for participants randomly as recommended in Western methodologies without
referrals might have a higher risk of receiving non responsiveness or superficial feedback when researching in China.

Therefore, four women entrepreneurs (Ruibin, Xiling, Sumei and Lily) were introduced through my personal friend relationship and a further four (Shuying, Hua, Lixin and Jian) were recommended through an organisation known as the Women Federation (WF) in the Haidian District of Beijing which was also introduced by a friend relationship. Only one participant (Xuemei) was known to one other member of the group (Lixin), who made a recommendation of this participant, however, the other of seven participants are not inter-connected and do not know each other. In order to protect their personal identity and financial security their total assets and finances are not presented in table 3.4. In the next section I will discuss two issues of concern in this study, ethical and linguistic.

3.3.2 Ethical and linguistic issues

In this section, I would like to discuss two issues raised in the study, regarding ethics and language. First, the ethical issues of confidentiality and privacy of individuals taking part in the research must be secured prior to conducting the interviews (Mason, 2002). Confidentially must be assured in order to gain the information's consent as part of the process. Second, the informants consent must be based on voluntary participation (Silverman, 2000). For the researcher to simply talk about an informants consent is impractical and the researcher must communicate to the participant precisely to what she is consenting. (Josselson, 1996). Therefore, prior to approaching the nine selected women entrepreneurs, I prepared a series of documents in both English and Chinese languages. These documents comprised a consent form (see appendix 1), a brief outline of research method, my research aims and objectives, my personal profile and a brief introduction to the University of Exeter. All documents have been approved by my supervisors before I started to contact and approach participants.
The issue of the investigation language (Chinese and English) was also taken into consideration in the research design. As Welch and Piekkari (2006) argue, some topics in China could only be investigated in Chinese. In another Chinese context, Tsang (1998) claims that communicating in the respondent’s language is of paramount importance because it allows respondents to fully express themselves, establishes good rapport and it enables the researchers to interpret the participants’ statement with cultural understanding. Therefore, all documents including the consent form were translated into Chinese. Each participant was presented with a folder containing Chinese translated language pages, preceded with the English language script.

Eight interviewees were happy to use their own real names and allow these to appear in this research, only one entrepreneur was very cautious and would not like her true name included in this research, however, she has given more details and also happy for her story to be included. Therefore, her name appears as a given pseudonym called Lily.

3.3.3 The interview design and process

Narratives are gathered through interviewing (Mishler, 1986), therefore, before I start to describe the process of narrative interviewing, I need first to highlight and explain the background and culture of Chinese society. Ann (2003) suggests that when conducting research in China, the Chinese will not respond in the same way as Western respondents and it is necessary to take Chinese cultural differences into account.

Although personal relationships play a role to a greater or lesser extent in many societies, as my previous chapter 2 explained, in Chinese society it has a significant effect and is built on guanxi-relationships and networks of friends and/or family. Chinese research respondents, have a much higher rate of success relying on personal networks and relationships (Ann, 2003). Connections play an
important role in recruitment in China and for information collected to be reliable, it is essential to build a trusting friendship before conducting any form of business.

Blackman (1997) states that in developing business relationships in China, establishing a long term relationship of friendship and trust is a pre-requisite. Chinese people place much more importance in knowing someone personally or through close friends or relatives, and trust their inner circle much more than acquaintances (Bond, 1992). Thus, recruiting randomly as in Western methodologies without referrals has a much higher risk of no shows, non-responsiveness or superficial feedback. Chinese people are typically reluctant to disclose truthful feelings to strangers but are very open and honest with their friends and family. As I am personally aware and as Ann (2003) found, the Chinese might not be willing to deal with strangers unless it is through referral from a friend or an established associate.

Therefore, based on my experience of the phenomenon of the Chinese culture, a three step process of interview was devised and applied in order to obtain valuable in-depth research information and robust data. By providing an explanation of the rationale under-pinning my research, followed by a personal interview and followed up by using a subsequent confirmation sheet, I was able to check the accuracy of the information and remove any miss-interpretations. This is detailed and described in the following paragraphs.

**Step 1-informal talk to develop relationship**

I would like to refer to step 1 as a Pre-interview strategy. In any interview situation it is essential to eliminate any suspicion or scepticism about the research and for the researcher to give a good impression of themselves and their supporting institutions. If the researcher is successful in minimizing the
perceived risks from the respondents point of view, it will lead to more open and honest responses. In the first meeting therefore it is important to be informal, open and friendly. Furthermore, it is essential to re-assure the participants that confidentiality will be respected and an explanation of the rationale underpinning the research is given.

With the four entrepreneurs (Shuying, Hua, Lixin and Jian) selected through the WF, the first meetings were arranged in the entrepreneurs’ offices and one of WF’s staff accompanied and effected introductions. These meetings were informal and unstructured and consisted of a general discussion about the differences and similarities between the UK and China and lasted approximately 30 or 40 minutes. Usually tea was offered and accepted. The shared drinking of tea is another social culture in China, which is also part of developing guanxi. At the start of the meeting business cards were exchanged and I gave a précis of my life story, which helped develop trust, respect and in some instances, admiration. Many Chinese are fascinated by those fellow countrymen and women who travel abroad to seek work or education and many express envy as well as admiration. By disclosing my life story it encouraged reciprocation from the participant. Openness and honesty with the participant resulted in the establishment of trust and guanxi was quickly developed.

Although the pre-interview stage was unstructured, the sharing of life stories at the first encounter enabled me to capture useful information about the interviewees’ life both prior to and subsequent to the establishment of their business. Information about their personal lives including their families and education were noted and subsequently written up immediately after the meeting to ensure accuracy. Much valuable information and data about the establishment time, the size of their business, number of employees, sales and profits can be captured through a basic conversation if using open ended
questions such as ‘When did you start to run your company,’ ‘How many employees work for you’ or ‘How large is your turnover and is it growing?’

Once a general feeling of trust was established, the interviewees were asked if they would accept a more in-depth interview at a later date and be prepared to share their life stories. They were asked if they would like to meet in private to talk again and if so, allow them to choose the next time and a venue, which would be convenient for both parties. Supporting documents, such as the university’s introduction, the interviewer’s personal profile and the research aims and objectives were left with the respondent to allow them time to read and understand as well as give them enough time to prepare. For example, the generic interview guide included ‘I would like you to narrate your story and experience in your business life particularly I would like to know more details about your motivation in the setting-up stage’, ‘Why have you been successful, what were and are the barriers and what are your future business plans’.

With the other four entrepreneurs (Ruibin, Xiling, Sumei and Lily) introduced through personal relationships (Close friends and family), an invitation was extended to meet individually for dinner. A quality restaurant was chosen for the meeting and during the meal an explanation about life in Britain and the PhD research aims and objectives were explained. The discussion and research area resulted in them expressing an interest to participate in this research and they agreed to be participants and share their business story. As with the initial four interviewees, documents previously prepared in the Chinese language were provided for them and an arrangement for the next meeting scheduled.

The entrepreneur (Xuemei) was contacted initially by telephone and following my introduction to the research and a general discussion, her agreement to participate was confirmed. She was emailed the pre-prepared documents.
regarding the research aims and objectives and the generic interview guide questions and a subsequent face to face meeting was arranged. During all the initial meetings and discussions, the use of a digital recorder was not mentioned or discussed as this may have resulted in causing nervousness and potential refusal to meet for a more in-depth interview, the second stage.

**Step 2- deeper interview with digital recording**

The second meeting venues were all chosen by the entrepreneurs so that they would feel more comfortable and thereby, more likely to talk freely. Five interviews took place at their private business offices, two were in the general meeting room of their company building, one was conducted in the private VIP room in a restaurant near the interviewee’s company and one was conducted in a coffee shop. Interviews lasted between 1 hour and 5 hours depending on the availability of the interviewee.

Prior to the commencement of the interview, general greetings and pleasantries took place to re-establish the personal relationship and *guanxi*. Once the general pleasantries were completed, the general aims of the research were repeated and a consent form was provided to let them read and if comfortable with its content, agree to accept and sign. The consent form also includes the option to agree to the use of a digital recorder to record the conversation. It was further explained that this recording was actually only for the interviewer to use and would help in the translation from Chinese language into English. Following which it would be destroyed. This reinforced the trust and removed any cautiousness or suspicions by the entrepreneur resulting in all nine agreeing to the use of the tape recorder.

Prior to each meeting, I refreshed my memory by reading the notes taken subsequent to the first encounter. This enabled me to revisit and check some of
relevant data. Cole and Knowles (2001) suggest that one way to generate data is to clarify purposes with participants and help them to see that the telling of stories about their lives is important. Following this advice, I started to ask them whether they had read the interview scope I gave to them at the previous meeting and also briefly repeated my interview guide questions. I therefore started to open a conversation by enquiring about their motivation in setting up a business, the successes and failures, the barriers and future plans to which the respondent started to narrate. The following example was taken from an interviewed with Ruibin, and demonstrates the technique of using open questions to extract information and closed questions to confirm the data.

YW: I remember you mentioned you set up your manufacturing in 1986, am I right?

RB: Yes, you are right.

YW: I would like to know what are main the reasons or motivations to set up your own business and could you please tell me your story or experience during that time? (Friendly eye contact).

RB: Ok, it is a long time ago; I need to give you some background prior to this. I was born in the small village in the outskirts of Beijing and my parents have a total 7 children, I was the fourth child, my parents were very poor. When I was 16, the Cultural Revolution happened, my school was closed and I had to leave school. My father helped me to get a job working with farmers in the field……

Stjernberg (2006) recommends that researchers should listen carefully in interviews to interviewees’ stories and also brings this interaction in an interview to a higher level by linking it to data analysis. He argues that during the interview, the active listening may be seen as a sense-making process and thus as a way of making an immediate analysis, providing an impetus to search for more
information and a deeper understanding. I used the affirmation technique by
nodding in agreement, saying ‘yes, I see’ and sometimes I used words such
as ‘really’ or ‘interesting’ to show interviewees I was listening carefully and I
was interested in her story. This often resulted in the interviewee confirming and
expanding on an important point. During the interview, as each topic was fully
explored, a summary of what had been discussed was conducted and the salient
points confirmed with the interviewees before seamlessly moving to the next
area of research.

**Step 3 - feedback and confirmation**

After conducting each of the nine interviews, all recordings were immediately
checked for speech quality and then a back up copy made on my laptop. A
summary of the main narrated questions was made relating to my research
purpose. For example, when I interviewed Xiling, who had run her own business
—importing tulips bulbs from Holland to China as a wholesale agent for 11 years,
I analysed and deduced that her main motivation was to look after her father and
her brothers, as shown in a sample of the following narrative:

```
I had enough money (my salary in the previous
state company) to survive in Beijing with my
husband but not enough to support my father
and my brothers financially, my father needed
to have an air-conditioning in summer, I
could not have extra money to buy one for him,
I felt really guilty…
```

Xiling’s motivation was simple and she just wanted to look after her father and
she decided to resign to set up her own business in order to improve the whole
family’s financial base. I was therefore able to summarise and deduce ‘to
support my parents and my family needs financially’ was an answer to one of the
questions on the feedback and confirmation sheet (see Appendix 2). To illustrate
another example, when I interviewed Hua, who had opened more than 20 noodles bars and five fine restaurants since 1986, I wrote down her summary which was ‘to survive in Beijing at the beginning of her business.’ Her husband was an artist and they relied on his paintings being sold to obtain money to live in Beijing. However, the small income was not enough to survive, therefore she tried to open the first noodles bar, as she said:

Paintings which my husband drew are elegant and beautiful but they are difficult to be sold, even one piece during a day in the street. People do not need art but they do need food to put into their stomachs. Business to do over and over, it is better to open restaurant as the Chinese saying. However, I did not have a lot of saving to run a restaurant, therefore, I thought of opening a noodle bar, it costs less and everyone could afford to buy a bowl of noodles.

She decides to open the first noodle bar to resolve her family’s physical needs and also hoped to earn more money to sustain a life in Beijing. Therefore, I checked this answer on my list ‘to stay and survive in Beijing.’

A summary of the nine entrepreneurs’ interview answers to the feedback and confirmation sheet sent to them through emails and fax are documented to reconfirm their answers and were further explored and expanded in step 2, the in-depth interviews, and through their narrating stories. They were advised that they may be contacted again if further information or clarification was required on return to England. At the conclusion of the interview, my personal and profound gratitude on the feedback and confirmation sheet was expressed to the nine interviewees. Politeness and respect being of high importance in Chinese society.
3.4 Data analysis

3.4.1 Riessman’s model

Analyzing narrative data has no standard set of procedures according to Riessman (1993). However, Riessman suggests that when researchers use narrative approaches to analyse data, the process of data analysis should follow five levels which are: attending, telling, transcribing, analyzing and reading, see table 3.5.

Source: author adapted from Riesman (1993, P.10)

I adopted Riessman’s structure but felt there was need for adaption taking in to account the cultural aspects in China, previously detailed. I therefore created an adapted model, see table 3.6.
My analysis actually starts at the pre-interviewing stage which Riessman refers to simply as "attending". In my model, attending is a two stage process with the first occurring during the pre-interview stage when the interviewer explains the rationale behind the research and sets the scene for the interview. At the attending or pre-interview stage, which may be face to face or by telephone, the researcher listens carefully for information related to the purpose of the study. By paying close attention to each question and comment, it enables the researcher to provide reassurance and prepare the ground, which will enable the interviewee to feel relaxed and more informed. I found that the attending or
pre-interview stage was more effective if carried out separately to the telling stage. However, this may be a particular phenomenon of the Chinese personality and culture.

Telling by interviewees entails eliciting the information required by the researcher using various questioning techniques. For my research I required the thoughts, motivations and desires of being an entrepreneur. The scene setting (attending) process helped me to identify questions, responses, probes and/or clues to guide the interview and search for additional information. Listening closely to the story telling is a pre-requisite and accurately recording the information is essential. However, note-taking, if carried out during an interview, can prove extremely difficult and lead to a disjointed and interrupted interview. These interruptions can break the flow of the narrative and result in missed information. I therefore chose to use a digital audio recorder and record the full interview. This enabled me to listen repeatedly to the audio recordings of participant’s stories before deciding which elements and specific comments and answers yielded important insights and answers to my research aims.

Furthermore, by recording the interview, I was able to pay much closer attention to the women’s narrative and identify their emotion, passions, fears and elations through the words, sentences, quotes and expressions presented. It also enabled me to probe deeper into the specific areas of interest by asking open questions about specific points mentioned during the narrative. In the first interview with Hua, I took written notes on her key words and sentence strands. However this proved to be a more difficult process than I was able to achieve during subsequent interviews.

Moreover, I found taking notes affected her fluency in narrating and she paused and paid attention to my note taking. Thus, note taking increased her curiosity
resulting in her enquiring what I had written down. This created a hiatus in the narrating and prevented me from observing her body language and facial expressions. Based on this experience, therefore, I stopped taking notes during the narrating period of the subsequent interviews. However, at the earliest opportunity following the interview, I wrote notes on any key words, verbatim quotes, strands of questioning and answers, as well as my observations of the interviewees facial reactions to key words and questions.

As Riessman (1993) cautions, note taking during the interview can interrupt the flow of conversation and she suggests listening to the audio recordings affords the luxury of time to concentrate on issues and thoughts embedded in the participants' accounts. Following her suggestion, I listened to the digital recording several times and, in conjunction with my subsequent interview notes, was able to record my thoughts and reactions which greatly assisted my subsequent analysis.

To ensure the robustness of the subsequent data, I also summarised the answers given during the narrative to the main questions relating to my research aims. I sent the summary to each interviewee and asked them to confirm their answers. In the following section, I will focus on the further analysis I conducted after the information was collated and data collected. I will expand on the issues regarding transcribing, the stages of analysis and the reading stage including raising some points with data translation.

3.4.2 Transcription

Audio recording and transcribing are essential to narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993). An audio recording provides an almost complete recall of a conversation as it includes pauses, inflections, emphases, unfinished sentences, fluency and tone of voice. It is not an easy task to transform spoken language into a written text to be taken seriously, as we no longer assume the transparency of language
(Riessman, 1993). Each inclusion as well as exclusion, even the arrangement and display of the text can have implications on how the reader will understand the narrative.

Furthermore, Riessman advises that at the beginning of the transcription, one should start with a rough transcription, a first draft of the entire interview including the words and other striking features of the conversation. This first draft should be inclusive, e.g. laughing, hesitations, long pauses, tonal changes, inflections etc, followed by a re-transcription of selected portions for detailed analysis. Following Riessman’s recommendation, I transcribed the nine entrepreneurs recorded interviews with the addition of the notation material. A 90 minute recording required between five and seven hours to transcribe resulting in more than 80 pages of Chinese writing language for the whole cohort. Following the first draft I spent considerable time scrutinizing the transcriptions and reduced by removing some texts which are not connected to the research questions. Below is an example translated into English from the transcript of an interview with Jian who runs a furniture factory. To locate more precisely the source of relevant information in the conversation, I needed to repeatedly listen to the recording and produce in more detail the key moments in her narrating.

Examples of rough transcription:

My mum was 44 at the time of my birth (pause) and my physical quality was poor (pause) since I was born my father gave me a name called Jian means wish I have a good health when I was growing up. Since I was a little, I was always coughing and coughing (laugh) maybe it was part of my father’s gene because my father had tracheitis (laugh). Since I was little I was always coughing and so my father gave me a name Jian. My parent was extremely poor, my parents were getting older and more than 60 and my brother had illness all the time during a year. My brother was 12 years older than
me and he had tracheitis at the beginning and then to phthisis (sad expression). I wanted to earn a lot of money to treat my brother's illness when I was studying in the primary school and I promised myself...

Re transcription:

I was born when my mum was 44 years old. My health was very poor, I was coughing all the time and I suspected maybe the gene was from my father because he was suffering tracheitis. My brother who was 12 years older than me and he had been affected by phthisis. Therefore, my father gave me a name called Jian, which he wished I would be fit when I grew up. Since I was studying in a primary school, I promised myself I must earn a lot of money to treat my brother and my father's physical problems one day...

All transcriptions were in the Chinese language which I read myself and after checking details such as vocabularies, Chinese phrases and idioms, I arranged the main points relevant to my research aims. I then arranged to have telephone conversations or emails to present the main points from the transcription texts to the nine participants and enable them to make sure all the interpretations of the stories and transcription were accurate and a true reflection based on their narration. Once they approved the transcription text, further analysis could begin.

3.4.3 Coding and framework analysis

According to Riessman (2008), in conducting narrative data analysis, a researcher could adopt different methods to suit their preferences and situation. Having developed an analytical strategy for all the transcriptions of the Chinese language interviews, I have chosen to use NVivo 8 to analyse and organize my data, including framework analysis to present the results of generated data.
NVivo 8 is a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) designed as a toolkit to aid researchers in managing and organizing data (Patton, 2002) and capable of dealing with data that has been transcribed in different languages other than English. This was particularly useful for this study since interviews and transcripts were carried out in the Chinese language.

As soon as the basic concepts and functions of the software, such as nodes, memos, attributes, searching are understood, the data coding and analysis process can take place. Coding is an essential procedure in data analysis as Strauss (1987) describes, the excellence of the research rests in large part on the excellence of the coding. To work and analyse data in your mother tongue is always preferable as it is faster and more in-depth. To be able to do this using software like NVivo 8 is a distinct advantage.

Miles and Huberman (1984) advise that researchers can start with some general themes derived from reading the literature and add more themes and sub-themes as they go. Following this advice and considering my research aims and objectives, I coded nine interview transcriptions to develop an initial codebook (see appendix 3). The first level of the codebook includes ‘motivations’, ‘success factors’, ‘barriers’ and ‘future plans’, which correspond to the main research aims and objectives and from which sub-themes were created in order to further expand and generate data. The second level is divided by the three research periods of 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. The third level shows supporting comments taken from the transcriptions and the final is summarized and inducted to correspond to chapter 2 Literature review which discussed key drivers including such issues as motivations (push and pull factors), culture (Guanxi influence), government policies, working-family conflicts, start-up capital, management and theoretical concerns.

Following the completion of the coding, a framework analysis has been applied. The word framework derives from the phrase of thematic framework which is the
central component of the method according to Ritchie and Lewis (2003). A thematic framework is used to organise data using key themes, concepts and emergent categories. It is an extension of a classification model and as such, each study has a distinct thematic framework comprising a series of main themes, subdivided by a succession of related subtopics. These themes are refined after familiarisation with the raw data with each main theme displayed as a heading in a matrix. Every respondent is allocated a row and each column denotes a separate subtopic. Edited data from each case study is then recorded within the appropriate parts of the thematic framework (Ritchie et al, 2003).

By adopting the model of Ritchie et al, I used the main themes as shown in the code book which correspond with the research aims and objectives plus sub-categories relating to the main themes such as time period. Further sub-categories were created where the narratives high-lights consistent or repetitive messages such as emotional pressures like work/family conflicts as well as support from family members. The division of the framework into the three time periods helps facilitate historic comparisons and potentially enable future predictions.

The table 7.1 in the final chapter 7 highlights similarities and differences during the different periods and potential emerging trends. For example, the motivation of setting up the business is obviously different in the first period compared to periods 2 and 3. The Push factor in period 1 transforms into a pull factor by period 3. Poverty and family survival needs is the most common driver for the three entrepreneurs in period 1. However, in the 2000s, it shows women entrepreneurs are eager to be recognised and the pull factor of self-achievement is the key driver. Interestingly, in period 2 (1990s), women entrepreneurs are motivated by both push and pull factors which may suggest that period 2 was a transitional phase in Chinas economic development. Further explanation of the
findings and results of the analysis will be presented in the final chapter 7 of this thesis.

3.4.4 Reading and translation

In her final analysis stage, Riessman (1993) stresses the importance of reading which she states is part of the analysis process. Conducting the analysis through reading without translation would be impossible for this thesis and the formation of data meaningless. As I have previously stated, my interview data and transcriptions are in the Chinese language and required translation to present the data in this thesis in the English language. Data translating is a vital and an essential requirement but it must be emphasized that some points regarding the translation have been edited without changing the meaning to give the reader a better understanding.

As Twinn (1998) warns, for some Chinese words, for which there are no immediate equivalents in English, it is appropriate to find English words or phrases which capture or represent the meaning of the Chinese. Therefore there could be concerns about the data being accurate or misunderstood in the translation process. The first concern is the grammatical style. Twinn (1998) highlighted the difficulties in translating data where there is little similarity in the grammatical structure of the two languages. Particularly, in cases when translating Chinese into English, where the tenses are not used in the Chinese languages and personal pronouns are not distinguished in the verbal form. Therefore, during the translation, I had to consider tenses and gender pronouns and where these were omitted they were added into the translated data taking into account the context of the interviews.

The second concern is the culture and customs associated with the translation of Chinese idioms and proverbs, many of which originated from Chinese historic stories and mythologies and complex social phenomena. Furthermore, these
idioms and proverbs include unique Chinese names and locations that would become meaningless and incomprehensible if directly translated according to the literal meanings of characters. Moreover, the translation would be clumsy, less concise and incomparable to the original text if many lengthy explanations were included.

Therefore, to overcome these problems, I used a contextualised translation approach, which focused on contextual or meaning consistency rather than verbal or discourse consistency between the source language (Chinese) and the target language (English). For example, the Chinese idiom ‘jin shang tian hua’ (锦上添花) as used by a few entrepreneurs during the interviewing, where the direct words translation is ‘add flowers to the brocade’, which to many may be meaningless. However, having checked dictionaries and consulted with Chinese and English colleagues, it has the same meaning as the English phrase ‘icing on the cake’.

Another example, ‘xue zhong song tan’ (雪中送炭), where the direct meaning of the words is, ‘send charcoal in snowy weather’, which for Chinese culture, means you provide timely help and care. Another example, ‘qiong ze si bian’ (穷则思变) is a famous Chinese idiom dating from two thousand years ago. The direct meaning in English is ‘poverty rule think change’ which makes little sense. However, if you understand the cultural background, it means ‘Poverty gives rise to a desire for change, or if you want to change your current poor living conditions, you must first look for the way to improve your life style’. Therefore, during the translation phase, I adopted relevant meanings to refer to the feelings and experiences of interviewees.

Furthermore, Di and Nida (2006) stress language is conventional, particular words and terms have their specific meaning in the fixed occasion with the conceptual frameworks at the fixed time or period. To report the Chinese women
entrepreneurs’ stories, experiences and thoughts as accurately as possible in this thesis, it has sometimes been necessary to keep words in their original form instead of translating it roughly. For example the Chinese word *guanxi*, which translates as network or relationship, however, neither network nor relationship encapsulates the complete meaning of *guanxi*. Similarly, *Danwei* was also used instead of organisation throughout this thesis. Fortunately, being Chinese and having a good understanding of both languages, I was able to avoid many of the issues previously discussed. Therefore, I suggest that a non native speaker engaged in similar research could find the robustness of their data compromised during translation.

