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# The Opportunities and Challenges of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership in Modern China

JINGWEI DU

## **Abstract**

Female entrepreneurial leadership is becoming one of China's economic development dynamics. However, the opportunities and challenges for female entrepreneurial leaders are still underdeveloped in research. Thus, this study seeks to analyse the opportunities and challenges of female entrepreneurial leadership by utilising the interpretive methodology from the perspective of cultural psychology and subsequently introducing the concept of "cultural gateway." Specifically, cultural tightness and looseness together often form a cultural gateway towards female entrepreneurial leaders.

This study makes contributions to the research on female entrepreneurial leadership in five aspects. Firstly, a family-oriented culture is explored as a new finding compared with extant research. Secondly, the concept of a 'cultural gateway' is proposed to systematically interpret how the opportunities and challenges formulate. This means that the status of a cultural gateway, such as closed or open, correspondingly becomes a challenge or opportunity for female entrepreneurial leaders.

Thirdly, the concept of 'gender gateway' is inferred from the concept of 'cultural gateway' to interpret gender inequality, which can contribute to understanding Chinese feminism. Based on this point of view, this study proposes that Chinese feminism is a transcendence of 'gender gateway'. Fourthly, a model of female entrepreneurial leadership for identifying challenges and opportunities is constructed as a contribution to cultural psychology. Particularly, this model reorganises the four levels of Culture Cycle (i.e., Individuals, Interactions, Institutes, and Ideas) into the relationship between psychological adaptation (at the Individuals level) and cultural gateway (at the levels of Interactions, Institutes, and Ideas). Cultural gateways and psychological adaptations usually interact together and formulate a coupling structure. In this situation, the psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders needs to match the cultural gateway. Both of these determinants will create real opportunities for female entrepreneurial leaders if they are matched. Conversely, if both are mismatched, the determinants will challenge female entrepreneurial leaders.

Fifthly, this study proposes that female entrepreneurial leadership is a practical path for women to realise a transcendence of both self and cultural gateway. Specifically, this study finds that geographic cultures with the properties of cultural tightness and looseness influence the opportunities and challenges of female entrepreneurial leadership. In detail, cultural tightness geographically exists in socioeconomic-developing areas, and cultural looseness exists in socioeconomic-developed areas. Thus, this study recommends that those Chinese women who are in the areas with cultural tightness need to learn from and reference the female entrepreneurial leaders who have business foresight and are successful in the areas with cultural looseness to realise their entrepreneurial visions. Generally, this study recommends that policymakers, female entrepreneurial leaders, non-entrepreneurial women, and Westerners transcend the self or cultural gateways with different solutions to seize opportunities and deal with challenges.



The Opportunities and Challenges of Female Entrepreneurial  
Leadership in Modern China

JINGWEI DU

Doctorate Thesis

Business School

Durham University

2023

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## **Declaration**

I affirm that the thesis I am submitting for the Doctorate degree at Durham University is entirely my own creation. This work is distinct from any previously submitted work for a degree at any other institutions or universities.

## **Statement of Copyright**

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## **Acknowledgement**

My supervisors, Dr. Martyn Griffin and Professor Jin Feng, have generously provided me with academic guidance and feedback, for which I am incredibly grateful. Thus, the quality of my thesis can be enhanced to satisfy the requirements for the doctorate. I appreciate my supervisors' perseverant encouragement, which allowed me to complete research on time and promptly.

Professor Sarah Xiao, director of the Durham DBA at Fudan programme, has provided me with invaluable guidance and encouragement throughout my doctoral studies. I am highly grateful to Professor Sarah Xiao.

Xiaojing Shi, who introduced and encouraged me to engage in the Durham DBA at Fudan programme, has shown me the brilliant prospects in my career development. I heartily thank Xiaojing Shi.

Furthermore, I would want to convey my appreciation to my parents, eldest brother, and sister for their unwavering encouragement and support.

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# **The Opportunities and Challenges of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership in Modern China**

## **Chapter I Introduction**

This chapter firstly provides an initial overview of the research background, objective, and significance of studying the opportunities and challenges of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China. Then, this chapter analyses the related and the latest research in this field and describes the research content and design. Finally, this chapter presents an overview of the subsequent sections of this thesis.

### **1.1 Research Background**

Female entrepreneurial leaders' roles in economic development have been underestimated for years. Women-owned enterprises have been growing more significantly since China's open and reform policy (Armanios et al., 2017a) was released in 1979. Although the Chinese government proclaimed a value of equality that "women can hold half the sky" (Zhong, 2010), the activities of Chinese women were constrained significantly in state-owned enterprises before 1979. When analysing women's development in China since 1949, the present study finds that Chinese women's causes were promoted and expanded to the entrepreneurial field after 1979 (