### 3.5 Trustworthiness

How do you judge the quality of narrative approaches in qualitative research? How can you believe the stories which participants have told amount to a reliable rendering of the past? How can we ensure that our research is reliable and valid? Quantitative researchers use the terms, reliability and validity to measure the research data (LeCompte and Goetz ,1982; Kirk and Miller,1986). However, in qualitative research, trustworthiness is the important criterion to judge the quality of the research. According to Bryan and Bell (2007), trustworthiness is made up of four criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) and parallels the judgment of quantitative research (internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity), see table 3.7.
Table 3.7 Criteria for judging quantitative and qualitative research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative Research</th>
<th>Qualitative Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal validity</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External validity</td>
<td>Transferability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Dependability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td>Confirmability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: the author based on Bryman and Bell (2007)

3.5.1 Credibility

The credibility criterion involves establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participant in the research. Since from this perspective, the purpose of qualitative research is to describe or understand the phenomena of interest from the participant's eyes, as the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Credibility deals with the focus of the research and refers to confidence in how well data and processes of analysis address the intended focus (Polit and Hungler, 1995). The first question concerning credibility arises when making a decision about the focus of the study, selection of participants and the approach used in gathering data (Patton, 1987).
As described earlier in this chapter, prior to conducting this research, consideration was given to which research method should be applied. Being cognisant of the significant differences between China and western countries and by paying particular attention and consideration to the Chinese societal culture, I rejected quantitative approaches as being unsuitable and incompatible with Chinese attitudes towards formal questioning or interrogation and chose a qualitative process instead. Having researched qualitative approaches and read several papers on narrative approaches including how these have been applied in previous qualitative research, I determine that a qualitative methodology using narrative approaches was the most suitable process to follow and would have the highest chance of delivering useful and credible data.

The preparation of my interview documents into the Chinese language and how I carefully selected 9 participants from various backgrounds, such as, age, education, business type, including how I contact participants, are described in more detail in a previous section. Also, consideration of the Chinese culture and how I designed the three step interview - pre-interview, interview and post-interview to improve and enhance the trusting relationships between the researcher and the participants is covered.

To impress on the interviewee and to encourage spontaneity during the interview stage of my research, I always started the interview by emphasising my personal interest using such phrases as, ‘I am very interested in your life-story, especially at the beginning of setting up your business.’ I sensed that the expression of genuine interest in them as individuals, as well as their story, resulted in building trust, which encouraged honesty and openness. The credibility of the narrative was further enhanced by removing the need for notation and by being able to observe body language, especially facial expressions. Where the expression matched the information, for example, in one
case an interviewee forced back tears when she explained the motivation to start her business was based on the desire to help her family in difficult circumstances. Therefore any genuine expression of concern, worry or happiness adds to the trustworthiness of the narrative.

3.5.2 Transferability

Narrative research entails the intensive study of a small group of individuals sharing certain characteristics, thus it is the depth rather than the breadth, which is the preoccupation of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). As discussed in section 3.2 of this chapter, narrative findings in qualitative research tend to emphasise the contextual contingencies and significance of the particular aspect of the social world being studied, rather than the generalisability of findings to other contexts. Therefore, it is the judgement of the researcher and the community of scholars that evaluates the transferability of specific findings to other contexts, because the sample can never be representative of the population.

Typically narrative research involves small samples and it is the researcher’s role to help the reader transfer the specific knowledge gained from the research findings. To enable readers to make their own informed judgments about how a particular study might link with wider trends, the researcher must produce an account that is sufficiently descriptive. Geertz (1973) calls this thick description, rich accounts of the details of a culture and the interview process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that a thick description provides others with what they refer to as a database for making judgments about the possible transferability of findings to other contexts, because the narrative data is richer and deeper.

From my own research experience, the longer the interview took, the more contextualized information it generated, with in-depth descriptions and details of the subject matter being provided. Information which is contextualized enables
the interviewer to better understand and interpret data more accurately. It can therefore be argued that there is a direct correlation between the length and depth of interviews and the transferability of useful information.

### 3.5.3 Dependability

As a parallel to reliability in quantitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose the idea of dependability and argue that to establish the merit of research in terms of this criterion of overall trustworthiness, researchers should adopt an auditing approach. This entails ensuring that complete records are kept of all interviews, and that all phrases used in the narratives by participants of the research are recorded. Formulation of questions, selection of the research participants, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts and data analysis decisions can enhance dependability. After the data collection, a detailed explanation of how to transcribe the narrative interview data, how to code, how to adopt framework analysis, how to translate the data and field notes from the Chinese language into English language, all help to improve the dependability of the research. A detailed description of each aspect of the process should enhance the dependability of the data and support the transferability for others to use.

By using research tools, such as the audio-recording of narratives, the researcher can add another significant dimension to the investigation, which further adds to the veracity of the narrative. The use of recording apparatus allows the researcher freedom from note taking and the facility to observe body language, in particular emotion as expressed through facial expression. The opportunity to observe body language does not necessarily result in enhanced reliability, unless the researcher is experienced in such mechanisms as well as having an understanding of the societal culture. For example, in the west, not giving eye to eye contact when responding to a question is translated as being untrustworthy or the person is telling untruths. However, in China, in certain circumstances, eye to eye contact is considered impolite and potentially
embarrassing. Therefore the observation of body language and its translation should only be used by experienced exponents who have an in-depth understanding of the culture in the society being researched. However, the advantage should not be underestimated in its importance to adding validity to narrative.

3.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is concerned with ensuring information with participants and not overtly allowing the researcher’s personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of the research and findings derived (Bell and Bryman, 2003). During the three steps interview, especially, in the post interview stages, an essential element is to test the answers and stories by seeking confirmation. This is referred to as a member check (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006), by asking for confirmation of the interviewers interpretation. Not only does this check accuracy but enables the interviewee time to reflect on their responses and agree or disagree, whilst being in a non pressured environment. All answers to the confirmation sheet are matched with the content of the narration and any discrepancies or contradictions are noted and clarified. During the process of transcription, I arranged to have telephone conversations or emails to present the main points to ensure the interpretations of the stories and that certain words or phrases are a true reflection based on their narration. Once participants approved, the data analysis can start and this point is covered in the transcription section.

In conclusion, the four criterion of Trustworthiness have been met in this research model. Credibility is enhanced by having an extensive personal knowledge and understanding of the subject focus and culture. Transferability is enhanced by providing an in-depth (Thick description) of the process and procedures utilised in the information capture and data analysis. Dependability is enhanced though the combined use of audio recording and observation of body
language and Confirmability is enhanced through the process of checking and re-checking the narratives with the participants.

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion and summary, I have researched, discussed and analysed the differences between quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in social science studies. Through this analysis an explanation is provided of the main considerations required before choosing the most suitable approach to achieve the research aims and objectives. Considerations made, such as the requirement to take into account any cultural issues which may skew the resulting data. Through analysis of the pros and cons of using a qualitative methodology utilizing a narrative approach, an explanation is given why the methodology was chosen and applied to this thesis.

Having considered Chinese society and established that there are significant cultural differences from the West, a narrative approach using a five-level process combined with the design of a three-step-interview was applied. A detailed description of the three steps interview process I devised and used in the data generation is provided but the main difference from the established method was the focus on the pre-interview element. The importance of addressing the culture in China and in particular the need for establishing a close relationship was paramount. Therefore special emphasis was placed on the establishment of trust to ensure the veracity of information resulted in useful and valid data.

Furthermore, the culture of *guanxi* in China necessitated the use of existing contacts to enable a representative sample of interviewees to be sourced. As the sample was relatively small, (9 entrepreneurs) a more in depth and detailed investigation was required. To facilitate this, the use of technology was
considered and subsequently used. This technology, audio-recording, facilitated lengthy in depth narratives to be recorded, transcribed and analysed. The comprehensive and detailed information compensated for the small sample size and produced extensive, worthwhile and wide-ranging data in support of the research aims and objectives.

As this research was carried out in Mandarin Chinese and nine Chinese women entrepreneurs gave their stories in Mandarin for this study, the transcription of translated data into English was carried out to produce reliable and valid research data. The use of a verification/confirmation sheet in the post-interview step resulted in robust internal validity and the use of coding for the data collection and framework analysis method has helped to create a strong data set.

This detailed and robust data has been collected in support of my research aims and objectives. Through well pre-prepared candidates agreeing to in-depth narrative interviews and by the utilisation of technology, a concentration on three groups of Chinese women entrepreneurs in three different periods in China has been achieved. However, it is accepted that there are limitations in the use of narrative approaches to a small sample in one area of such a large country and will be further discussed and considered in the final conclusion of this thesis.
Chapter 4  Motivations of Chinese women entrepreneurs:  
Three stories in the 1980s

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the use of narratives will be the main tool utilised in this research. Narrative analysis focuses upon stories lived and told and as such they should be considered as the outcome of the collaboration between researchers and participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). People tell stories and narratives come from the analysis of stories (Riessman, 1993) and the researcher’s role is to interpret the stories (Frank, 2000).

As stated in chapter 1, the aims of this research are to investigate the drivers and motivational factors that influenced Chinese women entrepreneurs leading to success in the transitional and developing economy of China. The objectives of this thesis are:

- To explore the motivations of Chinese women entrepreneurs in starting-up their business in the reform periods across the last three decades from the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.

- To uncover the factors that led to Chinese women becoming successful entrepreneurs.

- To identify the barriers, obstacles and effects on the work-life balance faced by women entrepreneurs in setting up and running their businesses.

- To assess the future plans and prospects of women entrepreneurs.
In order to achieve the four objectives set for this research and considering the previously identified gaps in the research into Chinese women entrepreneurs in the past three decades, i.e. the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, a longitudinal research model has been applied.

The aim of this chapter 4 is to investigate the motivational factors and drivers that influenced Chinese women entrepreneurs who set up their own business in the first reform period of the 1980s in China. The following chapters will use the same model to explore the motivations for the 1990s and 2000s. In this chapter I explore the narratives of three women entrepreneurs in the 1980s in order to: uncover their motivations in starting-up their businesses; to explore the factors that led to their success, to identify the historical barriers and obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs and to establish how these shape the entrepreneurs’ future plans.

The structure of this chapter is based on three cases studies of women who started a business in the 1980s. Each case study contains elements of the story of a woman entrepreneur as recorded by the researcher and includes an interpretation by the researcher in a commentary. Furthermore, the narration, interpretation and commentary of each case study relates to the main themes of this research as detailed in the previous paragraph. First, Ruibin’s story, who set up her factory in 1986, will be presented, interpreted and followed by discussion. Second, Hua’s story, who set up her catering business in 1988, will be presented, interpreted and followed by discussion. Thirdly, Shuying’s story, who also set up her factory in 1988, will be presented, interpreted and followed by discussion. Finally, the three women entrepreneurs’ case studies will be compared and contrasted using framework analysis, to facilitate further discussion prior to summarizing and developing a conclusion for this chapter.
4.2 Ruibin’s story

4.2.1 Introduction

When I started to become involved in this research in 2009, I contacted one of my close friends in China and inquired if he knew some women entrepreneurs in China who would like to participate in this PhD study. Ruibin was recommended by my friend, who suggested I should make contact with her directly. I therefore gave her a call and she readily accepted. We had a short conversation on the phone during which I obtained an email address where I could send her my personal profile and research objectives in Mandarin as previously explained (see chapter 3). I also wanted to advise her of my travel schedule in China, which was my window of opportunity to conduct face to face interviews. Ruibin was very friendly and said she would be consent to be interviewed on my visit to China.

On arriving in China I called Ruibin and confirmed our meeting time at her factory. Our meeting was in Ruibin’s meeting room next to her office in the two storey admin building at her factory, see plate 4.1. I started my interview with an informal introduction about my life experience, such as my family background and my life in Britain. I could sense this helped develop the relationship and built a feeling of trust between us. Having described the rationale behind my research, Ruibin agreed to explain her motivations and tell her story in setting up her business in 1986. Notably, her company has grown and increased the number of staff employed from 25 at the start, to 120 currently. In the following section, her narrative with interpretation and commentary will be presented using four main themes - Poverty & Motivation, Factory & Success, Guilt & Work - Family, the Future, which are related to the aims and objectives of the research.
4.2.2 Narrative and interpretation

Poverty & Motivation

Ruibin told me that she was born in 1950 and she continued by narrating that she had seven siblings and that she was the number three child in her large family. Her parents were arable farmers and lived in a small village on the outskirts of Beijing. Her father went to the field to work every day but could not earn enough money to pay her siblings’ schooling fees, even though he produced hand-made baskets by himself in the evening which he then sold to villagers to supplement the family income. Ruibin’s mother could never afford to buy or find time to make new clothes for her and she remembered that she always had her older sister’s clothes passed down to her to wear. These clothes often had holes in them and her trousers were often repaired again and again by her mother. Ruibin recounted that she studied very hard in school and dreamt that she could one day study in a top university in China. She hoped that she
could leave the village and get a good job in the city. However, the Cultural Revolution had started in 1966, which resulted in all schools being closed down. This destroyed Ruibin’s dream as she had to leave her education at 16 years of age. She recalled how she felt sad and very disappointed.

Ruibin was left with no alternative but to follow her father and she started to work in the field as a labourer. In order to help her father to support and feed the family, she also joined a so called ‘Iron Girls’ (strong girls/women) team in the village which worked as hard as men and therefore earned more money. Early every morning at about 5 o’ clock, she got up and left home to go out to pick up cattle dung from the streets for use on the land as fertilizer. Such hard and degrading work could not fail to influence her to develop a desire for improvement which in turn would motivate Ruibin to look for opportunities to escape this demoralizing situation.

Ruibin continued her narration:

The fact was it took me five years to escape the harsh circumstances. Marriage was one escape route (laugh), and I was introduced to a guy who was three years older than me by a friend of my parents, and subsequently married him. I then followed him (husband) to move to a town 50 miles away from my village…

**Factory & success**

After Ruibin married, a relative of her husband helped her to obtain a job as a shift worker in a township factory which employed 50 workers. At this time, all Township factories were owned by the government and run by a government official (Huang, 2008). Her wage was around 30 yuan (approximately 3 pounds
sterling in today’s values) per month and the job was much better than the one she had in her village, although it was still not enough pay to support two families as she had to send remittances to her parents and her parents-in-law every month. One of her colleagues recommended that she could earn a little more money if she had a basic knowledge of accounting and helped with book-keeping.

Ruibin decided to join a part-time training course in accounting in the centre of Beijing which necessitated her to ride her bike and travel for two hours to attend the course each weekend. This training in accountancy proved successful and enabled her to improve her living standard financially. She was able to leave her old factory and join another township factory working in the financial office as an accountant. The salary was better than being a shift worker in her previous factory and less arduous. It was during this period she became pregnant and her twin girls were born whilst she continued to work.

Time moved on and in 1986, following the government’s new policy of encouraging private businesses (Xu and Zhang, 2009). Ruibin, at 36 years of age, decided to rent and run the factory she worked for. This new policy allowed people to rent or buy township factories from the government and run these as their own business (Huang, 2008). Ruibin took advantage of this and after three years she was able to buy the factory. Ruibin recalled:

When I decided to rent this factory even though I did not have any savings, I was extremely excited and could not sleep in the night. I felt it was an opportunity for my whole families, especially, for my children’s education in the future. I did not consider any risk. I just wanted to do it that is my character. (Smiling happily)

Her narrative highlights Ruibin’s self-determination to improve her family’s financial situation. The desire to provide opportunities for her family and her
children also confirms that she did not want them to suffer the hardships she had encountered. Moreover, it highlights how she valued education, perhaps even more so as she, herself, had missed out on a formal education as a result of the Cultural Revolution. Although it was not easy for her to start her business, as she did not have capital, she was not going to miss this new opportunity offered by the change in government policy and she therefore asked all her relatives/friends to raise start-up capital. This suggests she had great self-confidence, but perhaps did not fully consider the risks. It could have been a mistake to underestimate the risk to her family’s security and it would appear that the risk was too great for her family. The request for financial assistance did not prove successful, as her friends and family would not help financially. Luckily, a close friend, who had started to run a factory a few years earlier, lent her 50,000 yuan (approximately 5000 pounds) as her start-up capital.

At the beginning of running the factory, Ruibin realised there were two main barriers to success. The factory produced poor quality products and had only a few customers. She knew she had to improve her products and develop new market opportunities and therefore she pushed herself to go out to look for new clients. She also asked a friend to find her someone in a university to help improve her products whilst she travelled around China and visited potential buyers. Although the quality of her products improved she was unable to find customers until one of her friends helped her by recommending an organisation (Danwei 单位) who might be interested in her products and she subsequently got the first deal. This commentary reflects the importance of the network or guanxi of people she had developed to generate ideas and contacts. It appears that this networking or guanxi was a key aspect that enabled her to find the right product knowledge and customers.
Guilt & Work-family

Ruibin started to run her own factory, following the Chinese traditional culture, which, being collective in nature, is well-known for its emphasis on family relationships and support. Families are described as close-knit units, manifested in three-generational households (Xu et al 2007). Rubin’s parents-in-law moved into her home and lived together to support her domestically. It is common for married couples to live in the same home with parents or even grandparents. Also, after three months, her husband stopped his job in the small township factory and joined her in her factory.

Ruibin recounted:

My mother-in-law looked after my girls. My father-in-law cooked. When my husband and I came back home from the busy and dirty factory, the meal was always there on the table. I did not need to cook and clean the house. My parents-in-law did everything for me…But I did feel really guilty that I left my two girls with them every day. You know, I am a factory owning woman. I do not have choices. I have to admit I am not a good mother…

In order to assuage her guilt as a mother, at weekends, she tried to manage her own time with her daughters and took them to the library or book shops. She wanted her children to read more and be able to attend a good university. She always felt shameful that she did not have a chance to study in the university and she was eager to give her children this opportunity.

Ruibin’s use of phrases such as ‘really guilty’, and ‘not a good mother’ suggests that she experienced conflict between the roles of an entrepreneur and a mother. A conflict which she found difficult to negotiate, comparing her role as a boss to that of a mother, suggests that she has regret. Whether this feeling of guilt is a gender issue or not, will be further discussed in the following sections.
Having run her factory for 24 years, Ruibin has decided she should retire soon. As she explained, her husband stopped working for her in the factory five years ago due to his arthritis problem. Her father-in-law died a couple of years ago and her mother-in-law is still living with them. Both her two daughters have now graduated from university and obtained good jobs. Both daughters are married and have their own children; therefore Ruibin has become a grandmother. However, in recent years, her health has not been so good and she has suffered pharyngitis. In response to her daughters’ suggestion that she should retire and leave the factory or leave someone in charge of the factory, Ruibin stated:

Maybe, my daughters’ advice is right. When my daughters were young, I was busy earning money and I did not have enough time to be with them. I nearly forgot I was a mother. Now, I do not need so much money. All my families are financially secure, I should enjoy being a woman, a mother and a grandmother (Smile). Not just a business woman like a man. I should spend much time with my daughters and my grandbabies. I am sure I will miss my factory and miss my workers. Some staff have followed and worked for me more than 20 years. I owe them. I might come back to see them every couple of months after I retire.

During my interview with Ruibin, I noticed she kept coughing and had to stop and take tablets with some Chinese herbal tea. I felt concern and sympathy for her. Whether the pressure of work or the dirty working environment of her factory, or even the wider pollution of the surrounding area has played a part in the deterioration of her health is hard to establish. However, it would appear to be the main reason for her impending retirement. Once again, Ruibin referred to her daughters and the time she missed being with them. This suggests that this is
one of the biggest sacrifices she has had to make in order to earn money to educate them and raise their social status. The reference to her health reflects her intention to retire from the business although she does mention visiting every couple of months and her love of her factory. This suggests she does not personally feel the factory environment is the cause of her illness as there is no resentment mentioned and only affectionate comments about her factory are used.

One other interesting comment that Ruibin made was ‘not a business woman like a man’. Could this comment suggest that there exists a gender bias that culturally women should not be running a business? This may suggest that Rubin perceived that the role of entrepreneur was framed by assumptions about the gendered division of labour and the roles that are appropriate for men and women in Chinese society. Transgressing these gender roles creates psychological stress, experienced in the form of guilt and regret, whose repair was only possible through the use of non-work time-spaces e.g. weekends, rather than redefining the role of entrepreneur to incorporate child care in the working day. This demonstrates, that in this instance, women have been unable to redefine the boundaries of entrepreneurship, which remain structured according to established patterns of work-life balance dominated by male expectations. This is worthy of further investigation and analysis.

4.2.3 Discussion

Ruibin’s story suggests that her self-sacrifices throughout her life, such as cycling for two hours to study whilst holding down a full time job, sending some of her hard earned money back to support the families, missing out on her children’s growth are all evidence of her selfless drive to improve. It would appear that the key motivation was to escape poverty rather than a desire to become an entrepreneur. This key motivation pushed her into self-development and into becoming an accountant prior to becoming a business woman. This
could be considered as satisfying a possible secondary motivation, being to complete her education which was prematurely curtailed when she was forced to leave school. Another key point is that the decision to marry came prior to the opportunity to become an entrepreneur. This seems to be critical in terms of the timing of start up and the choices about lifestyle that the woman is at liberty to make. If opportunities for entrepreneurship came before marriage, might this alter the motivations for marriage itself and present a different set of dilemmas for the female entrepreneur? In Rubin's case, being an entrepreneur could be seen as a means to an end rather than a burning desire to achieve a particular role in society.

_Guanxi_ was the key success factor, her narrative would suggest. To be able to take on the factory and rent the premises required capital. Capital which she did not have and could not be raised from family but from _guanxi_ with a friend. Furthermore, having acquired the factory, it required _guanxi_ to find her first customer. As previously mentioned, lack of capital and lack of customers were early barriers but ones which were apparently quickly over-come with the help of _guanxi_ and Ruibin’s personal skills, knowledge and determination. Even though she does not highlight work-family conflicts as being a barrier, could it be she is disguising this. Although her parents-in-law looked after her daughters and shared the housework which enabled her to focus on her business, it is human nature, as a woman and a mother, that she felt guilty about not spending much time with her daughters when they were young.

She now states this as one of her reasons for her to choose retirement to look after her daughters and grandchildren. Could this be to assuage her guilt? Was this guilt an inhibiting factor when she established her business? There is no comment or evidence to provide answers to these questions, moreover I cannot explore whether men ever feel guilty when they leave children to focus on
building a business. This is a gender issue and one which would benefit from further research. Furthermore, perhaps her gender has been a barrier in other ways. Her comment about ‘enjoying being a woman rather than a business-woman like a man’ could suggest that she has found her business to be a barrier to achieving a desired social identity.

Whether the hard life she endured as a young woman or the stresses of running her own business for 24 years has resulted in her ill-health cannot be determined. Therefore it is difficult to say if she would have continued to run her business longer; although her love of her business and a desire to return from time to time, could be evidence to suggest that she may have desired to continue longer. Additionally, her suppressed feelings of guilt about missing out on the childhoods of her daughters have played some part in her decision to retire.

4.3 Hua’s story

4.3.1 Introduction

Chinese niurou lamian (牛肉拉面), literally means hand-made noodles with beef and is a famous fast food in the north of China, see plate 4.2. Coincidently, when I was in China prior to moving to England, I went to Hua’s Noodles fast food restaurant many times and had these noodles, but I did not know that the owner and manager was a woman. I just knew I enjoyed the taste and it was quick to make and also it was much cheaper than any other Western style fast food such as McDonald’s and Kentucky Fried Chicken.
When the WF introduced Hua to me, I immediately told her I had eaten her noodles before and they are very delicious which made Hua smile. She also told me that she had just come back from England visiting her oldest son who was studying at Oxford University and she had stayed in England for three months to look after him. She also has a younger son who is studying in the secondary school in Beijing. We shared our experiences in England and she told me her perception about England and English culture. In particular we agreed that the lifestyle of women in the UK appears to be more relaxed and less pressured as we shared tea together with WF staff.

The initial introductions and conversation smoothly moved to discussing her business and some general information was obtained. We made a second appointment to meet in private and she invited me to meet her in one of her restaurants (in one of the VIP dining rooms) where we could have a deeper talk. She started her first fast noodles bar in 1988 when she was 24 and employed two people. Subsequently she has opened a chain of 24 fast noodles
restaurants plus 9 large banqueting houses in Beijing, see plate 4.3, for weddings and/or conferences. When I interviewed her in 2010, 1200 employees worked for her.

In the following section, her narrative with interpretation will be presented using four main themes - Living & Motivation, Two men & Success, Mother-in-law & Work-family, the Future, which are related to the aims and objectives of the research.

Plate 4.3 Hua’s Banqueting restaurant

Source: author, August 2010

4.3.2 Narrative and interpretation

Living & motivation

Hua was born in 1964 in a remote area in the North West of China. She was one of five children. The family were poor and her father had to work away to earn money to support the family. She got married when she completed her high school education at the age of 18. In order to look for a better living environment, she and her husband decided to move to Beijing where her father worked as a
chef in a hotel restaurant. However, when they arrived in Beijing, they struggled to find work and her father’s income was not enough to support all the family. Therefore, Hua tried to earn money by buying cheap clothes and selling them in the open market, even though she felt awkward and embarrassed to stand up as a street vendor.

This was her first business venture, although it made no profit. Undeterred, she tried a second venture. Hua’s husband is an artist, so she decided to help him to sell his drawings in the street, but again this proved too difficult and unsuccessful. Sometimes she stayed in the street all day without making a single sale and Hua said that the income from selling paintings was even worse than selling clothes. She therefore had to look for another way to earn money. After discussions with her father, Hua realised that there is one thing everyone needs in life, food. As Hua recounted:

"You know, his (husband’s) paintings were elegant and beautiful but it was difficult to sell them. Sometimes not even one piece during a day in the street. Seeing my frustration and desire to support the family, my father suggested I should think about going into the catering service area. In China we say business to do over and over is a good business, it is better to open a restaurant. People do not need art but they do need food to put into their stomachs. However, whilst I could see the logic of my father, I did not have money to open a restaurant. I thought of opening a small noodle bar, it would cost less. Everyone could afford to buy a bowl of noodles. I discussed this new idea with my father and my husband, Happily my father promised he could help me and prepare a recipe of cooking noodles."
**Two men & success**

Hua’s father raised 2000 yuan (approximately 200 pounds in today’s value) from a friend and lent it to her as the start-up capital. She then had to decide where to situate her noodle bar and looked for a busy area. She therefore obtained permission to rent a small area in the central market area of the city and opened her first noodle bar. The business was an immediate success and although she chose a busy area, she never expected the business would go so well with many customers coming and going. Her father helped to design a recipe and also showed her how to cook. She employed two girls to work for her to serve the food and do the cleaning. In Hua’s own words ‘incredible *Huobao* (火爆)', which means like fire-explosion, to describe her first opening day.

As we talked about the initial start-up for the business, it was evident that this reflection brought a lot of satisfaction to the respondent. As Hua described, the small business was a success and generated much more income than selling clothes and paintings and after three years, running this noodle bar, she had managed to accumulate some savings and she decided to open a second bar. At this time, her father’s health was deteriorating and he was unable to help her as much as previously, which made her feel some stress as well as emotional pressure and her husband therefore joined her business to help. The second noodle bar was also a success and Hua decided she wanted to open a chain of Noodle bars and reinvest her profits in opening new ones. With the exception of the initial capital from her father, she never borrowed money from friends or the bank but instead when she had saved money she invested in another bar. If profits fell, she stopped investing in new bars until revenues increased again.

I will never forget two persons in my business life. My father, he gave me so much help, and it was his advice to run the noodles bar. The second person is my husband.

I would not be so successful without his encouragement. Chinese saying, behind every
successful man, and there is a good woman; Behind every successful woman, always several men are there. My father and my husband are standing there behind me. I am a very lucky woman. (Laughter)

Hua also recognized the important part the government played in her success in allowing her to obtain permission and license to run her business. However, it also shows a strong Chinese cultural element of modesty (Lee et al 2001) as she takes no credit for her success but prefers to show her gratitude to others especially her father and her husband. Everyone in China had the same opportunities in the 1980s (Huang, 2008), but only a few had the strong motivation, drive or ambition to take advantage, Hua being one.

Mother-in-law & work-family

Hua is very straight forward person and when I asked her if she had any problems running her own business, she did not hesitate at all and immediately related to me her issues. When she was pregnant, she still kept working and never closed her business. In her words, ‘I deliver my son tomorrow but I was still working today…’. After she gave birth, her mother-in-law came to Beijing and stayed with them to look after her baby and also she hired a maid to do the housework so that she could focus on running the business and continue earning money.

My mother-in-law is a very traditional woman. She spent her whole life to cook and look after children. She is a great housewife and she is happy to look after my babies as well. I have to say I feel really happy with her. She is a great wife, great mother and great grandmother. I owe her a lot and I am not a good mother with my sons.

I know I am too busy on my business even though I do not want to neglect them. I have to, the business
is going so well. Also, I have had a countryside girl coming from my hometown. She stayed with my family, cleans the house and washes clothes. She has followed me for many years...My mother-in-law looks after my sons and shares the housework with her. I and my husband can focus on the business. I feel I am lucky. I never feel I have conflicts between my family and my business. (Smiling)

These comments are interesting in several respects. They suggest that Hua felt no guilt at leaving the raising of her children to her mother-in-law and her domestic helper. She appears to have accepted her role was to be an entrepreneur and not a mother and home-maker. She appears content in focusing on her business. This could be because she had total faith and confidence in her family environment. It may also suggest that the extended family culture in China (Wong and Chan, 1999) helped to allay any feelings of remorse. However, she refers to not being a good mother which could suggests a recognition that she could have been a better mother. Whether this is an admission of guilt or simply an acknowledgement of her circumstances, is difficult to ascertain.

**The future**

Hua is happy with her business size and she has a strong management team working for her. Also, her husband has become the managing director and takes responsibility for normal running routines. Throughout the interview, I could sense that Hua is happy with her own business model and the size of the company. She would be happy to maintain the stability and size of her noodles bars and restaurants and she would like the chain to continue in perpetuity. She would like her sons to continue her business but if her sons do not want to run the business, she would like to hire some managers to run them. She now enjoys the role of being mother and wife and spends more time with her family and,
although she has a housekeeper, she likes to contribute to housework and cook for her husband and children.

The most happiness is being with my family. That is why when my son was studying in Oxford, I would rather come to England to look after my son rather than opening another noodles bar. The business is very stable now and I do not need to spend too much time on it. I spend most of my time to look after my family, and make them happier. If they are happy, I am happy. My friends always say I am a successful woman because I have made money but I think money cannot judge your success, the most success is keeping all your family happy. This is something a woman should learn and know.

Contrary to the previous comments Hua made, about her having no conflicts of family and business life, these comments do suggest a recognition that family happiness should take priority over business and financial success. Whether this masks some unmentioned personal issues or is a suggestion that her success came at a cost to the family is not obvious. Her motivations appear to have changed over her life course and also as the business has moved through different stages. She refers to making her family ‘happier’ which could mean that although she was content with the domestic arrangements, her sons were not. Moreover, it would appear her ambitious nature, which was a key factor in her success, is now less apparent and spending time with her sons is more important.

4.3.3 Discussion

It is obvious from Hua's narrative that she, like Ruibin, was motivated by the desire to escape poor living standards in the rural area and the main driver was avoiding poverty which pushed her into setting up her business. She readily recognizes this would not have been possible without the influence of government and the support of close family, however, Guanxi was not
mentioned and it appears she feels it played no part in her success. Interestingly, she does not appear to recognize that it was her father's guanxi which raised the start up capital and enabled her to open her first noodles bar. It does appear that this one instance of guanxi was significant, but otherwise it appears to play no further part in her success.

Hard work, determination and support of family appear to be key success factors for Hua. Being commercially astute is also a key factor as she demonstrates great natural business acumen as displayed by her reinvestment of profits in new bars and restaurants to make more profit and increase the size of her business empire. It is less obvious whether her focus on business came at the expense of family happiness. It appears she was content in the early stages of development and growth with her work-life balance and appears to have experienced no guilty feeling at leaving the responsibility to others to care for her children. However, her comments about measuring success by family happiness, rather than wealth now suggests an element of guilt and possible unhappiness at the decisions she made when building her business. Perhaps the maternal roles that were esteemed by her but suppressed during start up and growth phases have led to a re-orientation of values in later life away from material prosperity.

She is obviously very proud and satisfied with her achievements and although there are hints at some regrets about family sacrifices, her comment that she would like the chain to continue being owned and run by the family for a hundred years does demonstrate her immense pride in her achievements. Handing over the day to day running of the business to her husband shows she has great confidence in his abilities but also suggests she has accepted that she has achieved her personal business goal and now seeks a different ambition of being a good mother and wife.
4.4 Shuying’s story

4.4.1 Introduction

Shuying was another introduction by the WF and after several attempts to appoint her, we finally met in her office. Tea was served and we had a relaxing and informal talk which lasted around 30 minutes. The usual pleasantries were exchanged and I introduced my research subject. We made an appointment for the following week and she also offered her driver to collect me and take me to her private meeting room in the factory situated outside of Beijing. Representatives of WF did not join this meeting.

The journey to her factory took nearly two hours and it was somewhat of a surprise as it looked more like a selection of buildings in a garden than a factory, with flowers, grass and trees and very peaceful. I could see a few apple trees and I felt it looked more like someone’s home and I occasionally saw workers walking across from one workshop to another. Shuying started her factory with 8 workers and at the time I interviewed her she had 100 employees. Her factory makes plastic products, see plate 4.4. In the following section, her narrative with interpretation will be presented using four main themes- Poverty & Motivation, Determination & Success, Tears & Work-family, the Future, which are related to the aims and objectives of this research.
4.4.2 Narrative and interpretation

**Poverty & Motivation**

Shuying was born in 1960 in a village on the outskirts of Beijing and she has ten brothers and sisters. Shuying was the fifth child in the family and her parents were unable to afford her education and she had to stop her study when she was 16 years old. Shuying described she had a hard time during her childhood:

I remember I only had bread and potato for my meal every day which I disliked. It was rare to eat meat. I had meat like chicken or pork only for a special occasion such as festivals. Sometimes I did not have anything to eat in a whole day, and I was often hungry. I went to the field to look for wild berries or steal sweet potatoes from the farmer’s land. The life was tough.

Shuying comments highlight the desperation caused by having a large family unit without the financial means to support it. The lack of food pushed her to risk her freedom by stealing and the lack of money resulted in her leaving education.
to seek work. She wanted to work in a factory and therefore she would be able to
afford to buy meat and food. She also wanted to earn enough money to support
her siblings. This meant she had to leave the village as there was no work there.

Her neighbour helped her to get a job in the small township factory as a shift
worker and she lived in the worker’s dormitory where six girls shared a room of
less than 10 square meters. Every month when she received her wages, she
went to the post office and sent most of her wages to her parents. It appears she
was happy during this period when she worked in the factory and it was during
this period in her life that she fell in love with her workmate, a young man who
was the same age as her, who later became her husband. During her work in the
factory, she observed the factory processes and she became familiar with the
company’s business model. She thought that one day she would like to run this
kind of factory on her own. As Shuying recounted ‘I wanted to earn more money,
I wanted my two families to have a good life.’

This comment suggests that her main motivation was the escape from poverty,
both for herself and her family and it also suggests her husband’s family were
also poor as she needed to support both families. She was strongly driven by
lack of money and family values. Her comments regarding observing the factory
process and understanding the company’s business model could suggest she
had innate business acumen. She also realised that she would never earn
enough money to give her family a good life simply by being a worker, which
may also suggest she was very astute and had ambition. Business acumen plus
ambition could suggest she had an innate entrepreneurial nature.

**Determination & Success**

In 1988, she decided to leave the factory and start out on her own by renting a
factory in which she intended to manufacture the same products as her former
employer. However, her husband and parents-in-law were not happy with her
idea and tried to dissuade her but the more they were against her, the more she wanted to pursue her ambition.

I am a very stubborn person. Once I have made a decision then no one can stop me. My husband was angry and did not speak to me for a long time. My parents-in-law gave me a long face. All of them thought I was going mad and my factory would fail. To make matters worse for the family. They said I will lose my small income from the factory.

It is evident from these comments that Shuying’s ambition met with great resistance. One can only imagine the arguments which ensued and the pressures she must have endured. It also highlights the difference between Shuying’s nature and that of her husband. One wanting to improve their lifestyle, the other being satisfied and not wanting to risk their stability. Although her husband and his family vehemently disagreed with her decision, Shuying showed immense self-determination and self-confidence. It also suggests she was a risk-taker as she must have been aware and indeed her husband and family pointed out that if the business failed, she would lose everything including her wages. This last point suggests that their personal situation was not desperate and therefore could also suggest Shuying was pushed as much by the desire for self-improvement as she was driven by financial necessity.

Shuying discussed and asked several close friends to help to raise 9,000 yuan (approximately 900 pounds in today’s value) as the start-up capital. She raised the money, found premises, obtained a license to start her business and recruited 8 workers. She got a contract from a company through her friend’s recommendation and in the first month she made enough money to pay her rent and her worker’s wages. In just four months she repaid her debts to her friends and made 10,000 yuan (around 1000 pounds) profit. That was a huge sum of
money, during the 1980s of China where general workers in the factory earned less than 100 yuan (around 10 pounds) a month (Liu, 2008) and she was both shocked and extremely excited. When she shared this profit with her husband, he was equally shocked and commented: ‘You are a very clever woman, I never believed that before, I want to work for you and we can run the factory together, I am happy for you to be my boss’.

The Government policy which allowed people to rent or buy township factories in 1980s (Xu and Zhang, 2009), provided Shuying with the chance to change her poor living standard. However, Guanxi again appears to have played two key roles in Shuying’s success. Firstly, her personal friendships helped her to raise the capital to start-up the company and Guanxi also appears to have been key in winning her first contract. Her husband’s comments highlight the difference in characters between Shuying and her husband and may identify a differentiating factor behind entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs. Shuying had ambition, self-confidence and vision. Her husband had caution, fear and negativity. His comments also highlight how swiftly money and success can change peoples’ perceptions. When Shuying’s husband’s expressed a desire to join her in her small factory, it made her very happy and his new found support and understanding was very gratifying to her.

My husband is in charge of the internal operations in the workshop. I am in charge of management and marketing. Perhaps I have a positive personality, easy to make good relationships with people. I have developed good Guanxi in my business But I always tell my staff, Guanxi is important. The most important thing is the quality of products and reputation. We must complete the production on time with the best quality. That is why some clients would rather keep the contracts with my factory, rather than give their business to someone else, although someone else offers a much lower price. (Smiling)
These comments appear to acknowledge for the first time in my interviews, the importance of *guanxi* in the success of her business, although she was quick to suggest that the quality of her product and service was of greater importance in maintaining her business. Interestingly she acknowledges *guanxi* as relevant in the success of the business however she does not appear to acknowledge its importance in helping her set up and establish her business. The fact that *guanxi* was used firstly to raise the start up capital and secondly in winning her first customer was not conceded.

She draws an interesting comparison between her own character and that of her spouse from the way she outlines their roles and responsibilities. Whether her outgoing personality is a reflection of her self-confidence and whether these are attributes of an entrepreneur deserves further investigation.

**Tears & Work-family**

Soon after starting her factory, Shuying became pregnant and had a son and as with previous interviewees, her mother-in-law took on the responsibility of looking after the child, as is the tradition for parents and/or parents-in-law to look after grandchildren (Chen et al, 2000). At the beginning she had to be at the factory all day and everyday and sometimes she even stayed over night and it was rare for her to see her son. She recalled that when her son was six years old, she was in the factory for a week and did not have time to go back to see him. Shuying recalled one particular day, her mother-in-law brought the son to her factory which made Shuying suddenly burst into tears. Her son's legs and arms and face were covered in mosquito bites and she felt guilty that she had neglected him:

> My mother-in-law looked after my son. But I always felt guilty that I left my son with my mother-in-law. I am a mother and I felt I should be with my son all the time ...Unfortunately I was always busy in the
factory. It made me feel even more guilt. Especially when I saw my son’s face and body with bites everywhere … I did not blame my mother-in-law but I blamed myself…

During this narrative, Shuying became very emotional as her thoughts returned to recall this past event. It appears she felt guilty about leaving her son to be looked after by someone else, even though this person was a trusted member of the family. It strongly suggests that she felt that she had neglected her son to satisfy her own ambitions. However her narrative did not mention experiencing any guilt prior to this mosquito incident which may suggest she had been totally focused on the business at the expense of all else. The point that she had not actually stated that she felt regret previously in the interview may not be an indication that she did not have guilty feelings, but that she was able to suppress them. Her son is now 22 years old and has graduated from university; however this story of him as an infant was still a strong memory and it seems to Shuying as if it just happened yesterday. She recalled this clearly and I could see the tears in her eyes and she tried to calm down her emotions. After a few seconds silence, I moved my eyes from hers and she started to narrate again:

As a business woman, you have to sacrifice a lot. I never forgot this period when my son was young. As a mother, of course I wanted to stay with my son every moment but it seems that I did not have a choice to stay with him at home. The whole family needed me to work hard to bring bread and rice on the table. I am like a man. (Laugh)

Again we return to the motivation of improved life style and food on the table. It appears this driving force can suppress even the strongest of maternal instincts in an entrepreneur. However, there was some contradiction in Shuying narrative as she then went on to comment that she felt she was a lucky woman:
I do not have work-family conflicts. I do not need to cook at home. My husband’s parents have done everything for me I can concentrate on working. My son is now grown up and he has got a good job in Shanghai. I hope my son will join my business but he does not want to work in my factory. He thinks mum’s factory is too small.

This apparent contradiction regarding work/family conflicts suggests that she differentiates between physical conflicts and emotional ones. Having previously commented on her regret at neglecting her son, she does not appear to consider this as being in conflict with running her business. It appears her regret is that she did not spend sufficient time with her son when he was small and that she believes he was not neglected physically as he has matured, is well educated and is successful.

The future

Shuying appears to be satisfied with her business and the size of the factory but her son does not intend to take over the business from his mother and would rather leave Beijing to work for a company in Shanghai instead as he thinks his mother’s business is too small.

As Shuying narrated:

I feel comfortable with my factory. I do not intend to expand my factory, and just keep this stability for the next five or six years. Until I decide to retire, maybe, I might sell the factory and start to travel around the world, and enjoy my old age with my husband. At least I feel happy with it now. I cannot say I am a good mother and good wife. But my friends and staff say I am a successful woman and good boss.

When Shuying said this, she laughed and I could feel she is genuinely happy with this compliment about her success however she still refers to her status as
a mother which may confirm the feelings of regret previously discussed. The acceptance of praise suggests her early ambition to make money to support her family has been superseded by achieving her ambition and being recognised. It is possible this ambition has always existed or perhaps, as she satisfied the financial needs of the family and gained financial security, she needed another driver in her life.

4.4.3 Discussion

As with the previous interviewees, Shuying’s story is interesting from several aspects. She was driven initially by the need to escape poverty and feed the family. This intensified after she got married and wanted to improve her husband’s and her extended family’s life style. She acknowledged that the change in government policy played a key part in her success, however she does not acknowledge that guanxi played an important part in enabling her to start her business, although she states it has been important in establishing and maintaining her business.

Moreover, she suggests it’s the quality of product and service which makes her business successful. There are further contradictions in terms of personal issues. On one hand she says there was no conflict between domestic life and business life but shows great remorse at neglecting her son. Her initial comments suggest her regret was more at neglecting him rather than missing him or seeing him grow and develop. However her emotional reaction would suggest this it is likely she does regret this and possibly she has suppressed this in her mind.

She is obviously very proud of her success in having achieved her ambitions to escape poverty, improve the lifestyles of her family and prove to her family and friends that although she was not educated, she still had great abilities. This sense of pride may be increased because she met with such resistance when she started. As she did make comment or show signs of regret at having to leave
school at 16, there is no evidence that this was an additional motivating factor in her desire to succeed. Neither did she express any especial desire for her son to go to university but there was some indication that she would have liked him to become involved in her business.

4.5 Further analysis and reflection

Having presented, commented and discussed Ruibin’s, Hua’s and Shuying’s stories, experiences and feelings, it appears their narratives display several similarities and some differences. These three entrepreneurs started to run their own business in the 1980s because China had introduced economic reforms enabling and encouraging ordinary people to start and run their own business (Huang, 2008). However, many people were still hesitant about private business models (Liao and Sohmen, 2001) and taking risks as previously described in the literature review of Chapter 2. In this section, following the aims and objectives of this research, I use a framework analysis to develop further discussion and reflection on their motivations, success factors (especially the use of *guanxi*), the barriers (focussing on the lack of capital), and the work-family conflict.
Framework analysis on objective 1: to explore motivations in starting up (1980s)

Table 4.1 Motivations (1980s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Drivers</th>
<th>Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruibin</td>
<td>Left school at 16</td>
<td>Support the family;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>Escape poverty;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hard labour</td>
<td>Support extended family;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Start Business</td>
<td>Improve living standards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hua</td>
<td>Left school at 18</td>
<td>Support the family;</td>
<td>Push</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>Support extended family;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Street vendor</td>
<td>Survival;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Start Business</td>
<td>Improve living standards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shuying</td>
<td>Left school at 16</td>
<td>Support the family;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Factory Worker</td>
<td>Escape poverty &amp; hunger;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>Support extended family;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Start Business</td>
<td>Improve living standards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

Their motivations appear very similar and simple, all have been driven by a basic push factor (Buttnner and Moore, 1997). The initial main diver appears to be support the family and to escape poverty, avoid hunger and improve their life standard and life quality. All of the three entrepreneurs were pushed into actions because of poverty and low living standards as well as a determination to support and improve their family's life-styles. They all had to leave school with only a basic education and none had the opportunity to go into higher education, although Ruibin increased her knowledge and skills though some further
education. They all had to find manual labour work to support their families but all the three demonstrate their strong characters, self-determination, self-confidence and self-persistence to improve their positions. All three had a self belief that they could earn more money through working for themselves.

➢ Framework analysis on objective 2: to uncover factors which helped them to succeed (1980s)

Table 4.2 Success factors (1980s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruibin</td>
<td>Self-determination</td>
<td>Joined weekend class to self-improve; Encouraged private ownership;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government policy</td>
<td>Husband joined company; Parents-in-law looked after home and child;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Support</td>
<td>Raised Capital &amp; won contracts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guanxi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hua</td>
<td>Self-determination</td>
<td>Worked as Street vendor; Encouraged private ownership;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government policy</td>
<td>Father trained her; Mother-in-law looked after child and home;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>Father helped to raise start-up capital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guanxi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shuying</td>
<td>Self-determination</td>
<td>Persisted in the face of family opposition; Encouraged private ownership;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government policy</td>
<td>Husband joined company; Parents-in-law looked after child and home;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>Raised start-up capital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guanxi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author
All three case studies highlight 4 key success factors. Self-determination and persistence, government policy, family support, and to varying degrees, *guanxi*. Self-motivation appears to be a characteristic in all three and each demonstrated their self-belief and determination. All three acknowledge that Government policy was the enabler which allowed them to achieve their ambitions and afforded opportunities. As the government policy opened up opportunities for everyone in China (Liu, 2008), their success highlights these three women’s strong characters and willingness to take risks.

Family support is demonstrated in all cases and highlights a phenomenon which may be typical in Asian culture (Li et al, 2006) and is worthy of further research. All three were supported by husbands and especially parents and in-laws. In particular, all were able to focus fully on their businesses with the confidence that their homes and families were well looked after. This re-assurance enabled all three to focus on their businesses without domestic distractions.

With more couples in China now working full time in order to support their life-style demands, not least the relatively new phenomenon of property ownership and loans, this key success factor may not be available to future budding entrepreneurs. In all three cases, *guanxi* played some part in helping to raise start-up capital and in two cases, Ruibin and Shuying, they would not have won the initial orders which helped to establish their businesses without *guanxi*. Although, it cannot be deduced from this that they would not have ultimately won orders and business, it can be assumed that *guanxi* enabled this to happen quicker. Interestingly and conversely, Hua’s business, being fast food, became successful from the first day.
Framework analysis on objectives 3: to identify barriers and obstacles to business success (1980s).

Table 4.3 Barriers & Conflicts (1980)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruibin</td>
<td>Start up capital</td>
<td>Needed to borrow 50,000 yuan from friends;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Product Quality</td>
<td>Technical support to improve products;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orders</td>
<td>Guanxi to gain initial order;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Mother-in-laws help to raise daughters &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business Vs</td>
<td>Father-in-law help to do housework;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>home</td>
<td>Feelings of guilt and regret at not spending time with her daughters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hua</td>
<td>Start-up capital</td>
<td>Needed Father to raise 2000 yuan from friends;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of Skills</td>
<td>Father to train her to cook;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Mother-in-law to look after her two sons;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Father-in-Law to do housework;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Feelings of regret that she did not spend more time with her sons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shuying</td>
<td>Start-up capital</td>
<td>Needed to raise 9,000 yuan from friends;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Husband &amp; parents-in-laws against her plan; Guanxi to win first order;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orders</td>
<td>Mother-in-law to look after her son;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Father-in-law to do housework;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Feelings of guilt when son was ill and regret and not spending time when he was young.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author
The common barrier for all three appears to be problems raising start-up capital and the common obstacles faced by all were around work-family issues and emotional conflicts. All struggled initially to raise capital and had to use friendships to obtain enough money to start their businesses. They did not ask a bank to help as none had any collateral to offer and they all had to use their personal relationships with friends and/or family for help. Two of the three, Ruibin and Shuying, struggled to win initial orders which again required personal relationships to overcome. In only one case, Shuying, there was a personality conflict barrier when she met vehement objections from her husband and her close family.

All three did not encounter work-family conflicts as their respective in-laws were available to look after their children and be home-makers, taking care of domestic chores and cooking. However, as a woman and a mother, they all admitted to having had feelings of guilt and regret at not spending more time with their children. This confirms the research by Carter and Cannon (1992) who stated women entrepreneurs felt guilty because they were unable to fulfil the traditional maternal role, children are considered to be a mother’s highest priority, and working mothers feel guilty for not spending as much time as they believe they should spend with their children. Kim and Ling (2001) pointed out that work-family conflict among women entrepreneurs was divided into three parts: job-spouse conflict, job-parent conflict and job-homemaker conflict.

It appears that these three entrepreneurs did not have job-spouse conflicts because the three entrepreneurs’ husbands worked and supported them in their business. As previously mentioned, the three did not have job-homemaker conflicts as the three never worried about their home because parents-in-law played the important role of being housekeepers. Furthermore, the job-parent conflict appears to have been reduced or suppressed by allowing a close family
member, a mother-in-law, take on the responsibility of child-minder. However, all have stated their regrets and feelings of guilt at not spending time with their children and missing out on their formative years. These findings will be re-stated and discussed in the final chapter 7 Conclusions.

- Framework analysis on objectives 4: to assess the future plans and prospect (1980s).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruibin</td>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td>Ill-health; Desire to look after daughters &amp; grandchildren; Husband has retired and she has a desire to be a wife, mother &amp; grandmother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>but retain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ownership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hua</td>
<td>Stabilise</td>
<td>Does not wish open new restaurants; Content with current situation; To be family owned for a hundred years; Be a good mother;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shuying</td>
<td>Stabilise</td>
<td>Not intending to expand &amp; comfortable with current size; Happy &amp; content with achievement; Hopes her son will take over; Hopes to be a good mother.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

All three say they do not want to expand their businesses further and they are happy with their success and the size of their business. All showed great pride in their success and all would like to see their businesses continue with some
personal or family involvement. Two of the three expressed similar hopes that they can spend more time with their respective families and the third, Shuying perhaps implies a similar desire by expressing a strong hope that her son will take over the business. The common theme about being a good mother suggests that once the three had achieved their ambitions to escape poverty, earn money and provide for their families, a significant aspect of self-actualisation became the adoption of maternal roles whose fulfilment that had been suppressed during the start up and growth phases of their respective businesses.

4.6 Conclusion

The three women entrepreneurs who started their businesses in the 1980s have much in common and share many similarities and characteristics. Ruibin’s, Hua’s and Shuying’s narratives display several common themes. The main motivation being to escape from poverty, the key facilitator was the government, the main barrier being lack of capital, the main support mechanism, although not usually admitted, was guanxi, the main conflicts being job-parent and job-homemaker and the main future driver being maintenance of business size and retention of family interest in the business.

The framework analysis graphically supports the conclusions that the three demonstrate similar personal characteristics such as self-belief, high work ethic, no aversion to risk and sound business acumen. Furthermore, the analysis also uncovers the common theme of work-family conflict. They all appear to have an advanced sense of family duty and took responsibility for improving their extended families life-styles and yet were prepared to abandon the responsibility of looking after their own children for the potential benefits of financially supporting their parents, in-laws and siblings. However, all three expressed deep regret at not spending more time with their children and admitted that any pressure
caused by the work-homemaker and work-family conflict was over-come by the help of close family.

Whether the three would have been able to cope with these pressures if they had not had the support of close family cannot be accurately established; it could be surmised that the feelings of guilt could have been exacerbated if non family had been recruited to carry out these responsibilities. Would the resulting increase in emotional pressure have had an effect on the success of the business? I will return to this point of conjecture in the final chapter 7.

**Chapter 5  Motivations of Chinese women entrepreneurs:**

**Three stories in 1990s**

**5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, the main aims were to investigate the drivers and motivations of women entrepreneurs who started their businesses in the 1980s. In this chapter, the main aim is to investigate women entrepreneurs who started their businesses in the 1990s and this will be presented in the same format as in chapter 4. The specific aims of this chapter are to achieve the research objectives and to present the motivational factors and drivers that influenced Chinese women entrepreneurs who started their own business in the second reform period of the 1990s in China through their narratives. The objectives of this chapter are to connect to the thesis objectives explained in the chapter 1:
Objective 1: to explore motivations in starting up their business.

Objective 2: to uncover factors which help them to succeed.

Objective 3: to identify barriers and obstacles to business success.

Objective 4: to assess the future plan and prospect.

In order to develop a comparison across the time periods and to harness the potential of the longitudinal approach, the structure of this chapter will be presented in a similar layout as in the previous chapter 4, which is based on three cases studies. Each case study contains selected elements of the story provided by the woman entrepreneur and includes an interpretation by the researcher on the commentary. Furthermore, the narration, interpretation and commentary of each case study is related to the main objectives and themes of this research as detailed in the previous paragraph. First, Xiling’s story, who set up her flower importation business in 1994, will be presented, interpreted and discussed. Second, Lixin’s story, who set up her IT Services Business in 1995, will be presented, interpreted and discussed. Third, Xuemei’s story, who set up her Silk Factory in 1996, will be presented, interpreted and discussed. Finally, the three women entrepreneurs’ case studies will be compared and contrasted using a framework analysis to facilitate further discussion prior to summarizing and developing a conclusion for this chapter.

5.2 Xiling’s story

5.2.1 Introduction

I had heard about Xiling’s and her entrepreneurial story that dates back to the mid 1990s through a relative who had a connection with Xiling’s younger brother. It was rumoured that Xiling was a very strong and intelligent woman, who gave up her stable and higher social status job in a state enterprise to set up her own
business at considerable risk to her reputation. In 2006, I met her through my cousin’s recommendation and her brother’s introduction. We met in Beijing for an initial meeting, which only lasted for one hour; however we both formed a good impression of each other. I therefore decided to contact her again in 2009, when I started to do this PhD research. I contacted her and explained my research project and asked if she would like to participate and be interviewed on my return to Beijing later in the year. She gladly accepted my proposal.

I invited her and her husband to have a meal together, which was the first time I had met her husband. It was obvious from the frequent interruptions during the meal that he was busy dealing with client’s inquires. Xiling appeared much calmer and more peaceful than her husband and she explained that her husband started to work for her a couple of years previously and he is now the managing director in her company. Upon his joining her company, Xiling became chairman and left the day to day running of the company to her husband.

After the initial greetings, general information about her company was obtained, such as when she set up her company (late 1994) and how many people she now employed (20 employees). She also revealed that most of her employees were graduates from various Chinese universities. Her company has grown from one office in Beijing to having three offices across China, covering the North East, South and South West regions. After the meal and general conversation, we made arrangements for a second meeting at her office a week later. In the following section, her narrative with interpretation will be presented using four main themes: Father & Motivation; Xia hai & Success; Marriage & Work-family balance; The future. These themes are related to the aims and objectives of the research by the following sections.
5.2.2 Narrative and interpretation

Father & Motivation

Xiling was born in 1967 in a province in the middle of China. She was the second child in her family, which includes two brothers. Tragically, her mother died from cancer when Xiling was only 11 years old and her father brought up the three children. She attended school where she studied very hard and passed the Chinese national entrance exam to obtain a position in the top Chinese Agricultural University in Beijing. She studied for a Bachelor degree in plant nutrition and continued to study to gain a Masters degree. After spending 7 years at university, she obtained her first job with a state owned company who were agents in charge of importing and exporting flowers and plants. The company also gave permissions and approval certificates for other Chinese organizations and individuals to import and export. Her job was very secure and stable and the salary, along with her husbands, was adequate for them to live in Beijing.

Xiling explained that she met her husband when he was her classmate at university and they married during the final year of her Masters study. At the same time as she started to work with the state agency, her husband gained a position at the university as a lecturer. Although both had a regular income and job security, they did not have much spare money and Xiling also felt her work was boring and she did not have much passion with the job. She felt she was over qualified for the mundane position and she was not able to use her knowledge and energy to contribute and achieve more.

As Xiling narrated:

The salary was only good for myself but it was not enough for me to look after my father. For example, I wanted to buy a new air conditioning unit for my father, I could not afford. I wanted to buy a new apartment for my father to improve his living condition, I could not afford. If I wanted to support
my young brother to complete his education, I could not afford. All salary including my husband’s salary was only enough for us to live in Beijing.

My husband wanted to show his filial piety to his parents as well. I felt guilt and was ashamed of my financial situation. My father worked so hard to look after me and my brothers when we were young. When I was studying in the university, my father borrowed money from relatives and friends to support me. I felt I owed my father a great deal. Now I was just working in this organization and did nothing every day. I felt I was useless and wasting my time. I really needed to earn more money and I wanted to show my xiaoxin (孝心) to my father…

I noticed during this narration that Xiling became a little stressed and repeated the word xiaoxin in Mandarin many times. The literal translation and meaning of xiaoxin is ‘the heart of filial piety’. Filial piety is considered a virtue in Chinese culture. According to Confucianism, filial piety means to be good to one's parents; to take care of one's parents and to engage in good conduct not just towards parents but also outside the home so as to bring a good name and honour to one's parents. Furthermore, it is considered important to perform the duties of one's job well, so as to obtain the material means to support parents and show love, honour and respect.

After a couple of years working in the state organization and although the job lacked excitement or stimulation, she learned and gained an understanding of the process of international trading including the knowledge of importing and exporting. Her state owned Agency, not only gave approvals and licenses to companies to import & export flowers but it also owned a few subsidiary companies which imported flowers and plants from abroad such as Holland and Japan. One subsidiary company imported hundreds of containers of Dutch tulip and lily bulbs from Holland and ran a wholesale business.
During these two years working in the Agency, Xiling was struggling emotionally with herself, because of the multiple demands upon her role as a privileged child and also because of the lack of satisfaction in her current position. The question was whether she should keep her current secure job or whether she should take a risk and leave. If she continued working for the agent, she would be unable to look after her father financially, however if she left to set up her own business, perhaps, it would not be profitable. In the mid 1990s, whether to leave, or remain in the job, was becoming a difficult question for Xiling to live with? This phenomenon of cognitive dissonance in entrepreneurship studies is discussed by Monsen and Urbig (2009) and Cohen and Zimbardo (1969), where some aspect of the individual’s identity is not satisfied, which leads to a crisis and a decision to act.

In the summer of 1994, she travelled back to her hometown to see her father. She recalled that the weather was extremely hot, around 38 degrees, and her father told her that his neighbour had just bought a new air conditioning unit and he wished that he could have one. She sensed how envious her father was towards his neighbor and therefore she asked her father how much it cost, he replied that it was around 2000 RMB (about 200 pounds). Xiling did not have any savings and she knew that she was unable to afford to buy one for her father and she felt extremely sad and guilty. Xiling continued:

If I had 2000 RMB with me at that moment, I would straight away go to a department store to buy one for my father. Unfortunately, I did not have that sum of saving. I realized that if I stayed in my state company, perhaps, I have to save some of my salary for half year to improve my father’s conditions. I felt that I must earn a lot of money, then I can afford to buy an air conditioning unit for my father and I can look after my father well. How to earn a lot of money? It seems the only way is to run your own business....
By the time she returned to Beijing, she had made up her mind and started to think about her potential business model and how to import Dutch Tulips and Lilies. She realized she would have to raise some money. She was familiar with Dutch suppliers and an understanding of the Chinese seed and flower market through her working environment. She had an idea and imagined how she could earn money. She felt excited that she would be able to give her father money every month to improve his standard of living, and how this act would demonstrate how much love and filial piety she possessed for her father. In the end of 1994, she submitted her resignation letter and left the state agent and started her own business. She recalled that she would never forget the date of 26\textsuperscript{th} December 1994, when she became a self-employed entrepreneur and started her own business. All her colleagues and her friends were immensely surprised and some thought she was foolish to trade a job with stable income and a high social status, for the role of an entrepreneur with its insecurity and risk.

\textit{Xia hai & Success}

In early 1992, Chinese former leader Deng Xiaoping paid a visit to a few southern cities, including Shenzhen, which was the most successful special Economic Zone visited during the tour. He criticized those who harboured doubts about the country's reform and open-up policy, stressing the importance of economic development and encouraging private business. In Deng's Southern Tour and speech, he referred to \textit{xiahai (下海)} which means 'to get into the sea', \textit{xia} means 'jump into'; \textit{hai} means 'Sea'. The reference to \textit{xiahai} here refers to the 'business sea, the markets' and this literally became a national tide in urban China (Liu 2001).

Around the same time the State Council amended or abolished over 400 regulations that restricted business, with the consequence that large numbers of
officials and intellectuals began to ‘jump into the sea’. Many officials from the State Planning Commission began their business careers at the same time. The Ministry of Personnel statistics data reveals that in 1992, 120,000 officials quit their jobs to set up businesses. Perhaps even more significantly, a further 10 million started up businesses while remaining in post (Liu, 2008).

As Xiling narrated, the social and economic environment combined with the impulse contributed by her father’s austere living conditions, stimulated her to make a decision. She made a final decision to leave the state agency and she registered an importing company with the local government commercial agent’s assistance, whilst her older brother helped her to raise 5000 RMB as her initial capital. During the 1990s, Xiling commented, it had become easier to register a private business because China wanted to encourage people to do business. After she obtained her license, she rented a very small office in Beijing. She then asked her younger brother whether he would like to give up his teaching job in the primary school in her hometown and work for her in Beijing. Her brother declined as he did not feel it was secure work and doubted it would be a successful business. His answer and doubts were disappointing to Xiling. Therefore, at the beginning, she was on her own dealing with every aspect of the business.

Through her previous business contacts and relationships, she easily found clients who would like to do business with her and she was able to source suppliers in Holland. Within a month of starting her business she won her first contract, her first ‘Pot of Gold’ as Xiling called this. I could see a look of happiness on her face as she recalled this moment and remembered the details even though it was 15 years earlier. As she explained, the first month she made profit and she used some of the money to buy an air conditioning unit for her father. She had met one of her ambitions and felt great self satisfaction. She
made profit each month and moved to a larger office and she started to look for a part-time accountant to help her deal with her financial transactions. She also looked for a sales person to help her develop guanxi and increase her market. She therefore asked her younger brother again to join her and this time he agreed and said he would like to work for her.  
As she narrated:

I need to make a good relationship with my clients, most of them are male. You know in China, if you are doing business, you have to attend a lot of business dinners and you have to be a good drinker, you need to have a strong ability to drink Chinese liqueur, I am a woman and I cannot drink this, so I needed my brother to help and I also trusted my brother, he would not cheat me. When my brother said yes this time, I was extremely happy…

Through Xiling’s narrative, she felt that, as a woman, she was excluded from certain aspects of business that were regarded as essential to the entrepreneur role in China. This raises the question about whether gender differences can affect success. Xiling acknowledged that if her brother had not helped her to develop the market at the beginning, she would not have been so successful later. Does the Chinese culture of business dinners and heavy drinking put women at a disadvantage? Of course, Xiling stressed that her persistence and strong character, which meant that she never gave up, played an important part in setting up the business and being successful.

Marriage & Work-family

During the first five years of the business, Xiling had experienced great pressure from her husband who was not happy with the amount of time she spent on her business. She recalled that their marriage nearly ended. As I previously detailed, her husband worked in the university and his working time was regular and 5
days per week. Xiling had to work more than 16 hours per day including weekends and she was coming home much later and with much stress due to the pressures she experienced at the beginning of starting up her company. She recalled that her husband often called her to check where she was and ask when she would come home. Furthermore, her husband wanted to start a family, but Xiling was too busy and did not want to have a baby until her business was successful. Xiling’s recalled her husband’s warning: ‘okay, if you do not want to have our own baby this year, I feel you just love your business. I cannot feel any love with you. I want to divorce and you think about it …’

When Xiling recalled this, I could sense the emotions as her thoughts were returning to the past. Of course, she loved her husband and she wanted to have a baby as soon as possible, but this conflicted with the commitment to the company which had just started and needed her full attention. For her, starting a family would be better in the future, when the business was larger and more stable. After her busy work in the office, she had to spend time to comfort and placate her husband and eventually she gave in to his wishes. She had to compromise and had to agree that she would return home before 6pm each evening. In 2004, after ten years of running her business, she decided to have a baby to show her filial piety to her husband’s parents and her faithfulness to a man whom she loves. After ten years growing her business she made the decision to employ someone to help run the business and therefore she could have enough time to look after her husband and her child. She was also able to afford to hire a house keeper and after she gave birth, Xiling’s father moved to Beijing to live with her and help to look after her baby son.

As Xiling narrated:

During the first of five years, my pressure was not only from my clients and the market, but also my husband. However, in the second five year period, when my company is growing, I had
more money and was becoming rich. Now my pressure is from my neighbours and friends. Someone said that I am a very strong woman, but my husband is useless and he is fed by his wife. He was not happy and lost his esteem as a man. He suggested I should close or sell my company and become a full time housewife staying at home.

... Obviously, I do not want to close up my company even though people gossip about my husband. Having seriously considered our options, we decided that he should resign from university and instead work for my company. In order to enhance his social status / reputation and stop people gossiping about his ‘chi ruan fan’ (the meaning is a man has been supported by a woman, or as in English ‘bread winner’).

... I put him into the important position as Managing Director. I would like to become a woman behind him to save his face and embarrassment. If you notice, on my name card, I just put my title as chairman. My husband is now responsible for the routine business. He is happy with my decision. Now our relationship is getting closer and both are busy in our own company.

Xiling has been running her business for 16 years when I interviewed her in 2010, and her conclusion and comments were surprising to me. As Xiling said, if the time could go back, she would not ‘jump into the sea’ on her own and she would not resign from her state job. Instead, she would encourage her husband to start the business and she would prefer to be a supportive woman behind her husband and let him run the business. Then her husband would understand more about her hard-work and pressure. Xiling commented, men should go out, women should stay in and look after children. She felt she would have been a good wife and look after him and their home. She should have contributed to assisting her husband to become a successful man.... But because her husband was not such a motivated person as Xiling and did not have the desire to change his life and improve the family income during that period, she had to throw herself into starting the business, even though she had many pressures. Unhappily for Xiling, her husband did not understand her motivations and she felt really sad and disappointed with her husband’s behaviour and attitude. She
will never forget this period in her married life and I could sense resentment although her marriage has improved since her husband started working for her.

**The future**

I interviewed Xiling for more than 5 hours and I was touched by her honesty and her story about her marital conflicts and her husband’s lack of understanding of his wife as a business woman. Although Xiling has been successful and has made a lot of money, it has been at the expense of her personal happiness. However, she has now bought a new apartment for her father and has hired a housekeeper to look after him. She donates to poor people and she has donated money to her hometown for a primary school and to build a new library. She says she enjoys her charity role and I could sense this gave her happiness.

Her husband’s involvement in the business in recent years has improved their marriage and he enjoys his work. He wants to expand the business and plans to buy a piece of land outside Beijing in a village to produce their own flowers. She said her husband wanted to do this and although she was supportive, she would step back and let him run it in order to give him more confidence and self-esteem.

As Xiling narrated:

> My son is only six, I would rather spend much time with my son. Leave my husband in charge of the business. I have the money and I do not worry about my financial situation. I enjoy more the role of being a woman, not a strong business woman. I can give up everything if I can make my husband and my son feel comfortable and happy... However, when I was young, my finance was limited, I had a strong ambition to change my situation. I thought once I had a lot of money, I can afford to buy everything for my father, my brother and my family, my relatives, those I love and to make them all happy. But I have found that happiness does not increase just because you have a lot of money.
5.2.3 Discussion

Xiling’s narrative suggests that she is a kind and generous woman who was driven and motivated by her love and respect for her father. She was obviously affected by the death of her mother at such a young age and her affection and closeness to her father suggests that he provided both love and security for his three children. He must have made sacrifices for his children and Xiling’s concern for him suggests that she was aware and appreciative of his efforts when she was young. Xiling’s case, has highlighted another gap in entrepreneurship research and published literature. During my literature review I found no evidence from previous researchers into entrepreneurship, that love has been identified as a motivational factor? Whilst it could be argued that wanting to improve one’s family’s life style and circumstances is underpinned by family affection, it has not been established whether this is due to family loyalty and respect or to personal love. Xiling’s actions to become an entrepreneur were not self motivated for status gains or personal wealth accumulation. It was driven by love for her father.

Although her narrative suggests Xiling’s main motivation was to help and improve her father’s situation, the additional driver was her need for a more challenging role in life. The job with the Agency was not stimulating and she realized that being an entrepreneur could satisfy two needs. First to improve her family’s lives, and second, to provide her with a more interesting career. Her success was, in part, due to her identifying a market that could be developed and her own self-determination. Although she has been successful in her business life and to some extent her family life, she has suffered a high degree of work-family conflict. She has been able to help her brothers and especially her father, but her conflicts with her husband has left her unsure whether the success has been worth the strain and pressure on her marriage. An interesting paradox arises as she now accepts money cannot always buy happiness, but her future happiness appears to be partially dependent upon donating money to charities and helping others financially.
5.3 Lixin’s story

5.3.1 Introduction

I was introduced to Lixin through the WF and their recommendation. Before I met Lixin in her office, I heard that she was a very beautiful and elegant business woman and she was not only successful in her business, but also she was the Chairman of the Association of Female Entrepreneurs in Beijing. She is involved in many social events and charity work. I was advised that if I am looking for interviewees to participate in this PhD research, I should interview her. I was accompanied by two female staff in the WF to see Lixin and Lixin’s company. After the general greetings and introduction, we spent about 20 minutes having an informal talk and Lixin agreed to make a second meeting in a couple of weeks and she chose the time and the venue.

Lixin set up a business to sell computers in 1995 after she graduated from university in Beijing. At the beginning she opened a shop and ran this on her own. Gradually and constantly she has developed her business from a one person business computing shop in 1995 to become a large IT services company with 700 staff in 2010. Her company is located in the high technical developing zone in the north of Beijing. In the following section, her narrative with my interpretation will be presented using four main themes- Freedom & Motivation, Market & Success, Balance & Work-Family, the Future, which are related to the aims and objectives of this research, followed by discussion about the findings.

5.3.2 Narrative and interpretation

Freedom & Motivation

Lixin was born in the south west region of China in 1970 and both her parents were working for the local government as officers. When she was 18, she left her hometown and went to Beijing to study a Bachelor degree course in computing. I
started the conversation by enquiring about why she chose to study computer management and Lixin responded: ‘I did not choose this subject, my parents chose this for me and they suggested that I should study computer because it is easier to find a job in the large city (laugh)’.

However, after Lixin completed her study in the university, she did not look for any jobs. Instead, she started to run her own business to sell computers as Lixin narrated:

My parents were right. It was easy to get a job in a company. Most of my classmates obtained positions in the state companies or private companies. When I had nearly completed my study, I went to a company to do my internship. I did not enjoy the working environment and the fixed work hours between 8am and 6pm without flexibility.

Lixin explained that when she was growing up in a remote region, she liked the open spaces and to be free. The work environment did not suit her. Therefore after her graduation, she told her parents she would not look for jobs and work for someone else. She expected that she could set up her own business to sell computers. However, her parents felt disappointed with her plan. Her parents are like most Chinese parents, who hope that their children can find a decent position, will not need to work too hard, and that they can achieve a regular income to support themselves in the city. However, Lixin preferred the freedom to work for herself, as she commented that she could arrange her own time to do things she wanted.

When Lixin set up her computer shop she asked a commercial agent to help to obtain a license. Her parents finally agreed and also lent her 8000 RMB as starting capital. She also asked her friends who had studied at the same university, to raise some money. One of her friends from university became her business partner and eventually her husband. In 15 years, the business grew from a person running a shop selling PCs to a full computer services company offering training and software development with 700 employees.
Market & Success

In October of 1995, Lixin’s first shop was opened and was located in Zhongguancun, China’s so called Silicon Valley. Lixin explained that since 1978, when China started to implement the policies of reform and opening-up, various special economic zones were established, such as the city of Shenzhen in Guangdong Province in the 1980s, the new district of Pudong in the Shanghai Municipality in the 1990s and in the mid 1990s, Zhongguancun in Beijing. Zhongguancun has gradually become the leading hi-tech commercial area in China. As Lixin narrated:

Zhongguancun was a big market area to sell computers. A lot of people wanted to buy computers, and in Beijing they must come to, zhongguancun. My friend said once that if I can open a shop here, I can earn a lot of money. I do not need to worry how to sell computers, customers would come to you to buy. I remember that at the beginning, I did not have enough money to rent a big shop. My parents lent me 8000 RMB as starting capital.

I used this money to rent a small area, only 8 square meters and also it was not in the high street because I could not afford the much higher rents being charged if the room was in the high street. I had some friends who made and sold computers, so I asked them to give me a few computers to sell and I would pay them once I had sold them. Unbelievably, they agreed and once I opened the shop, on the first day, I sold all the computers. I earned net profit of about 5000 RMB….

I questioned Lixin about how she could get products and how she could find customers? Lixin realised that I was struggling to understand this and she added:

You will never understand that period in Zhongguancun. The demand for computer in the market was like waves in the sea. During that time, I could take computers from the manufacturer directly and I did not need to pay any deposit. I took computers and after I sold computers, I returned the money to the manufacturer. Sometimes I did not have any stock, I only had samples in my shop. Once customers requested a computer and we negotiated the price, I just let customers wait for me in the shop. I ran round to my friends shop and borrowed one of his stock. People trusted each other and because they knew my
shop was in Zhongguancun, I became a trusted person. That was the Chinese way.

... Of course, Zhongguancun has developed quickly and nowadays it is becoming a modern and developed hi-tech industry area. But at the beginning of 1990s, Zhongguancun was smaller and immature. Also, the small shops have now become big IT service companies. At the beginning I ran the business myself. When I started to earn money and have regular customers from individuals and organizations and they ordered more, I hired two people to help me. Gradually, I became familiar with the suppliers and the buyers. You know, I never thought my shop would become a big company after just 10 years of development. I have to say, I am not a clever business woman, it is the demand of the market which pushed me to do it.

Through Lixin’s narrating, I realised that the friend she mentioned very often, eventually became her husband. At the beginning, they both opened separate shops and her friend helped her with advice and stock. They merged their two shops together and set up a company. Now they are not only business partners but they are also married and have a 10 year old son. Lixin appears to be very happy and satisfied with her success on becoming an entrepreneur.

**Balance & Work-family**

I could feel Lixin is a happy woman and she mentioned how she and her husband work together. She commented that of course, they had arguments many times and she felt much pressure and frustration from her husband. When she was angry, sometimes with him, she thought she wanted to divorce and to separate the company from him. However, after they both calmed down emotionally, they realized that they still loved each other. They accepted that the main reason they had arguments was because of the business. Eventually, they understood that they both wanted the company to succeed and they discussed some solutions and made joint decisions. She accepts that she would not be so successful without her husbands’ involvement in the business and she feels very grateful for his contributions and tolerance.
Xilin’s parents retired from the local government and they moved to Beijing and now live together. Lixin’s parents look after her son and she has hired two people to look after her home and cook. In Lixin’s own words:

My parents have helped me to deal with my domestic things and look after my son. I have a maid to clean and cook. I have a private tutor to help my son’s study and homework and teaching my son piano. I just concentrate on my work and keep earning more money…. (Smile).

I could feel she was very proud of this achievement when she explained the details to me and it appeared she never suffered the conflicts between work and family life that were apparent in the narratives of other entrepreneurs. Therefore I asked whether she felt guilty and whether she missed her son, as a mother, when you do not stay with him all the time?

Lixin replied:

Not really. My parents look after my son better than me actually. My husband and I have worked very hard to make our company successful. All our hard work is actually for our son and his future. I think my son understands this and we hope he will appreciate his parents’ hard-work when he is grown up and becomes a man. Since my son was born, my mum came to Beijing to look after him. My mum said I always had my business in my heart and I was a workaholic….Maybe I am. (laughs)

I can give my son everything he needs, why do I need to feel guilty?

I was unable to comment as I did not know how best to respond to her rhetorical question. It appears Lixin did have some work-family conflict, but not in the same context as the previous case study. The conflict appears to be focused on the business rather than the family. The obvious difference with Xiling is that Lixin is supported by her husband and that both of them share the same idea of putting the business first as the optimal way of providing for their family. This sense of mutual support and partnership is evident in this narrative, whereas in the
previous narrative the entrepreneur’s husband felt the business was a threat to his interests as a husband.

There was no evidence in Lixin’s narrative or body language that she experienced any guilt about leaving the responsibility of her son’s up-bringing or welfare to others. Whether this was due to the responsibility being delegated to a close family member or whether it is because her success can pay for material benefits which compensate for emotional ones will be discussed later.

The future

Lixin talked about her future perspective and she has a strong and very clear ambition for her company in the next five to ten years.

I have prepared a plan for my company. My wish is to take my company to the Stock market as a listed company. My husband has agreed with our development strategy, but even he sometimes makes a joke with me. He says, entrepreneurs are too greedy, once you have 10 millions, you chase for 10 billions. Perhaps, this is our human nature. (Laugh)

This suggests that although Lixin is a very rich woman, she still wants to develop her company. This could be because she is not only interested in money but because she still has ambition, higher expectations and the need to challenge herself. It seems she believes she cannot stop now because more than 700 people depend on her. She believes she needs to take responsibility for her employees. For example, if she chose to sell the company, although she would have enough money to live and no financial worries for the rest of her life, some of her employees may lose their jobs and would not have an income. The impression she gave was that she must continue to run the business and work until she dies. Through the interview, I realised she also enjoys another role of being involved in charity work. She has donated money and computers for schools and hospitals in her hometown. If in the future, her company becomes a
listed company on a stock market, she would like to donate much more money to support China’s education and help poor children to obtain an education.

5.3.3 Discussion

Lixin’s initial motivation to start her own business appears to be to seek freedom from the rigidity of being an employee. This appears to have been superseded by the enjoyment of being successful, which developed into seeking higher self-achievement. More recently her motivation appears to be to safeguard her employees and help society. The key success factor was the market force and demand for computers linked to China’s policy of creating special economic zones and the push for hi-tech development. Of course her self-persistence and desire for improvement were also key factors, although she does not accept herself that these factors, along with her intelligence, were responsible for her success. This is a typical response within Chinese culture where modesty is regarded as a virtue. The general feeling I had through my conversation was that Lixin had a strong ego and enjoyed her success and self-achievement.

It appears that Lixin does not have the previously identified conflicts between work and family life. Domestically, she has arranged everything, her parents, her home, her son’s education and it appears she does not feel guilty as a mother or wife. She is proud of herself being a successful business woman and has high self-esteem. It was obvious that her success has resulted in wealth and a high standard of living which has enabled her to provide everything materially for her son and parents. Providing financial security is a key factor of satisfaction in Lixin’s narrative. There was no evidence of regret in Lixin’s narrative regarding her focus on her business, rather than on her son. Neither was there any sense of guilt regarding her husband and domestic needs. This could be because they worked so closely together, and after some initial issues around business conflicts, they appear to have a harmonious life together. Her future aspirations of floating her company on the stock market would appear to be motivated by a
desire to give something back to society. Lixin says she wants to donate her money to help China’s education system and poor people. Philanthropy is a noble attribute but one which also outwardly demonstrates a person’s success.

5.4 Xuemei’s story

5.4.1 Introduction

I was introduced to Xuemei by the previous interviewee Lixin. Xuemei is a personal friend of Lixin who set up a silk design and embroidery factory in 1996. After we had a short conversation on the phone and I explained the purpose of my research, Xuemei was happy to accept my invitation to be interviewed. We made an appointment for a face to face interview and she suggested that I should come to her factory, which is in the outskirts of Beijing. Through the conversation on the phone, I personally felt Xuemei was a very caring person and I had a good impression about her.

After the usual initial pleasantries associated with a face to face meeting, Xuemei related how she had started to run her own factory in 1996. She explained how the factory used to be a government run collective-owned factory employing around 50 people, which she rented before she subsequently bought after 10 years. She continuously invested in the business, and in 2010 more than 200 workers and technicians worked for her in her factory, see plate 5.1. In the following section, her narrative with interpretation will be presented using four main themes- Dreams & Motivation, Policy & Success, Housekeeping & Work-family balance, The Future, which are related to the aims and objectives of this research.
5.4.2 Narrative and interpretation

*DREAMS & MOTIVATION*

Xuemei was born in 1963 in the North East of China, her father was an engineer and her mother was a teacher in a high school. Xuemei was very proud of herself when she was 18 she passed the national exam to obtain a position at Tsinghua University, the top university in China. She studied fabric art design and after 4 years study in the university, she was accepted to work in a state-owned textile manufacturing company as a designer. She commented that she enjoyed her work at the beginning as she was able to show her strong interests in fabric design, more especially on silk fabric designing. After 10 years working in the state manufacturing, she decided to leave as she always wanted to have her own design brand. This appears at face value to be a western idea and I wondered how much her education influenced her desire to develop her own brand. Perhaps it was simply an artistic impulse that was influenced by
western culture although she did mention developing an international brand. During the time she worked in the factory she paid a lot of attention and interest in the manufacturing process.

Xuemei narrated:

I love design and I always dreamt that I should have my own design company. I wanted to be not only a perfect designer but also I want to produce my own products. I had a dream since I studied in the university; and I want to design and produce my own branding in the silk market; I wish my design could become the Chinese national brand; I wish that my own work can be recognised by the world and become an international brand (Smile). Perhaps, this was my teenage ambition.

In the state company, Xuemei felt she had the ability to do more design work but because of the system of restriction she was not allowed to design things which she really liked and to have the satisfaction of seeing them made in the factory. She gradually became frustrated and was prepared to leave and started looking for opportunities.

**Policy & Success**

In 1996, Xuemei recalled that in the factory they introduced a new policy which enabled any staff to leave or resign from the factory and obtain compensation of around 100,000 RMB. Xuemai decided to take advantage of this offer and also raised some money from relatives. This enabled her to rent and run a small silk factory in Beijing and within seven years, she managed to pay off the initial loans from relatives and she was able to buy the factory.

During the early months of running the factory, she obtained orders through her previous work contacts and friends’ connections. I asked how important she felt *guanxi* had been in her early success and Xuemei said that good relationships can help you win contracts but the quality of your products are the essential
importance. She used the analogy that good relationships are like oil which would lubricate the wheels of the car. She felt very happy at this time as she could design and produce to suit the market and her interests. The factory was rapidly growing and she had to employ more people to work for her. During the time of her previous job, she had married a man who she had met at university and who also worked in a silk factory. She therefore asked him to work for her, which he readily accepted. She attended national and international exhibitions to promote her products and the business grew. However, as the business was growing she needed to look for more funding and she acknowledged that cash flow was an issue in the business. She therefore sold her house and borrowed some money from a bank and from friends.

As Xuemei narrated:

I was extremely busy in my own factory. I never had a rest and I work 7 days a week and I am in the factory every day. I have a small room in the factory and most of time I and my husband just stay in the factory over night. My friends always say I am successful, but they do not know how hard I and my husband worked, especially how much pressure I had when I needed more cash to keep the factory running.

This comment and the reference to cash flow and working capital problems, suggests that this period in her life was stressful. Selling their home to live in the factory must have been difficult. It demonstrates the determination she had to make a success of her business and to achieve her ambitions. It also suggests that her husband was very supportive, which must have helped her cope with the pressures.
Housekeeping & Work-Family balance

Xuemei’s husband is also a designer and they studied at the same university. After they graduated and got stable jobs in manufacturing, they married and now have two sons. As Xuemei narrated:

My husband and I have known each other so long. We worked together and we discussed things together and we have so much in common and fun together, of course we have arguments sometimes. But I feel I am lucky to have him. When we worked in the state factories, we had a very regular working routine. When my sons were born, I started to hire a housekeeper to stay with me and look after my family domestically. I enjoyed being a wife and mother, but I never stopped dreaming!

This suggests that Xuemei on the surface, she was able to find extra help to enable her to pursue her passion, which was her business. There is no sense of their being a conflict between her roles in this portion of the narrative. Her husband worked with her and they enjoyed working together. Meanwhile, in order to reduce doing housework and looking after their sons, she employed a housekeeper to clean, cook and take her sons to school and picked them up after school. The only thing she wanted to do was focus on her business.

The future

Xuemei continues to have high expectations for her factory. When I interviewed her in 2010 she had just returned from a promotional trip to Italy:

I went to a fashion exhibition in Milan; and I took my products for the exhibition. I feel confident with my own design and the quality of my products; I have obtained new contracts from overseas.

When she talked about her experience in Italy, she appeared very excited. If she could obtain some funding, she would love to expand her factory. It seems she
has applied for a loan from the bank and if she could obtain the loan, she could buy new machinery and produce more products. I noticed that as Xuemei talked about this, her eyes looked bright and I could feel she enjoyed her achievement in selling her designs abroad.

5.4.3 Discussion

Xuemei’s motivation was and still is to achieve her dream of being an internationally recognized designer and manufacturer. The critical factors leading to success are the government policy in 1996, when they introduced an incentive for people to leave state companies and start their own businesses. This combined with Xuemei’s determination and her husband’s support and encouragement are the key factors contributing to her success. Guanxi again appears to have played some part in the success. From the initial loans from friends and family and the initial orders obtained from friendship networks, to the later requirement to borrow from friends when cash flow was an issue for the business. She does not appear to have experienced any work-family issues. It appears that the success of the business enabled her to afford to hire a housekeeper to deal with domestic chores and look after her sons. Her future plan is still linked to her dream of being an internationally recognized designer and she wants her products to become both a national brand and even an international brand.

5.5 Further analysis and reflection

It was noted in chapter 2 that the birth of private sector development in China in the 1980s was revived after Deng Xiaoping’s ‘South Touring Talk’ in April 1992. Under the guidance of Deng’s theory of ‘Getting big, going forward and development is the first principle in China’, private and individual business activities increased, encouraged by his famous phrase ‘Jumping into the sea’ (xiahai). In accordance with Deng’s theory, the governments, both central and
local, started to implement expansionary policies for encouraging private business development (Liu, 2008).

Having presented, commented and discussed the three stories of Xiling, Lixin and Xuemei who set up their business in the 1990s, it appears their narratives display several similarities and a few differences. These three entrepreneurs started to run their own business in the 1990s and in this second decade period, China continued with economic reforms. These three entrepreneurs’ motivations appear different from the previous three entrepreneurs in first decade period of reforms in the 1980s. In this section, following the aims and objectives of this research, I adopt the same framework analysis as in chapter 4 and the same analysis model to develop further discussion and reflection on their motivations, success factors, the barriers, including the work-family conflicts.
Framework analysis on objective 1: to explore factors & motivations in starting up a business (1990s).

Table 5.1 Motivations (1990s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Driver</th>
<th>Theory</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xiling</td>
<td>University at 18 &amp; studied Phytology</td>
<td>Improve father’s living conditions; Boredom from salaried job; Raised expectation and ambition; Better social environment; Demand from floral market.</td>
<td>Push</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 years working experience Filial Piety Import trade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lixin</td>
<td>University at 18 &amp; studied Computing Internship experience Opened a small computer shop IT expansion</td>
<td>Freedom and self-fulfilment; Demand from the IT market; Better Social environment.</td>
<td>Pull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuemei</td>
<td>Top university at 19 &amp; studied Art &amp; Design 10 years working experience Government incentive</td>
<td>Dream &amp; recognition; Self-fulfilment; Frustration; Better social environment.</td>
<td>Pull</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

These three 1990s entrepreneurs have similarities beyond their gender and some significant differences. The similarities include they all benefited from the social desire of parents for children to have a university education and all studied
at good universities. All used their chosen majors in their choice of business. Two of the three (Xiling and Xuemei) had previous experience in a state run company before starting their own. Two of the three became frustrated or bored with being an employee. All three desired the freedom of choice being an entrepreneur can allow.

Unlike the entrepreneurs in the previous reform period, only one of the three (Xiling) appears to have had a strong desire to earn more money to support her family. The living condition of her father appears to have been the trigger to make her act to change her financial situation. Lixin was driven by a desire for self-actualization after experiencing the restrictions of being employed and Xuemei was driven by her dream of self achievement and recognition.
Framework analysis on objective 2: to uncover factors which helped them to succeed (1990s).

Table 5.2 Success factors (1990s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xiling</td>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>Left state company;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government policy</td>
<td>Able to obtain a license;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Growing economy</td>
<td>Demand for flowers;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guanxi</td>
<td>Assistance to gain license;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family raised finance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lixin</td>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>Rejected employment;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government policy</td>
<td>Development of IT area;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Market demand</td>
<td>Sold everything;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guanxi</td>
<td>Friends loaned stock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuemei</td>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>Left state company; Incentive scheme to leave employment;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government policy</td>
<td>Able to expand the business;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Market Demand</td>
<td>Friends raised finance and helped win contracts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

All three entrepreneurs in the 1990s demonstrated great self-determination and confidence. Two of the group (Xiling and Xuemei) gave up secure jobs to set up their businesses and Lixin turned her back on the opportunity of employment. All accept that the government push for more new private businesses was a key factor in their opportunity to start a business and its subsequent success. The government’s relaxation of rules and financial incentives allowed Xiling to obtain an import license and Xuemei to receive a payment to use as startup capital.
The government policy was also increasing domestic demand in China, which is evidenced by the immediate profits made by the three as soon as they commenced trading. All three admitted that they had help from friends and family which was a key factor in being able to start their business. *Guanxi* again, as in the previous decade, appears to have had an influence.

- Framework analysis on objectives 3: to identify barriers and obstacles to business success (1990s).

Table 5.3 Barriers & Conflicts (1990s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xiling</td>
<td>Startup capital</td>
<td>Brother lent 5000RMB;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Husband’s pressure and near divorce;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engaged Housekeeper &amp; Fathers help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lixin</td>
<td>Start-up capital</td>
<td>Parents lent 8000 RMB;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Husband became business partner;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engaged Housekeeper;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tutor &amp; Parents help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuemei</td>
<td>Start up capital</td>
<td>Needed Govt. scheme and friend help;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recruited husband &amp; sold house;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Housekeeper.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

All three entrepreneurs in the 1990s would not have been able to start their business without the help of friends and family who raised start-up capital and or stock. Xuemei may have been able to start with just her government incentive payment, but she acknowledged she needed help from friends to stay in business when she experienced cash-flow problems. Only one of the three
(Xiling) appears to have experienced serious work-family conflict, which seems to have been resolved by inviting her husband to take over the day to day running of her business. All have involved their husbands in their businesses. All appear comfortable leaving the domestic work and raising children to others and none of the three commented or showed any anxiety or guilt at not being with their children during their formative years.

➢ Framework analysis on objective 4: to assess the future plans and prospect (1990s).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xiling</td>
<td>Expand</td>
<td>Build warehouse ;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charity</td>
<td>Donate to schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lixin</td>
<td>Expand</td>
<td>Stock market listing;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charity</td>
<td>Donate to schools and hospitals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuemei</td>
<td>Expand</td>
<td>Buy new equipment ;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand Recognition</td>
<td>Develop overseas market</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All three entrepreneurs in 1990s continue to want to grow and expand their businesses which may reflect the fact that they have been in business up to 10 years less than those who started their businesses in the previous decade. Also, two of the three (Xiling and Lixin) want to share their rewards with donations to charities and in supporting good causes. Xuemei is still chasing her dream of being an internationally recognised designer.
5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the three women entrepreneurs who started their business in the 1990s have much in common and share many similarities and characteristics, which is illustrated graphically by the framework analysis. The three entrepreneurs demonstrate similar personal attributes.

Xiling’s, Lixin’s and Xuemei’s narratives display several common themes. The key facilitator was the social reform environment and government policies and the huge undeveloped market demand. The key barrier to setting up a business during the 1990s appears to be start-up capital and is therefore similar to the previous decade. Guanxi also still played a significant role in helping to establish a business. Although personal attitudes towards domestic and family concerns appear to be less of an issue, the involvement of spouses in their businesses may be the key factor in this and worthy of further investigation. The key driver of the 1980s, escape from poverty, has now been replaced with a need for self-determination and freedom of choice. Unlike the entrepreneurs of the previous decade, these three all had a University education although it has not been possible to establish if this played some part in forming their attitudes towards entrepreneurship. Determination and confidence are still key factors for success and continuous growth is now driving the entrepreneurs. A new concept has now been uncovered during this research period, that of charitable giving. It will be interesting to discover whether this concept continued.
Chapter 6  Motivations of Chinese women entrepreneurs:  
Three stories in 2000s

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters 4 and 5, the main aims were to investigate the drivers and motivations of women entrepreneurs who started their business in the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly, the main aim in this chapter is to investigate women entrepreneurs who started their business in the post 2000s and this will be presented in the same format as in chapter 4 and chapter 5. Therefore it is still adapted to longitudinal research using the time line as presented in chapter 2, i.e. the three periods of important economic reforms in China.

The specific aims of this chapter are to achieve the research objectives and to present the motivational factors and drivers that influenced Chinese women entrepreneurs who started their own business in the third reform period of the 2000s in China through their narratives. The objectives of this chapter are the same as the objectives of this thesis as presented in the Chapter 1 by focusing on the time period of 2000-2008.

- Objective 1: to explore motivations in starting up their business.
- Objective 2: to uncover factors which help them to succeed.
- Objectives 3: to identify barriers and obstacles to business success.
- Objectives 4: to assess the future plan and prospect.

It is worth stating that this research is to develop a comparison across the time periods and to harness the potential of the longitudinal approach. Therefore, the structure of this chapter will be presented in a similar layout as in the previous chapter 4 and chapter 5, which is based on three cases studies. Each case
study contains selected elements of the story provided by the women entrepreneur and includes an interpretation by the researcher on the commentary. Furthermore, the narration, interpretation and commentary of each case study is related to the main objectives and themes of this research as detailed in the previous paragraph.

First, Jian’s story, who set up her furniture business in 2004, will be represented, interpreted and discussed. Second, Lily’s story, who set up her Chinese medical services business in 2006, will be presented, interpreted and discussed. Third, Sumei’s story, who set up her media investment company in 2008, will be presented, interpreted and discussed. Finally, the three women entrepreneurs’ case studies will be compared and reflected on using a framework analysis to facilitate further discussion prior to summarizing and developing a conclusion for this chapter. It is important to recognise that these businesses were only set up in recent years and therefore they are younger than previous business case studies. The stories and comments are concerned more with the start up phases and the initial growth cycle. In comparison to the previous stories they are less complex and there is less detail.

6.2 Jian’s story

6.2.1 Introduction

I met Jian, her husband and her son at the same time in her factory through the WF’s staff recommendation. I immediately felt they all were very friendly and enthusiastic with my initial introduction and explanation of my research topic (the first stage of interview as I explained in the previous chapter 3 Methodology). Through the conversation I learnt that their 23 years old son had just completed his Bachelor Degree in Design at Manchester University and returned to Beijing a couple of months earlier. The conversation with her son was pleasant as we were able to compare our experiences of living and studying in Britain. We shared some common points such as English culture and customs, English food,
fish & chips, English weather etc. This conversation with her son helped cement the relationship with Jian as she appeared very happy to listen to the conversation with her son and what he discussed with me. Jian commented that she regretted not being able to visit her son whilst he was in the UK for 3 years but unfortunately she explained that she was too busy running her business. However, her son was able to fly back during the university’s holiday periods.

Having established a good rapport with Jian, she proceeded to explain that she set up her office furniture factory in 2004 in the outskirts of Beijing. At the beginning, she employed 5 staff but the business quickly grew and by the end of the first year she employed 20 staff. The company continued to grow and after 5 years 80 staff were working for her when I met her in 2010, including her husband who joined her three years ago and her son who had just started to work for her as well. In the following section, her narrative with interpretation will be presented using four main themes- Housewife & Motivation, Hard-working & Success, Son & Work-Family, The future, which are related to the aims and objectives of this research, followed by discussion about the findings.

6.2.2 Narrative and interpretation

Housewife & Motivation

Jian was born in the east coast area of China in 1962 when her mother was at the age of 44. As Jian commented, her mother was vulnerable to give a birth at this age and since birth, Jian was not strong and her health was not so good. Following Chinese culture and superstition, her father gave her a boy’s name Jian, the Chinese character is 健, the meaning is healthy and strong. Jian told me that she had a brother, 12 years older than her, who was suffering with phthisis. Their father was a fisherman and the family spent most of their income on treating her brother’s very serious illness and her parents wished Jian would become much more healthy and not suffer ill-health like her brother. Jian explained that if she had developed the same illness as her brother she does not
know how her parents could have coped financially. Fortunately, Jian grew up stronger than her brother and did not develop the same illness.

After she finished her high school education at 17 years of age, she started looking for a job to support the family. She therefore went to Shanghai where she believed there would be more opportunities to look for work but it seemed the trip was unsuccessful. In 1982, she came to Beijing and was introduced by her cousin to work for a friend of her cousin who ran a curtain and bedding sewing factory. Here she was taught how to make curtains and duvet covers and how to use a sewing machine. Also during this period, her cousin introduced her to a man who was 10 years older than her and as Jian commented: ‘I wanted to marry him and have a stable life and I did not want to be homeless and like a flying leaf in Beijing.’ It appeared that she was very happy to get married. Her husband worked for a furniture factory as a marketing manager and his income was reasonable. After she married, her husband suggested that she should stop working in the sewing factory and become a housewife and her son was born a year later. During the first ten years of their marriage, she was happy and she devoted all her love and time on her husband and son. However, she felt her lifestyle was a paradox.

As Jian narrated:

I feel I was the happiest woman in the world. My husband got promotion in his company and his salary was good. We had a comfortable life but I always felt I had some emptiness in my heart. I did not know what it was. When my son was gradually growing up and went to school and my husband went to work. In the daytime, I felt the time was pausing and it was too slow. I felt I did not have energy and I was bored. My neighbour and friends knew I had skills to make curtains and beddings, occasionally, they introduced some work for me. I liked to do this work at home. I felt I could kill my time and of course I had small income made by myself, and not have to ask for everything from my husband…
The time slowly passed and after Jian’s son finished his high school she felt she was free and she could do some useful work and not stay at home all day. She therefore asked her husband to look for an opportunity to work in his furniture factory. She commented that she did not mind doing a dirty job, even if it was to let her clean the toilet. However, her husband declined as he did not want her to work, and being a very traditional Chinese man, he preferred that his woman should stay at home and look after her husband and children. After nearly 18 years being a housewife Jian was not satisfied with his decision and with this lifestyle. One day, she had a serious conversation with her husband and told him she wanted to run a furniture business like the one where her husband worked.

As Jian said:

I have had this idea for a long time, every time when my husband talked about his factory; I was paying attention to listen. I felt it was not difficult to run this kind of business. My husband’s factory was making office furniture such as desks, chairs and file boxes. If I run the similar one like my husband, I can add some other products and make home curtains and bedding cases. When I told my husband this, he was shocked and he asked where I would raise the capital as we did not have spare money. It would be too risky and where we could get orders, where we could get workers and designers.???

I could sense that Jian was disappointed with her husband’s negativity. She felt that these were all negative points which hurt her deeply. Jian confided they had many arguments when she discussed this several times, but her husband continued to strongly disagree. One evening, her son who had witnessed the many arguments, came over to her and surprised her. She vividly recalled her son’s words: ‘Mama, I support you and you have the intelligence to do this. Do not feel upset with Dad’s attitude’.
I could detect Jian was moved by her son’s words and fought back tears. This moral support made her even more determined to start her company. Her son’s reaction also appears to have changed her husband’s attitude towards Jian’s idea and he finally agreed to let her try.

**Hard-working & Success**

Time moved to 2004 and Jian was preparing to open her factory. She asked ten people (friends & relatives) to raise 600,000 RMB (about 60,000 pounds) in total as starting capital. She rented a small factory and she got some contracts through friends and relatives networks. She was doing everything in her factory, she was cooking for workers, she was involved in making curtains and she went out to look for contracts. It seems she feels she was always lucky and won contracts and was able to deliver on time. As Jian explained, making office desks and chairs are easier than making home furniture and does not require a significant input from fashion designers to go to market. As Jian confidently said:

> I have stayed with my husband for many years, through his work, I understand his business model. I felt it was easy to copy. The importance is the contracts. In the first year I started to run this factory, my contracts were through friends, relatives and my husband’s network, I earned some money and more than my husband’s salary, I asked him to stop his work and he should work for me. He finally agreed….. (Jian smiled)

Jian ran the factory successfully and after two years she returned all the loans to her friends and relatives and she had enough capital to buy the factory. However, she did not use the capital to buy the factory, instead, she invested in her son’s education in England. Her son wanted to study furniture design in order to help his mother in the future. Through the conversation with Jian, I could feel she is much happier than before she started her business even though she is much busier than being a housewife. She felt she was now a useful person and she
felt she had achieved something. This point she mentioned several times. She admitted that when her husband became involved in working for her, she felt very grateful and much more confident. She now has regular contracts with department stores and other companies through her husband’s and her friends/relatives networks. She is happy with the current size of the business and stable of clients. She has a loyal group of workers and some live in the factory and they work very hard for her. Sometimes workers have to work through the night if it is in a busy period and she needs to meet delivery times.

Son & Work-family

Jian is very proud of her son. I could see the happiness on her face every moment when she talked about her son. As in previous interviews, I like to get the interviewee to talk about how they deal with work and family life conflicts. Jian’s story was different to some of the previous interviewees and prompted me to enquire more. Jian narrated that she does not have these kinds of issues:

When I started this business, my son actually was grown up and I was a housewife for near 20 years. Now I feel my current situation is the best of both worlds. I do everything by myself. I cook for my family, I cook for my staff. I get up at 5 o’clock every morning and start to make myself busy. I go out to see my clients and look for more contracts for my factory. My husband has had experience in his previous job and he monitors, controls and checks the quality of products that workers make. My son is just starting in the business and will take responsibility for design, will work with my old colleagues and help to run the factory as well. In the factory, we have our own rooms and if we are all busy, we all stay in the factory and do not need to go back home at all. We can all spend time together in the factory.
Interestingly, a factory in which family and work are merged is a similar model to the pre-industrial model of work-family life that existed in England in the 18th century.

Jian is obviously a hard working woman and enjoys her success. However she does not feel she has missed this opportunity because she was not doing anything for 20 years. After 20 years it appears it was a good time for her to work hard and she does not feel any conflicts between work and family. Her business is her family and her family is her business. Unlike other interviewees, she refuses to look for a housekeeper or maid and she likes to do everything on her own. She feels this way makes her more comfortable. She was bored and tired when she was a full-time housewife but, through this opportunity to run her business, it appears she never feels tired and frustrated. She commented that when she started to earn profit it made her feel more confident and the success of her business has made her feel high self-esteem.

The future

During more than two hours of interview, I could hear the noise of the wood saw cutting machines and the factory was busy. Her phone was ringing continuously and she had to switch it off. She apologised for the interruptions but explained she must get the workers to finish the work on time to meet the clients’ requirements. She also explained that the machines need to be changed and she needs to buy new machines which will make the factory more efficient. If the company continues to grow, she feels it may be difficult to maintain the high reputation she enjoys in this area and therefore she has stopped accepting more new contracts until she can improve her workshop and equipment. Jian has already paid the deposit and will have new saw machines soon.

She stressed that her health was good and she had a lot of energy and plans to develop the business. She commented that she appreciated that her parents...
gave her a boys name and believes this helped to make her strong, both physically and mentally, which gave her the determination to start her factory. Interestingly, the giving of a boys name to a girl reflects the cultural attitude towards gender prior to the Moa period starting in 1949. Although Jian was born in 1962, her parents were born in the 1920s when this attitude was prevalent.

It appears Jian enjoys her role of being an entrepreneur more than her previous role as a housewife although she makes no complaints about spending time looking after her husband and son.

6.2.3 Discussion

Jian's story is different to other interviewees in several aspects. She appears to have had a traditional attitude towards marriage and family. There was no early burning ambition to be an entrepreneur and she appears to have been driven more by a desire for self-achievement rather than financial gain. She appears to have enjoyed being a mother, wife and homemaker during the period when her son was young, but as her son's needs and demands reduced, Jian appears to have become bored and needed an outlet for her energy. Although her husband earned enough to maintain a reasonable standard of living for the family, Jian's comment that the small amounts of money she earned from making curtains and bedding gave her some independence, which suggests that she desired some level of individual self respect and financial autonomy, being dissatisfied being supported by her husband. Her continued requests to her husband, in the face of negativity and arguments, suggest Jian has a great deal of self-determination and passion. However, whether she would have persisted with her desire long term, if her son had given his support, is not obvious.

Once again, guanxi appears to have played a significant part in both setting up and establishing her business. She raised start-up capital from friends and family and used the same connections to win orders. However, although Jian realizes that guanxi is an important element of her business she is also aware
that she must make a high quality product and honour delivery requirements of her customers if she is to maintain and grow her business. Her comment that she enjoys her business life more than her previous life as a mother and wife may be an exaggeration, as family is obviously an essential part of Jian’s life and the involvement of her husband and son in the business appears to be Jian’s utopia. Her refusal to engage a house-keeper and continuing role in looking after the domestic needs of her family supports this conclusion. It is interesting, the fact that she still values the role of housewife and regards the provider role as important to her in both aspects of household reproduction and financial stability.

6.3 Lily’s story

6.3.1 Introduction

I first met Lily in 2000, when I worked in Beijing, through an introduction by my sister. During that period, she worked for a printing company and subsequently she was promoted as a marketing manager. My impression of Lily was that she was a beautiful and intelligent young lady interested in fashionable clothes and enjoying a good quality of life. I did not have any impression that she would become an entrepreneur a few years later. I was therefore surprised when I learnt from my sister that Lily had started her own company. In 2010, when I needed to look for participants to be involved in my PhD research, I immediately thought of Lily and I contacted her and asked if she was happy to participate in this research project. She accepted my invitation to be interviewed and promised that she would meet me. I therefore contacted her on my return to China.

Lily set up her own business in 2005 at the age of 30. She now employs 15 staff working for her in 2010. She is very busy and I had to contact her several times before we were able to meet. She came to see me one evening at 9pm and explained she had to put her 4 years old daughter in bed before she was free to meet. As I knew she was busy and she had to look after her daughter, I had planned to interview her for a couple of hours. However, our interview actually
lasted for four hours. Once our conversation started time passed quickly and it seemed that it was difficult to end the conversation. I could feel Lily enjoyed the time talking with me and I sensed she enjoyed sharing her story with me.

Lily set up her business in the summer of 2005 and runs a Chinese medicine treatment service specializing in acupuncture and massage. She opened her first shop in 2005 and her second shop in 2008. She has grown the business and increased her staff from 4 to 15 in 5 years. It appears she feels she has done very well and importantly, she is happy and enjoys this type of business.

Following the same structure and layout as the previous chapters 4 and 5, the following section includes her narrative with interpretation and will be presented using four main themes- Unsatisfied & Motivation, Good service & Success, House-husband & Work-Family, The Future, which are related to the aims and objectives of the research, followed by discussion about the findings.

6.3.2 Narrative and interpretation

**Unsatisfied & Motivation**

Lily was born in 1975 in the North West of China. Her parents were both teachers in a secondary school. When she was 19 years old, she came to Beijing to study business management and after four years study in the university she gained a degree in business studies. Following the completion of her degree she took a position in the marketing department working for a private company which ran a printing business. It appears that she enjoyed her work and her position.

As Lily narrated:

I really enjoyed my work in this company. My position was to develop the market and sell the services to organizations and individuals. My salary was good. I had basic salary and also bonus from my selling target. My boss was a woman entrepreneur and she
set up this business in 1980s. She was my role model and I admired her. Perhaps, her entrepreneurial spirit affected me.

From Lily’s narration, I could feel she really enjoyed working for her previous boss, she worked very hard and her sales skills improved. During this period, she had grown from a young inexperienced graduate to become a young professional sales woman. She demonstrated her ability and seemed to satisfy her passions and ambitions though working for this company. I was therefore interested to discover the reason why she made the decision to leave her position, which she obviously enjoyed, to set up her own business. Also, why did she set up her own business in a completely different business area? Lily sensed my intrigue and therefore explained and gave intimate details about her reasons for leaving the company...

As you know, in China, if you want to get more contracts and make good guanxi to sell your products and develop the market, you have to be capable to drink, especially, Chinese baijiu (白酒 alcohol). I can drink as much as men do. The result was always I wanted my clients, most of them, men, to be drunk and of course I got drunk as well. In the first five year period, I was a single woman and happy to have this kind of business-social life, but after I married, I did not want to go out for business dinners or entertainment. I wanted to stay at home with my husband after my work. However, it was difficult to change it. I am an employee, she is my boss. I have to listen to my boss’s demands and follow her arrangements. This made me unhappy.

When Lily explained this, I could empathise and fully understood her unhappiness. China is known as a country in which alcohol is an important aspect of the culture. The Chinese have continually regarded alcohol as the representation of happiness and the embodiment of auspiciousness. As I mentioned in the Literature review, drinking is socially accepted and plays a
significant part in major events of daily life such as the New Year Festival, wedding ceremonies, birthday parties etc. It also plays an important role in business life as drinking alcohol is seen as a useful tool for developing guanxi leading to business success (Hao & Young, 2000). Nowadays, drinking is seen as facilitating social exchange and easing tensions among Chinese business people. Furthermore, sharing alcohol is also believed to help to maintain good relations between managers, supervisors and employees and among colleagues (Hao et al, 2005). Lily continued:

Sometimes, in the night, around 11pm, when I was going to bed, my boss called me and asked me go out with company clients to massage rooms or KTV (Karaoke Television) rooms. I did not really want to go, but I had to, as you know in china, you cannot say no. Otherwise, next day she would give me long face or reduce my bonus at the end of the month.

Chinese business relationships inevitably becomes a social relationships. Unlike Western business relationships which remain professional and separate, even after a long time, Chinese business relationship becomes a social one. Business dinners in China are the most prominent display of our die-hard drinking culture. Even if you don't want to drink, you need to drink to give your business associate face and respect and also to show him or her that you are honest and trustworthy by putting your life on the line and drinking more than your capacity (Hao et al, 2005). It's not uncommon to find people whose entire career is built on their ability to drink. Drinking is important to demonstrate masculinity and alcohol is bound up with the culture of Chinese masculinity. Women must also negotiate their identity as women by dinking in male environments.

The more you share your personal life and time with your business associates, the more you would succeed (Brahm, 2004). Formal business dinners normally
extend for several hours as there will be much social talk, some karaoke (KTV), and drinking contests. Quite often everyone is too drunk to indulge in further entertainment after a dinner and in addition, if you are new to this group you are unlikely to be invited to further after dinner entertainment. However, once you are familiar with them, you may be invited to a Karaoke, or a Night Club, or a Sauna, or a Massage.

Eventually, as Lily explained, she could not tolerate her boss’s attitude and demands on her private life as well as becoming fed up with this kind of business environment. Therefore, at the age of 30, she decided to leave, to become an entrepreneur.

**Good service & Success**

The reason that Lily has chosen the decision to start up an acupuncture and massage business is because when she worked for the previous company, after business dinners she often took clients to the Karaoke clubs, night clubs and massage shops. She therefore became familiar with this area and could see that these businesses were very profitable. However, she also realized that to open a Night club or karaoke club required a great deal of capital which she did not have and that a large sum of money is also difficult to borrow from a bank. To open a massage room required much less capital but could still be profitable. Therefore, in 2005, she prepared to leave the print company and asked to borrow money from parents, relatives and friends. She raised 300,000 RMB (about 30,000 pounds) to open up her first shop in Beijing. I could sense Lily’s pride in herself in having the courage to leave a good well paid job and in setting up her own business:

I am a sales woman and I know how to promote my business. I contacted all my friends, previous clients, relatives and friends of friends; also I used newspapers to advertise. As soon as I start to open, my business is good. The most welcome service is foot massage, especially in
the night after meals, people (groups and individuals) come to my shop for relaxation or after a day of shopping when their feet hurt.

A traditional Chinese foot massage is considered a perfect way to relax the body and mind. According to traditional Chinese medicine, every part of the foot corresponds to an area of the body, see plate 6.1, making a foot massage a catalyst to relieving discomfort elsewhere in the body (Fan, 2006).

Plate 6.1 Chinese medical treatment-Foot Massage

Through Lily’s networking ability and her deep understanding of guanxi and promotion, she quickly won regular customers /clients. It appears she works much harder than before but with greater happiness as she does not have to accept anyone’s arrangements or feel coerced into spending her private time being sociable with others. She says she is now free to arrange her own time and her own dinners with her own friends and family and people she likes. Initially, Lily employed one Chinese male doctor (retired from a state hospital) to do the medical treatment in acupuncture and four girls (trained and qualified) to do foot massage and full body massage. In the first two years the shop was open 24 hours and 7 days per week and after three years she was able to repay
her loans to friends/relatives and also she gave birth to her baby daughter whilst she still kept working. She commented that being the boss enabled her to have a baby as she just needed to arrange the work schedules and manage the business. Lily explained her business model and commented:

People come to my shop to spend money for relaxation, good and friendly service and peaceful environment is extremely important and necessary. In the night, in my shop’s lights, I have put some incense to make the rooms smell nice and I have music playing, music is also important. I provide free fruit (like in summer, fresh watermelon is always served, tea or water is free, except for beers and we do not offer heavy liquors, because some customers have had a meal and heavy drinks in the restaurant already, some are nearly drunk, come to my shop, just to relax, help them recover from their heavy drinking. The important thing is well-being as I learned from my previous company; I know how bad it is if you got too much alcohol in the night, in the next morning, it is awful. I and my staff care about all my customers.

It is apparent that the time Lily spent entertaining clients for her previous boss taught her about the disadvantages of the drinking culture as well as how people like to relax after the intensity of the business dinner. She has used this experience and knowledge to develop a business model which is proving successful. Massage shops are numerous in large cities such as Beijing and therefore competition is intense. The massage business in Chinese society is large and growing and enjoyed by both men and women. However, in some instances it is connected to prostitution and certain establishments have a better reputation than others. There are now many chains of massage rooms catering for both men and women. For Lily to be successful in this area she realized she needed to use her promotional skills as well as offer something different to other shops. She understands that customer service can be a differentiator.
Traditionally in China, the husband was the head of the household (Heng, 1990), his role was to earn money to support his wife and family. The most important thing for a Chinese woman was to find a husband who was rich or capable of earning money to support family. Although this tradition is changing and many women now work and have careers in China, these views are still deeply embedded in the Chinese mentality of older people. Women having careers are still considered, by the majority of people, as a secondary role after the primary role of looking after their husband and family (Heng, 1990). The result is that many Chinese women continue to look for a husband who is more capable and holds a higher position than they do. Therefore I was interested to know why Lily had married someone, who I knew was unemployed at the time of their marriage, but I was reluctant to raise this question as I did not want to embarrass her. However, an important element of my research is to establish if there are issues around Work-Family conflicts, I felt I had to raise the question regarding work and family whilst trying to deal sensitively with Lily. However, Lily seemed to have read my mind. She said: ‘You perhaps have heard some gossips about my husband. Yes, he is unemployed and he has no job because he is a full-time house husband. Financially he is depending on me…’

Lily’s explained her husband is three years younger than her. He tried to look for job after he completed his study in the college. It seems he was always unlucky. Eventually, he gave up looking for work especially when Lily started to open her own business. He helped her and gave her some ideas to design the shop layout and also helped her to raise money. When Lily gave birth to their daughter, he became a full-time father and house-husband. Lily’s says her husband enjoys his role and says he prepares delicious meals for her when she returns from work, he looks after their daughter and takes her to the nursery in the morning,
picks her up in the afternoon. As well as preparing a family meal, he teaches their daughter to learn words, and takes her to piano lessons.

When we started to discuss this topic, I thought she would feel embarrassed and possibly want to avoid talking about the subject. To my surprise, she was happy to talk about this and I could sense from the smile on her face that it gives her happiness. She narrated:

Before I married, I thought men who do not work are not real men. If they stay at home being house-husband for a long while, their wives would feel superior and their marriage will suffer. However, now I do not think so. My husband is a househusband, I do not feel it is shameful. My business is his, his is mine. We are like the same person. The difference is I run the business outside my family, he run the business inside our family. He is a good cook; he is more patient for my daughter than me. He is more caring than me. Also he is good in managing the family expenses. And he has done a lot of DIY decoration for our house. I know my husband has got stress and discrimination from the society and my friends, even my parents.

I suggested to Lily that she is a strong and successful woman. However, it appears Lily refused to accept herself as a strong and successful woman. She thinks all her success today is due to her husband's encouragement and assistance. She knows her husband looks after her daughter well and cleans the house and she does not need to do anything at home. Like several previous interviewees, the questions regarding any conflicts or barriers between the work and family life resulted in an interesting response. Lily's response was ‘Half and half’.

She stated she likes to go out to run her business and she likes to be a caring woman. On the one hand, she is jealous of her husband who stays at home and looks after her daughter all time and plays and enjoys his fatherhood.
Occasionally, she feels guilty that she leaves her 4 year old daughter with her husband and she also says she feels that is unfair for a 4 years old girl to always be with her father. ‘Babies should be with their mother, always, not a father’ Lily’s own words, and she feels her life is complicated. However, on the other hand, she says that if you let her stay at home all day and every week with her daughter, she feels she would get fed up and bored. She says she wants to go out, she wants to go to her shop as Lily commented ‘that is me, how complicated I am….’

**The future**

Lily’s ambition is to open 5 shops in Beijing in the next ten years. Like other women entrepreneurs, she has great ambitions for her business. In the next ten years, she still hopes that her husband will look after her daughter and look after her home. She enjoys being a working mother rather than just a mother. She still hopes her husband can continue looking after the home, make gourmet meals for her after work and help her daughter with her homework and be ready for bed when she comes home at night. She neither needs do the ironing and the laundry, nor does she need worry about whether or not the household bills are paid on time. All domestic things her husband can sort out. She says she feels content and does not have domestic worries.

Lily, unlike Xiling, a previous entrepreneur in 1990s, does not wish for her husband to be involved in her business. She prefers her husband being a house-husband until her daughter goes to university.

As Lily’s narrated:

> My husband's personality is not suitable to be involved in my business. This business is serving people; it needs you to have good communication skills and sociability. My husband is too quiet and he does not understand how to make *guanxi* or communicate with people.
>
> ...
The business is going well now. I have enough money for my family. In the future, when my daughter is growing up to go to the university, my husband might get fed up with his house-husband role, he might want to run his own business or look for a job, I would definitely support him. But not now, in our family, I need him, my daughter needs him.

These comments suggest Lily has reconciled herself to the work-family conflicts and has suppressed her maternal instinct in wanting to be a full time mother. She obviously gains great strength from the knowledge and reassurance that her daughter is safe and well cared for. Her own success appears to mask any concerns about any social stigma attached to her husband’s role. Whether her husband is happy and comfortable with his role is difficult to establish however, as Lily does not make any comments or raise any concerns about arguments or disagreements, we can assume her husband is not unhappy with his role in life.

6.3.3 Discussion

As with the previous interviewee in this time frame, Lily was not driven by financial needs, indeed, the opposite can be said to be true. She was earning a good income working with the print company and had a good standard of living. Similarly, Lily had no burning desire to be an entrepreneur and being a career woman suited her. The main driving force appears to have been the need to escape from a work-life conflict and her need for self-respect. The decision to set up her own business would appear to be her desire to be mistress of her own destiny and not be controlled by the demands of others. Her choice of business area suggests Lily is a very perceptive woman. She used her experience of entertaining clients to observe other business models and analysed their success and potential. She also used her own knowledge of guanxi to help her set up and develop the business. Moreover, she used her considerable sales and marketing experience to develop a successful business model.
Lily appears to be managing the work-family conflict well. There does not appear to be any negative influence from her husband and their respective roles in the marriage appear well suited to each personality. The subject of feeling guilty about leaving a small child to be cared for by her husband is present, but her comments suggest it not a major issue and the absence of any comments regarding family disputes or arguments suggests her husband is content with his role in the marriage. Lily is obviously enjoying being an entrepreneur as evidenced by her desire to grow the business. She appears to enjoy running a business and finds this significantly more interesting than running a home and her reference to domestic chores suggests she would not be well suited to being a full time mother and house-keeper. Having her husband deal with all the domestic issues and especially looking after their daughter enables Lily to focus on her business and dedicate her time and efforts in growing the business.

6.4 Sumei’s story

6.4.1 Introduction

I interviewed Sumei through a recommendation of a personal friend who had informed me that she was from a rich family. My perception, based on my previous negative experiences with similar individuals, was that she must be very powerful, aggressive and arrogant. After a few attempts to arrange a date and the time to meet Sumei through my friend, I finally met her in her office. My first impression contradicted by initial perception and she looked very gentle and friendly and I would say she looked more like a primary school teacher than a business woman. Her appearance belied the fact is she is an entrepreneur who has been involved in significant investments in Media and property around Beijing.

Sumei set up her company in July 2008 focusing on real estate and media investments. Prior to becoming an entrepreneur, she worked for a state run power station and was involved in several government controlled projects. She
attended university where she gained her first degree in Thermal Fusion Power Generation and subsequently an MBA. In 2010, when I interviewed her, she employed 140 staff. In the following section, Sumei’s narrative with interpretation will be presented using four main themes—Higher expectation & Motivation, Guanxi & Success, Maids & Work-Family, and The Future, which are related to the aims and objectives of the research, followed by discussion about the findings.

6.4.2 Narrative and interpretation

Higher expectation & Motivation

Sumei was born in 1967 in the south of China and her parents were workers in a local state manufacturing business. She is the youngest child and only daughter in her family of 3 children. During her childhood, the living conditions were poor and her parents had to work hard to earn money to support three children. Therefore, her mother became what is often referred to as ‘a tiger mother’, as Sumei revealed. Her mother was very strict with her as a child and forced her to study hard. The expectation of her mother was for Sumei to go to a good university and get a good salaried job in the capital city of Beijing. Sumei did not disappoint her mother and when she was 18 years old she passed the national university entrance exam with a high score and therefore was given a chance to study at the Beijing University which is ranked number 2 in the league table of Chinese Universities. Her mother and father and the whole family were very proud of her achievement.

After 4 years university study, she was qualified to work for a national run power station located in the outskirts of Beijing. Sumei quickly established herself in the company and became involved in many different national and international projects resulting in her being sent to America and Japan to study and work for a short period. She was conscientious, worked hard and gained promotion, becoming a leader in the facilities division of the company. She focused all her
time and effort on her career development rather than looking for boyfriends or a husband in marriage. However, she always felt that she should do something greater than hold a position in the power industry. Sumei narrated:

I thought I would not get married in my lifetime and I concentrated on my career. Most of my university friends married and had children except me I was still a single woman by the age of 40. It was by chance, I attended a wedding of my friend , where I met a man who I liked but I did not know he was actually very rich ( Smile). We fell in love and got married in three months. Look, I am 43 and my son is 3 years old already. All my friends could not believe that I have pushed to change so quick… (Happy smile). Perhaps, it is fate.

Sumei described herself as being lucky. She commented that she never thought she would get married to a rich man and she never thought she would be able to leave her state run organization. However, her expectations were completely changed after she married. She has met and known many successful business people through her husband’s network and she realized she wanted to do something different. She also realized that her husband and his network of friends can be an advantage and a useful resource. Although she was a successful career woman, she felt she would like a new challenge in her life and attain a higher achievement. In 2008, she decided to take advantage of the opportunity and she resigned from the Power Company and she set up her own media investment company.

**Guanxi & Success**

Sumei’s company is located in the East district of Beijing and conveniently very close to the local district government building. Her husband introduced her to some high ranking local government officials and he helped her to raise the start up capital to buy a piece of land to build offices for rent and a large media
training centre. The development of a media centre was a project the local government was keen to promote and support and therefore it was easy for Sumei to obtain approval to develop on this land. The local government intended to develop the area as a long term business strategy and also wanted to develop offices and houses for media companies. ‘Guanxi is very important’ Sumei stressed, ‘If I did not have any contacts with the local government, I would not get this piece of land to build buildings’. It appears Sumei had this advantage through her husband’s network. Sumei narrated:

If my husband did not have this kind of network with government, I would not expect to set up my own business, I would still be working for the power station. My entrepreneurial start up is at a much higher level. Perhaps, this is me. Once I do it, I want to be much more professional and have a high level business. I know, my husband would help to raise the money for me. You know, I am just lucky to have him. The business just started in a couple of years; I am still learning and improving.

From Sumei’s comments it not obvious whether she always had an entrepreneurial nature or whether she was presented with an opportunity which developed into a business idea. Just how much her entrepreneurial husband influenced her, is difficult to establish, nonetheless, it is obvious from her narrative that she understood the importance of guanxi and the role networks play in the development of a business. Sumei, frequently referred to her good luck throughout our meeting which suggests she may never have become an entrepreneur had she never married.

**Maids & Work-family**

Sumei’s work and family life appears easier than most of the previous interviewees. She has two maids to help run her home with one responsible for the house work and the other to look after her son. This enables her to spend
most of the day in the office. Her husband also appears very busy as he travels away quite often to deal with business issues in the north east region in China. From Sumei’s conversation, I deduced that her husband has investments in mining companies around China. Sumei commented that her own business is small compared to her husband’s investment in mines. I enquired further about her husband’s business however, I sensed Sumei did not want to discuss this topic and she just mentioned her husband was from a very poor family and he jumped into the business sea in the early 1980s when most of Chinese people were hesitating. Her husband has strong relationships with the bank and government. I could also feel she was very proud of her husband and wanted me to know that her husband achieved his success through hard work. This phenomenon is possibly linked back to an earlier comment about the culture encouraged by Mao, where wealthy people were considered as ‘free-loaders’.

From her comments, I felt Sumei is really happy with her husband and her life. Even though her husband is ten years older than her and she does not need to work, he does not have any problem with her working and balancing her family life. The two maids who stay with her means she does not need to do domestic chores at home. Most of time the maid is looking after her three year old son but she tries to manage her time to allow her to stay with her son as much as she can. Sumei told me that when she goes to the office in the morning, the maid and her son accompany her to the office and she has a private room for her maid and son to play. If she is not busy she can just pop into the room for a just a quick look and check her son is ok, she feels content with this arrangement. Sumei continued:

But, I do not want my maid to look after my son at the weekend. I am with my son. My son is my future and is my new hope. Some journalists like to ask me how I balance my business and my family life? I just say, look, it is easy. From Mondays to Fridays, my son belongs to my maid, but in the weekend, I switch off
any business work, I belong to my son totally. I am a house-mummy only for weekends, not working days.

From her comments it appears Sumei has struck a balance between her work and her family. By allowing her son to stay with her in the office it appears to have alleviated any feelings of guilt or regret experienced by other entrepreneurs. She is obviously devoted to her son and ensures he is not neglected. By splitting her time between working week and weekend she appears to have created a balance between work and family commitments. Interestingly there was no mention of how much time she spends with her husband although she does refer to his need to travel away.

**The future**

Sumei’s says her company still has a long way to go. From her plans and ambition, it appears the business should have a bright future but she commented it would still need further significant investment. Sumei said:

> I just bought the piece of land, you can see from my office window. This land is empty now; I plan to develop new houses with offices to rent. As you see, in Beijing, most of homes are apartments in the high buildings and skyscrapers. My design is to have houses which will be adapted from English house styles, with gardens, people can work in the house with gardens and they will feel like working at home. These kinds of home-office models would be very popular. I know, once I can finish the construction, it will be easy to let out. I know the market demand.

When Sumei talked about her future plans, I could identify excitement in her eyes and I could sense her confidence in her business model. She invited me back to meet her in two years time to see her houses. I was not able to determine what the level of investment had been to set up the business or what
the level of new investment would be to develop her future plans. However, it would appear her husband’s connection will ensure she can receive the required funding. Sumei expresses confidence in her business plan, however, is this confidence based on her belief that her properties will sell and make a profit or it based on the knowledge that her husband could under-write the project?

6.4.3 Discussion

Sumei had a strong work ethic instilled in her from a very young age and her mother was obviously a dominant force in her early life and pushed her to succeed. This determination to succeed enabled her to gain a good education by attending a top university which in turn led to her gaining employment in a secure state run industry. The work ethic combined with her knowledge led to promotion but interestingly Sumei’s comments suggest she was not content in her career.

Obviously meeting and marrying her husband was a life changing moment both in terms of her domestic situation but also her financial position. She was no longer tied to her career with the power company and moreover, she now became a mother. It was not possible to determine what the main driver was in her setting up her company other than possibly opportunism. Though her husband’s network she learnt of the opportunity to set up a development company and also though his connections she was able to acquire land and finance.

Although Sumei had possibly not been exposed to the effects of guanxi in her previous working life, she obviously became aware soon after meeting and marrying her husband. The inference from the limited comments she made about him suggests he has strong guanxi with government and banks. Her narrative suggests she quickly grasped the importance of guanxi and exploited this in order to set up and develop her business.
At face value there appears to be no suggestion of work-family conflict, although there was a slight expression of irritation when Sumei spoke about the media questioning her about her work-family balance, which subsequently led her to emphasise the importance of dedicating weekends to her son. The financial status of the family has enabled her to recruit two helpers to run the home and look after her son, which alleviates potential work-life balance conflicts. Moreover, by providing for her son and his maid to spend time at her office, she has helped to assuage any sense of regret or guilt. Whether this will change next year when her son starts to attend school and therefore is unable to spend time at her office will be interesting to discover.

Sumei appears to be enjoying her new life both as a wife and mother as well as being an entrepreneur. She appears excited at the prospects for the business and appears to be enjoying business life. Having worked continuously for nearly twenty years it may have proved difficult for her to have become a full time mother and house-keeper and there was no suggestion that her husband wanted her to adopt this role.

6.5 Further analysis and reflection

Having presented, commented and discussed the three stories of Jian, Lily and Sumei, it appears their narratives display several similarities and differences. These three entrepreneurs started to run their own business in the 2004, 2005 and 2008, during a period when China continued to experience high economic growth. These three entrepreneurs’ motivations appear different from the previous three entrepreneurs in the first decade period of reforms in the 1980s. In this section, in order to be consistent and following the aims and objectives of this research, I also adopt the same framework analysis as in chapter 4 and chapter 5 and the same analysis model to develop further discussion and reflection on their motivations, success factors (especially the use of guanxi), the barriers (focusing on the lack of capital) and the work-family conflict.
Framework analysis on objective 1: to explore motivations in starting up (2000s).

Table 6.1 Motivations (2000s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Driver</th>
<th>Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jian</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Not content being housewife; Changed emphasis;</td>
<td>Pull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son grow up</td>
<td>Self-achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Start Business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>Sales woman</td>
<td>Unsatisfied ; Not content with work demands;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fed up with business</td>
<td>Self-achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>entertainment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Start Business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumei</td>
<td>Professional woman</td>
<td>Not content with career; Changed emphasis;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Met husband</td>
<td>Self-achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Start Business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

Unlike all the 1980s entrepreneurs and two of the 1990s entrepreneurs, the main motivation appears to be self-achievement and fulfilment. All three had no financial pressures and therefore were not driven by poor living conditions, family needs or a desire to escape poverty. Two of the three had successful careers but did not feel content in their work whilst one was not content with her domestic role.
Framework analysis on objective 2: to uncover factors which help them to succeed (2000s).

Table 6.2 Success factors (2000s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jian</td>
<td>Determination&lt;br&gt;Market demand&lt;br&gt;Guanxi</td>
<td>Prepared to argue with husband;&lt;br&gt;Demand for product;&lt;br&gt;Raised capital and won orders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>Determination&lt;br&gt;Cultural&lt;br&gt;Guanxi</td>
<td>Prepared to leave well paid job;&lt;br&gt;Immediate success;&lt;br&gt;Raised capital. Used contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumei</td>
<td>Determination&lt;br&gt;Market Demand&lt;br&gt;Guanxi</td>
<td>Prepared to change career;&lt;br&gt;Govt policy of expansion;&lt;br&gt;Used husbands network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

All three respondents showed a high degree of determination with Lily being the one with most to lose should her business fail. The other two having husbands incomes to support them. Furthermore, the continued high level of growth in the Chinese economy helped all three to establish their businesses quickly and return a profit in a short period of time. Moreover, all three were able to raise start up capital and secure business through their respective friends, families and contacts, confirming once again that guanxi plays a vital role in business success in China.
Framework analysis on objectives 3: to identify barriers and obstacles to business success (2000s).

Table 6.3 Barriers & Conflicts (2000s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jian</td>
<td>Startup capital</td>
<td>Raised 600,000 RMB from 10 people;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work-Family issue</td>
<td>Husband negativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>Start-up capital</td>
<td>Raised 300,000RMB from friends, relatives;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No work-family conflict</td>
<td>Househusband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumei</td>
<td>No start-up capital issue</td>
<td>Raised start up capital from husband;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No work-family conflict</td>
<td>Employed two maids</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

Two of the three experienced issues around raising start up capital and similarly two of the three have experienced little or no family conflicts. Only Jian experienced a high degree of objection from her husband. Sumei appears to have experienced the least problems and conflicts starting her business and balancing work and family life. Whereas, Jian appears to have experienced the highest level of issues. She needed to raise start up capital and deal with her husband’s lack of support and negativity.
Framework analysis on objective 4: to assess the future plans and prospect (2000s).

Table 6.4 The future (2000s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jian</td>
<td>Expand, Family Involvement</td>
<td>Buy new machinery and win new orders; Yes, husband and son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>Expand, Family Involvement</td>
<td>Open five more shops; No, does not want husband involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumei</td>
<td>Expand, Family Involvement</td>
<td>Expand her developments and build new houses; Yes, uses husbands guanxi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

All three recognize the opportunities which exist in their respective sectors and acknowledge the government’s policy of expansion is a benefit. All want to continue to want to grow and expand their businesses and two of the three, Jian and Sunmei are happy to involve their families in the business and Jian especially values their support. Lily recognizes the requirements of the business and the limitations of her husband and chooses not to involve him. All three appear to be enjoying their success and self achievement.

6.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the three women entrepreneurs who started their business in the 2000s have much in common and share many similarities and characteristics, which are illustrated graphically by the framework analysis. The three entrepreneurs demonstrate similar personal attributes. They were all older than the entrepreneurs of the 80s and 90s when they started and all three were
already established in either business or domestic careers. Unlike the 1980s and to a lesser extent the 1990s, escape from poverty and financial gain were not the main motivating factors. Jian’s, Lily’s and Sumei’s narratives display several common themes with the interviewees in the two previous decades. The key facilitator was the social reform environment and government policies and the huge undeveloped market demand. The key barrier to setting up a business during the 2000s appears to be start-up capital and is therefore again, similar to the previous decades. Guanxi also still played a significant role in helping to establish a business, especially in Sumei’s case.

It appears her husband’s strong network with the local government has brought great opportunities for him and for her. Although personal attitudes towards domestic and family concerns appear to be less of an issue, the involvement of spouses in their businesses may be the key factor in this and worthy of further investigation. The key driver of the 1980s, escape from poverty, has now been replaced with a need for self-achievement and higher-expectation. Unlike the entrepreneurs of the previous decade in 1990s only two of the three had a University education although it has not been possible to establish if this played some part in forming their attitudes towards entrepreneurship. Determination and confidence continue to appear to be key factors for success and continuous growth is now a motivation for these entrepreneurs. In the previous decade of the 1990s, charitable giving became a new dimension, however, none of the entrepreneurs in this research period expressed any commitment or made any reference to making charitable donations.
Chapter 7 Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

As stated in chapter 2, the literature review has identified minimal specific research into Chinese women entrepreneurs. The majority of research into women entrepreneurs focuses on generic aspects of entrepreneurship and little evidence that the specific research or conclusions apply to Chinese women entrepreneurs with the possible exception of the push-pull theory. There appears to be limited research into firm formation, business growth or the effects on the Chinese economy. The extant literature, provides support to the theory that analysis of entrepreneurs should be multidimensional.

The main conclusion of this literature review is that there are significant research gaps in the whole area of Chinese women entrepreneurs and these include limitations in scope and lack of detail over the three decades since 1978, namely; little previous research carried out on identifying individual motivations; few studies that focus solely upon women Chinese entrepreneurs; no analysis of the barriers, drivers and success factors of women’s business start up activity; no research into the social context, family circumstances and financial capital issues affecting women entrepreneurs.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the drivers and motivational factors that influenced Chinese women to become entrepreneurs and the influences leading to success in the transitional and developing economy of China.

The first objective is to explore the motivations of Chinese women entrepreneurs in starting-up their business in the transitional and economic reform periods across the last three decades from 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. The second objective is to uncover the factors that led to Chinese women becoming successful entrepreneurs. The third objective is to identify the barriers, obstacles
and effects on the work-life balance faced by women entrepreneurs in setting up and running their businesses.

The last objective is to assess the future plans and prospects of Chinese women entrepreneurs. This final chapter will present the findings of the research as they relate to each objective, drawing connections to the wide literature to indicate where these findings are applicable to wider contexts.

The aim of this chapter is to present and summarise the research main outcomes. This final chapter structure consists of four main sections which are:

First, to summarise the main findings of this research, i.e. the contribution to knowledge, associated with women’s entrepreneurial activity within the three time periods; second, to present the main contributions to the literature in women’s entrepreneurship and also the methodology of studying in the area of women entrepreneurship; third, to point out the limitations of this research and the research method being used as well as consideration of the researcher’s suggestions for further research. Finally, to summarise this thesis and offer a conclusion.

7.2 Discussions and Summary of main findings

Having presented, commented and discussed in three groups, the nine entrepreneurs’ stories, experiences and feelings in chapters 4, 5 and 6, it remains to highlight certain similarities and differences during the different time periods and to highlight emerging trends. As previously described in the methodology of Chapter 3, in this section, a framework analysis is again used to develop deeper discussion and reflection based on the four research objectives and to summarise the main findings of this thesis.
Framework analysis on objective 1: to explore motivations in starting up (Table 7.1)

Table 7.1 Motivations (1980s, 1990s, 2000s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Survival &amp; Financial needs (Push)</th>
<th>Support family (Push)</th>
<th>Self-achievement (Pull)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980s (1)</td>
<td>Ruibin</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shu ying</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hua</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s (2)</td>
<td>Xi ling</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Li xin</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xue mei</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s (3)</td>
<td>Jian</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Su mei</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lily</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

In Chapter 4, in the 1980s, the motivations of the three entrepreneurs appear to be very similar. In line with Maslow’s Hierarchy, the basic motivations are those directly related to physiological and safety related needs, which constitute a basic push factor (Buttner & Moore, 1997). The main driver of business start-up appears to be the goal of materially supporting the family and to escape poverty, avoid hunger and improve their life standard and life quality. All of the three entrepreneurs in 1980s were pushed into actions because of varying degrees of
poverty, experienced directly or indirectly through the impoverishment of the extended family, and in addition, low living standards which combined created a determination to support and improve their family’s lifestyles.

In the 1990s (chapter 5), it was suggested that the motivations of the three entrepreneurs showed significant similarities, which could be accounted for by their gender in part, but by a range of other factors. Two of the three (Xiling & Xuemei) had previous experience in a state run company before starting their own. Two of the three became frustrated or bored with being an employee. All three desired the autonomy that being an entrepreneur can provide. Unlike the entrepreneurs in the 1980s period, only one of the three (Xiling), appears to have had a strong desire to earn more money to support her family. The living condition of her father appears to have been the trigger to make her act to change her financial situation. Lixin was driven by a desire for freedom of choice after experiencing the restrictions of being employed and Xuemei was driven by her dream of self achievement and recognition.

In the 2000s (chapter 6), it was found that unlike the 1980s entrepreneurs and one of the 1990s entrepreneurs, the main motivation of the entrepreneurs appears to be self-achievement and self-fulfilment. All three had no financial pressures and therefore were not driven by poor living conditions, family needs or a desire to escape poverty. Two of the three had successful careers but did not feel content in their work, whilst one was not content with her domestic role (Jian’s case). These findings support the research conducted by Gupta and Sharma (2011) where they uncovered that women find that they play multiple roles, both in the family and the society. Findings of the research indicate that autonomy and adequate income, flexible working environment, opportunities, empowerment, growth and promotion of societal responsiveness are important factors enabling female entrepreneurs in their endeavours.
To summarise, it has been found that the motivation associated with start-up are different in the first period of the 1980s, compared to the 1990s (period 2) and 2000s (period 3). Table 7.1 illustrates how the Push factor in period 1 transforms into a pull factor by period 3. Poverty and family survival needs is the most common driver for the three entrepreneurs in period 1. However, in the 2000s, it shows women entrepreneurs are eager to be recognised and the pull factor of self-achievement becomes the key driver. Interestingly, in period 2 (1990s), women entrepreneurs are motivated by both push and pull factors which may suggest that period 2 was a transitional phase in China’s economic development. The findings also reflect the changing socio-economic role of women during the research period which began with the changing political policies after 1978.
Framework analysis on objective 2: to uncover key factors which helped them to succeed (Table 7.2)

Table 7.2 Success factors (1980s, 1990s, 2000s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Self-determination</th>
<th>Family support</th>
<th>Guanxi</th>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980s (1)</td>
<td>Ruibin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hua</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shuying</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s (2)</td>
<td>Xiling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lixin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xuemei</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s (3)</td>
<td>Jian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sumei</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

Key: 1-5 = Relevance identified by interviewees (1 = Highest)

In the 1980s, all three entrepreneurs state their self-determination was strong and they were driven to change their standard of life. However, to be successful, self effort was not sufficient and it needed an external influence such as the social environment to change. Therefore the role of government played an important part in facilitating their opportunities. All three acknowledge that Government policy was the enabler which allowed them to achieve their ambitions and bring opportunities. As the government policy opened up
opportunities for everyone in China (Liu, 2008), their success highlights these three women’s strong characters and willingness to take risks. Family support is demonstrated in all cases and highlights a phenomenon which may be typical in Asian cultures (Li et al, 2006) and is worthy of further research. All three were supported by husbands and especially parents and in-laws. In particular, all were able to focus fully on their businesses with the confidence that their homes and families were well looked after. Guanxi played some part in helping to raise start-up capital and in two cases, Ruibin and Shuying, they would not have won the initial orders which helped to establish their businesses without guanxi. Although, it cannot be deduced from this that they would not have ultimately won orders and business, it can be assumed that guanxi enabled this to happen quicker. Interestingly and conversely, Hua’s business, being fast food, became successful from the first day.

In the 1990s, the three demonstrated great self-determination and confidence. Two of the group (Xiling & Xuemei) gave up secure jobs to set up their businesses and Lixin turned her back on the opportunity of employment. All accept that the government push for more new private businesses was a key factor in their opportunity to start a business and its subsequent success. The government relaxation of rules and the provision of financial incentives allowed Xiling to obtain an import license and Xuemei to receive a payment to use as start-up capital. The government policy was also increasing domestic demand in China which is evidenced by the immediate profits made by the three as soon as they commenced trading. All three admitted that they had help from friends and family which was a key factor in being able to start their business. Guanxi again, as in the previous decade, appears to have had an influence.

In the 2000s, all three respondents showed a high degree of determination with Lily being the one with most to lose should her business fail. The other two having husbands’ incomes to support them. Furthermore, the continued high
level of growth in the Chinese economy helped all three to establish their businesses quickly and return a profit in a short period of time. Moreover, all three were able to raise start up capital and secure business through their respective friends, families and contacts confirming, once again that guanxi plays a vital role in business success in China.

To sum up, the narratives and stories of all nine case studies in the three groups of entrepreneurs, highlight 4 key success factors:

- Self-determination and self-persistence
- Chinese culture (family support & guanxi)
- Government policy
- Chinese domestic market

This research has uncovered that a key success factor for women entrepreneurs in China, is family support and guanxi. Being a woman entrepreneur in China is not a single entity, it is the whole family unit. For example, grandparents look after their grandchildren, husbands become involved in the businesses, friends help raise start-up capital and win orders. It can therefore be said that Chinese women entrepreneurs actually run a family business with the head and decision-maker being a woman and wife. This contrasts with men in Chinese society who see themselves predominantly as income earners.

Paradoxically, as we discover in the next section, even with the help and support of family and friends, there is evidence that the women entrepreneurs of the 1980s experienced guilt and regret through not spending time with children, however this appears to have subsided by the 2000s suggesting a change in cultural attitudes. The limitations of this research have not enabled me to establish whether there is a connection to the one child policy which was introduced by the government in 1979. This could be another worthwhile research area.
Framework analysis on objectives 3: to identify barriers and obstacles to business success (Table 7.3)

Table 7.3 Barriers & Conflicts (1980s, 1990s, 2000s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Work-Family conflicts</th>
<th>Lack of capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980s (1)</td>
<td>Ruibin</td>
<td>Emotional guilt</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hua</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shuying</td>
<td>Emotional guilt</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s (2)</td>
<td>Xiling</td>
<td>Emotional guilt + Husband</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lixin</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xuemei</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s (3)</td>
<td>Jian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sumei</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

In 1980s the common barrier for all three appears to be problems raising start-up capital and the common obstacles faced by all were around work-family issues and emotional conflicts. All struggled initially to raise capital and had to use friendships to obtain enough money to start their businesses. They did not ask a bank to help as none had any collateral to offer and they all had to use their personal relationships with friends and/ or family for help. Two of the three, Ruibin and Shuying, struggled to win initial orders which again required personal relationships to over-come. In only one case, Shuying, there was a personality
conflict barrier when she met vehement objections from her husband and her close family.

All three did not encounter work-family conflicts as their respective in-laws were available to look after their children and be home-makers, taking care of domestic chores and cooking. However, as a woman and a mother, they all admitted to having had feelings of guilt and regret at not spending more time with their children. This confirms the research by Carter and Cannon (1992) who stated women entrepreneurs felt guilty because they were unable to fulfil the traditional maternal role, children are considered to be a mother’s highest priority, and working mothers feel guilty for not spending as much time as they believe they should spend with their children. Kim and Ling (2001) pointed out that work-family conflict among women entrepreneurs was divided into three parts: job-spouse conflict, job-parent conflict and job-homemaker conflict.

It also appears that Ruibin, Hua and Shuying in the 1980s group did not have job-spouse conflicts because the three entrepreneurs’ husbands worked and supported them in their business. As previously mentioned, neither did the three have job-homemaker conflicts as the three never worried about their homes because parents-in-law played the important role of being housekeepers. Furthermore, the job-parent conflict appears to have been reduced or suppressed by allowing a close family member, a mother-in-law, take on the responsibility of child-minder. However, all have stated their regrets and feelings of guilt at not spending time with their children and missing out on their formative years. It would appear that the push factor was so dominant in the women entrepreneur’s family which motivated the whole family to work as a single unit.

In the 1990s group, all three would not have been able to start their business without the help of friends and family who raised start up capital and/or supplied stock. Xuemei may have been able to start with just her government incentive payment but she acknowledged she needed help from friends to stay in
business when she experienced cash-flow problems. Only one of the three (Xiling) appears to have experienced serious work-family conflict which seems to have been resolved by inviting her husband to take over day to day running of her business. All have involved their husbands in their businesses and all appear comfortable leaving the domestic work and raising children to others. None of the three commented or showed any anxiety or guilt at not being with their children during their formative years.

In the 2000s group, the key barrier to setting up a business again appears to be start-up capital and is therefore similar to the previous decades. *Guanxi* also still played a significant role in helping to establish a business, especially in Sumei’s case. It appears her husband’s strong network with the local government has brought great opportunities for him and for her. Although personal attitudes towards domestic and family concerns appear to be less of an issue, the involvement of spouses in their businesses may be the key factor in this and worthy of further investigation. The key driver of the 1980s, escape from poverty, has now been replaced with a need for self-achievement and higher expectation.

Two of the three experienced issues around raising start up capital and similarly two of the three have experience little or no family conflicts. Only Jian experienced a high degree of objection from her husband. Sumei appears to have experienced the least problems and conflicts starting her business and balancing work and family life. Whereas, Jian appears to have experienced the highest level of issues. She needed to raise start up capital and deal with her husband’s lack of support and negativity.

To summarise, lack of capital is the common barrier for entrepreneurs in the start-up stage in all three periods and family/friend support is essential in over-coming this obstacle. Furthermore, family support is an important factor for entrepreneurs in removing the barrier to success by alleviating feelings of guilt around domestic issues. The strong family tie which is a well documented
element of Chinese culture appears to be a significant success factor in all three groups but interestingly receives greater recognition in the last (2000s) grouping. Additionally, *guanxi* could be characterised as being a weak tie to a non family member. However, as we have uncovered, this weak tie is nonetheless an essential element to success.

- **Framework analysis on objectives 4: to assess the future plans and prospect** (Table 7.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Retire</th>
<th>Stabilise</th>
<th>Expand</th>
<th>Donate to Charity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980s(1)</td>
<td>Ruibin</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shuying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hua</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s(2)</td>
<td>Xiling</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lixin</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xuemei</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s(3)</td>
<td>Jian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sumei</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lily</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

In the 1980s group, all three say they do not want to expand their businesses further and they are happy with their success and the size of their business. This
suggests they are now comfortable in their lifestyles and the entrepreneurial life-cycle (Hoy, 2006) is nearing or reached a satisfactory conclusion (Hoy, 2006). All showed great pride in their success and all would like to see their businesses continue with some personal or family involvement.

Two of the three expressed similar hopes that they can spend more time with their respective families and the third, Shuying, perhaps expressed a similar desire by expressing a strong hope that her son will take over the business. Generational transfer is often found in family run businesses (Griffeth et al 2006), however, with the pressure placed on young people in China to go to university and obtain a degree, there appears to be few children in the research sample who are seeking to take over from their mother. The common theme about being a good mother suggests that once the three had achieved their ambitions to escape poverty, earn money and provide for their families, the innate maternal instinct has become dominant.

In the 1990s group, all three continue to want to grow and expand their businesses which may reflect the fact that they have been in business for up to 10 years less than the previous decades case studies. Also, two of the three (Xiling & Lixin) want to share their rewards with donations to charities and supporting good causes. Xuemei is still chasing her dream of being an internationally recognised designer. This suggests that these entrepreneurs are mid-way in the business/entrepreneurial life-cycle, but potentially reaching the end of their domestic life-cycle as supporting the family no longer appears a priority.

In the 2000s group, all three recognize the opportunities which exist in their respective sectors and acknowledge the government’s policy of expansion is a benefit. All want to continue to grow and expand their businesses and two of the three, Jian and Sunmei are happy to involve their families in the business; Jian especially values their support. Lily recognizes the requirements of the business
and the limitations of her husband and chooses not to involve him. All three appear to be enjoying their success and self achievement. They are still in the initial stages of both entrepreneurial life-cycle and domestic life-cycle.

In summary, the research confirms that there is a changing attitude towards expansion of the business depending on age which confirms that there exists an Entrepreneurial Life-Cycle. However, their attitudes may also be connected to the reasons behind starting their business at the outset and linked to their domestic life-cycle. The 1980s entrepreneurs, being driven by poverty and a desire to improve lifestyles have met their objectives whereas the 1990s and 2000s entrepreneurs, whose motivations were self-achievement may be addicted to the sensation of success and recognition or may not yet have fulfilled their ambitions. This could also be connected to the changing cultural attitudes towards entrepreneurs which have evolved through the three study periods. In the 1980s, when Mao's philosophy was still dominant, some people considered it shameful to be an entrepreneur. As china moved into the 1990s, entrepreneurs became societally accepted and by the 2000s they became admired.

To conclude, the research has established that motivations and drivers, both in terms of start up and continuation, change as domestic, economic and cultural attitudes change. However the one constant throughout the three decades has been the government policy and support for entrepreneurship. The work-family conflict correspondingly changes as the motivations and drivers to start a business change, however the importance of the family remains a constant in line with the perennial problem of raising start-up capital. The necessity for guanxi remains a constant both in terms of raising capital and winning orders however, the importance of guanxi to win new orders changes as companies become established.
7.3 Contribution to knowledge

I would like to propose that the contribution of this research to existing knowledge is both specific and significant. From the comprehensive literature review and research, it is evident that Chinese women entrepreneurs have not previously been researched. Therefore the research not only adds to existing generic knowledge on entrepreneurship, providing important contributions to our knowledge of women entrepreneurship studies, but more relevantly fills a specific gap in the current understanding and literature on Chinese women entrepreneurship studies. Moreover, as the research covered a 30 year period, it affords some useful historical information which was not previously available. Furthermore, the research methodology and tools used provides helpful further evidence and support to future researchers who select to use qualitative methods and especially narrative tools and techniques to conduct research to obtain data and information. The following will expand on these contributions.

First, on the contribution to literature, as this research focussed specifically on Chinese women entrepreneurs working and living in China, it has provided a useful insight into how culture shapes attitudes and consequently can influence decisions and create motivation. The research also highlights and confirms how government policy can drive entrepreneurial activity resulting in an increase in employment and personal wealth. Although the research covered a relatively small sample of a large research area and vast phenomenon, this research inevitably confirmed much of the generic findings of the many previous researchers into entrepreneurship. The generic motivations and drivers, the opportunities and barriers as well as risks and rewards are all evident in the information which I obtained as listed below:

- The motivation of setting up the business is different in the three periods of 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. The Push factor in period 1 transforms into a pull factor by period 3.
• Poverty and family survival needs is the most common driver for the three entrepreneurs in period 1. Self-achievement by the pull factor becomes the key driver in 2000s.

• Chinese women entrepreneurs are motivated by both push and pull factors in 1990s which may suggest that period 2 was a transitional phase in China’s economic development.

• This research has uncovered that a key success factor for women entrepreneurs in China, is family support and guanxi. Being a woman entrepreneur in China is not a single entity, it encompasses the whole family unit.

• Husbands and grandparents have played important roles with gender as an important concept in this study. Gender is always theorised vis-a-vis men/women, however, in this study I reverse the principle and discuss women in relation to men.

• The conflicts between work and family appears less than in western countries because of husbands and grandparents and housekeepers all being involved in the business sharing different duties and responsibilities and this raises the issue of child care as being a potential barrier to female entrepreneurship.

• Lack of capital is the common barrier for entrepreneurs in the start-up stage in all three periods and family/friend support is essential in over-coming this obstacle.

• Changing cultural attitudes towards entrepreneurs which have evolved through the three study periods. In the 1980s, when Mao’s philosophy was still dominant, some people considered it shameful to be an entrepreneur. As China moved into the 1990s, entrepreneurs became societally accepted and by the 2000s they became admired.
From the previous literature review, it is apparent that much of the research was based on entrepreneurs in western developed economies with more emphasis on male entrepreneurs. Therefore, as this research focuses on women and China where entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship studies are a relatively new phenomenon, the findings are significant. Whilst this contribution is new and current, the sample size being small suggests that further studies into Chinese entrepreneurship and especially focusing on Chinese women entrepreneurship, would be beneficial, worthwhile and meaningful.

Second, this work makes a contribution to the subject of methodology, tools and techniques. This research highlights the importance of selecting the most appropriate methodology and interview techniques relevant to the subject matter and paying significant attention to the culture, history, gender and attitudes which exist in the specific geographic area of research. This becomes even more relevant when the research subject matter is new and there is little or no previous information to provide guidance or support.

Having read Riessman’s narrative research experience, I chose to adopt and adapt Riessman’s five level research model, which she advocates when using narrative approaches in the social science research area. In her book *Narrative analysis* (Riessman,1993), she promotes the five levels as: 1) Attending. 2) Telling. 3) Transcribing. 4) Analysing. 5) Reading. Critical empathy is relevant to the quality of the data one can obtain from entrepreneur and as I stated, I have a deep understanding of Chinese culture and also some experience of entrepreneurship first hand. This critical empathy allowed me to obtain information that would be regarded as private or too personal in many western contexts. I believed it was essential to take into consideration Chinese culture, Chinese language and the Chinese social background. I have therefore been able to utilize critical empathy into my research methodology and expanded on Riessman’s model to seven levels to capture these influences which could have
a potential impact on the validity of the information gathered. See the table 7.1 below.

Table 7.5 The seven levels of narrative research experience and process

Where research using narratives is carried out in a foreign country and information is captured in a foreign language, there will inevitably be a requirement for a ‘Translation’ level to produce the information into the study language, in this case, Chinese into English. In addition, where there are cultural issues which could affect the capture of information, the two levels which
Riessman describes as ‘Attending’ and ‘Telling’ requires the addition of a third level. The Riessman description of ‘Attending’ and ‘Telling’ should be taken as the ‘Pre-Interview’ and ‘Interview’ stages in my modified model with the addition of a third level, which I have called the ‘Post-interview’. This should be used to confirm the narrative data generated and provide an additional level to check quality and robustness of information.

The importance of addressing culture, especially in an Asian country such as China, and in particular the need for establishing a close relationship, is paramount. The culture of guanxi in China necessitated the use of existing contacts to enable a representative sample of interviewees to be sourced. Moreover, establishing guanxi with the interviewees enables in depth questions to be posed resulting in greater detail being secured. As the sample was relatively small (9 participants), a more in depth and detailed investigation was required. Therefore, there is a requirement for more emphasis on the ‘Pre-Interview‘ (Attending) level. This enables the development of trust and guanxi, which ensures the Interview (Telling) stage captures truthful and detailed information.

As this research was carried out in Mandarin Chinese and the participants gave their stories in Mandarin for this study, the transcription of translated data into English was carried out to produce reliable and valid research data. When conducting research in international contexts, the understanding of local culture and language is essential, and the skills of translation are a necessary prerequisite.

In conclusion, the literature review carried out, confirmed to me that using a narrative approach in the research of Chinese women entrepreneurs would be a novel concept and would make a contribution to social science, more especially in the field of entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the narrative approach has significant advantages when researching subjects where historical or cultural
elements require deeper investigation in order to obtain useful data. Finally, the 7 Level model based on Riessman’s five Level model may prove to be a more effective methodology when conducting other types of research using narratives in China or other Asian countries. My deep understanding of Chinese culture led me to conclude that quantitative research tools would not achieve my research aims as the data would not be robust and may not be reliable and potentially misleading.

7.4 Research limitations
Every study, no matter how well it is conducted, has some limitations. I have to acknowledge that there are several limitations in this research. Furthermore, generalising the findings of this research is difficult because the literature on Chinese women entrepreneurs is not well developed and therefore it is hard to obtain any external supporting data to add validity in this study. Therefore, an aim of the thesis was to be an exploratory study with the goal of knowledge development and testing of ideas in this field of research will only be relevant once we better understand the specific factors that are important for women.

First, the limitation research area. Due to time, cost and situational constraints, all the respondents were from the capital city Beijing. In such a vast country as China, there are some cultural differences and government policies differ between the many regions and therefore, the finding may have differed if the research had covered a wider geographical area. I was only able to conduct one, or in some cases two rounds of interviews and therefore, although the study is longitudinal in scope, it relies upon retrospective memories of the interviewees. I would emphasise that research in which translation is required, necessarily means that the number of interviews has to be restricted to a manageable size.

Second, the constraint of the selected sample size and adoption of a narrative approach. I acknowledge that the sample size of nine may be considered
relatively small, however, this was necessary to produce rich contextual knowledge about the detailed circumstances of each entrepreneur's decision making at different stages of the business cycle and family life-stage. Rather than producing a thesis that is a mile wide and an inch thick, the intention was to generate rich case studies across three decades, which necessitated a limited sample of three women respectively. The use of the same methodology with three groups did enable meaningful comparisons to be made. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that there are limitations applying to narrative approaches. Due to the consideration of Chinese culture and guanxi as explained in Chapter 3, narratives are not suitable for studies of large numbers of population as this approach is slow, painstaking and large time commitments are required. Furthermore, they may be considered as only limited portraits (Riessman, 1993).

Third, the information and therefore the conclusions may be skewed as I only interviewed a wife as an entrepreneur and did not interview the wife’s husband and/or children. Their views may have been contradicted or supported by the perceptions of a wider range of interviewees. If the time allowed, I would have not only interviewed women entrepreneurs but also interviewed their husband and/or their children to gain different angles and perceptions on their narratives and to establish if the findings and conclusions were altered. The constraints of time precluded the collection of secondary data to support the primary data and the perspectives of spouses, children and even employees may have proved a good source of triangulation had time and resource allowed. Shamir et al (2005) argue that we should compare the stories of leaders with the stories told about them by their family and friends, other work colleagues and competitors. This would provide a more rounded view of the entrepreneur to establish if they are telling a story to create a legacy effect or for some other reason.
7.5 Further research

Based on the statement of research limitations and restrictions, the researcher has to state that the main findings and outcomes of this research are only discovered in the area of Beijing and it does not present the whole population of Chinese women entrepreneurs in China. Therefore, one area for potential future research resulting from the limitation discussed above, is to expand the investigation into other regions and areas in China. A comparative study between entrepreneurs within other cities or regions including Special Economic Zones vis a vis those outside may make a useful contribution to the research area. The second issue would consider the use of mixed research methods, for example a quantitative survey could be applied as a follow up to this research to obtain a greater population and larger sample size and to test certain theories that have been illuminated by this study. Thirdly, during my literature review I found no evidence from previous researchers into entrepreneurship, that love has been identified as a motivational factor and whilst it could be argued that wanting to improve one’s family's life style and circumstances is underpinned by family affection, it has not been established whether this is due to family loyalty and respect or to personal love, as Xiling’s case has highlighted. This gap in entrepreneurship research and published literature may also be worthy of further research. Fourthly, several interviewees draw interesting comparisons between their own characters and that of their spouses, including their personality traits. Whether an outgoing personality is a reflection of self-confidence and whether these are attributes of an entrepreneur may also deserve further investigation. Finally, the push-pull factors highlighted the key motivations of the entrepreneurs and uncovered their attitudes to risk. However, the research was not able to determine if there is a correlation between risk and personal situation and further research to uncover if there is less risk when you have less to lose or if there is less risk when you have a safety net of a fall back position, could make a useful contribution.
7.6 Conclusion

From an academic viewpoint, this research is a pioneering longitudinal study of Chinese women entrepreneurs that focuses specifically on the government economic reform period of 1980, 1990s and to the present. The study has made a new contribution to entrepreneurship studies in general and specifically to our knowledge of women entrepreneurship in transitional economies. From an economic viewpoint, this research could be used to help formulate government policy where further entrepreneurship is to be encouraged and developed, such as providing a start-up capital loan, providing more facilities for childcare and more training for women. The research evidence clearly demonstrates that government economic changes encouraged the development of entrepreneurship both directly, where workers were supported with grants to take over the running of state businesses, and indirectly where the relaxation on business ownership were introduced.

The study aims, to investigate the drivers and factors that influence Chinese women’s entrepreneurial success in China and particularly, to explore the motivations of Chinese women entrepreneurs in starting-up their business in the reform periods across the last three decades, has been met. A total of nine Chinese women entrepreneurs in three groups who set up their own business in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s were investigated for an in-depth interview using narrative approaches in a qualitative research methodology. The main findings show how Chinese culture, government policy and massive domestic market demand have influenced and affected Chinese women’s entrepreneurial identity and motivation. I therefore conclude that this research has met the original aims and objectives and whilst accepting the limitations of this research, offer this thesis to support existing knowledge and stimulate further research into gender specific entrepreneurship.
On a personal level, this project has also been an interesting journey from being an entrepreneur to an academic researcher focussing on entrepreneurship studies. Since starting this research in 2009, my personal experience has given me a better understanding about being an entrepreneur, especially being an entrepreneur in China with its cultural and political differences from the West. Prior to starting this research, I was only familiar with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, a Theory of Human Motivation in Psychology as was stated in the chapter 1.2. Through this research, I now better understand the pull factor of self achievement and why I personally chose to leave a secure job and was eager to run a cultural training company in China.

Furthermore, in my brother’s case, I understand the push and pull factors which played a part in his decision to set up his art design business when he wanted to improve his standard of living as well as his status. Moreover, I now fully understand the push factor of poverty which motivated my mother to open a small business in the 1980s and I have to admit to a sense of guilt about my feelings of embarrassment about her at that time. In line with this research findings over the three transitional decades, I have transformed my attitude from one of embarrassment to one of admiration.

(End)
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Appendix 1 A Consent Form (Chinese version)

英国艾克赛特大学商学院博士学术调研项目受访者声明书

我已经阅读了英国艾克赛特大学的简介和博士生研究员桑顿-温燕女士关于中国私营经济女企业家调研项目的介绍及调研的目的和方法论。

我同意或者不同意参加这次访谈。我同意或者不同意在访谈过程中录音。我同意或者不同意我的名字，我的公司名称及我个人的故事出现在英国艾克赛特大学博士论文研究报告上。

我同意或者不同意我的名字，我的公司名称及我个人的故事用英语在国际报刊发表或者用汉语在中国发表。我同意引用我个人的故事但希望用匿名或者实名形式，不要或者要提及我的姓名及我企业的名称。

受访者姓名：
受访者签字或者印章：
日期：
Appendix 1  A Consent Form (English version)

A PhD Research on Chinese Women Entrepreneurs

Participant Consent Form

I have read the profile of the University of Exeter, the brief introduction of the aims and objectives of this research being conducted by Yan Wen-Thornton.

I agree / do not agree to participate in this study. I agree / do not agree to the interview being audio taped. I agree / do not agree to my name, my company’s name or my own story being used when the data is being written up on this thesis by the researcher.

I agree/ do not agree to my name, my company’s name or my own story being published in English language in Britain or Chinese language in PRC in the future.

I agree / do not agree for the researcher to use my information provided my identity and company remain anonymous in this thesis or future publication.

Signature or Stamp

Full name

Date
**Appendix 2 The feedback and confirmation (Chinese version)**

英国艾克赛特大学商学院博士调研学术受访者问卷总结反馈（可以多选 中文翻译版）

受访者姓名：

**问题1：**您是否对英国艾克赛特大学商学院博士生桑顿温燕女士的调研态度、调研问题及采用叙事讲个人故事的调研方法感到满意？

a. 满意  b. 不满意  c. 不想说  d. 其它

**问题2：**您认为当时成立您自己的公司或者企业下海经商时的主要创业动机（或者原因）是：

a. 为了能在北京生存养活自己  
b. 为了父母，孩子及家人需要  
c. 为了积累个人财富  
d. 对原工作单位或者前任老板不满意  
e. 为了时间上的自由  
f. 为了实现自我价值发挥我个人的才干  
g. 我没有别的选择了  
h. 其它，请陈述：
问题 3：您认为您成功的主要因素在哪里？

a. 我的信念和毅力坚持，坚持再坚持永不放弃
b. 我的管理才华和员工对我的支持与鼓励
c. 我丈夫及父母朋友对我的帮助和支持
d. 政府的政策与扶持
e. 我抓住了好的时机
f. 信誉和诚实
g. 关系
h. 幸运
i. 其它，请陈述：

问题 4：我在公司或者企业初成立时及后来的扩大发展中遇到的主要困难和障碍是：

a. 缺少 周转资金
b. 缺乏管理知识和管理技能
c. 家庭和工作不能平衡，诸如和丈夫的冲突，和孩子及做家务的矛盾
d. 缺少关系
e. 健康问题身体不好
f. 其它，请陈述：

问题 5：您本人及公司或者企业的未来计划是什么？

a. 保持现状求稳定
b. 继续投资扩大规模
c. 压力大计划关闭公司另改行业
d. 决定把公司或者企业卖掉，不再涉足商界
e. 决定移民到海外发展
f. 决定退休，把公司或者企业交给我儿子（女儿，亲戚）或者职业经理人来经营
g. 多做慈善事业帮助穷人
h. 其它，请陈述：

谢谢合作！
Feedback and confirmation from interviewees

Your name:

Q 1. Have you been satisfied with the interviewer's attitude, questions and use of the narrative method (storytelling) for Yan Wen-Thornton's PhD research?
   a. Yes, I am satisfied
   b. No, I am not satisfied
   c. I do not want to answer
   d. Other (please state)

Q 2. What were the main motivations for starting your own business?
   a. To stay and survive in Beijing.
   b. To support my parents, my children and my family financially.
   c. To increase my personal wealth
   d. I was not satisfied with my previous job or my previous boss.
   e. Time freedom and flexibility
   f. To achieve my personal goals
   g. My first marriage broken
   h. I do not have a choice.
   i. Other (please state)
Q3. What are the main reasons or factors being a successful entrepreneur?

a. My personal belief and strong willpower, persistence and never give up
b. My management skills and employees encouragement.
c. My husband and/or parents and/or friends help.
d. Government policies and support
e. I have seized good opportunities.
f. Credibility and honest reputation
g. Guan xi
h. Good Luck
i. Other (please state)

Q4. What were your main barriers and obstacles in running your own business?

a. Lack of working capital
b. Lack of management knowledge and skills
c. Imbalance between work and family, for example, conflicts with husband, children and/or housework.
d. No Guanxi
e. My poor health
f. Other (please state)

Q5. What is your future business plan?

a. Keep current situation and stability
b. Continue investing and growing bigger
c. Sell my company and start to do something else.
d. Emigrate overseas and further development outside China
e. Decide to retire and let my children or professional manager run the company.
f. Do more charity and help poor people.
g. Other (please state)

Thank you for your cooperation!
Appendix 3 Codebook

Source: the author

See next page
**Motivations**

- **1980s**
  - Poverty
  - No choice
  - For living
  - Support family
  - Being my own boss
  - Interests & hobbies
- **1990s**
  - No housewife
  - Unhappy with boss
  - More wealth
- **2000s**
  - More wealth

**Success factors**

- **1980s**
  - Rent & Determining
  - Reliable & Products
  - Parents & Friends help
- **1990s**
  - Never give up
  - Husbands & Friends
  - Waves & Demand
  - Trust & Promise
- **2000s**
  - Opportunities
  - On time
  - Capability
  - Better services

**Barriers**

- **1980s**
  - No money
  - No sales, no guanxi
  - Emotional guilty
- **1990s**
  - No cash flow
  - Weak management
  - No guanxi
  - Emotional pressure
- **2000s**
  - Not enough savings
  - Poor HR
  - Emotional guilty
  - Old tools

**Future plans**

- **1980s**
  - Age and unhealthy
  - Family life
  - Happy and content
- **1990s**
  - Stock market & donate
  - Warehouse & School
  - National branding
- **2000s**
  - New houses & donate
  - Chain shops
  - Purchase new tools & help poor people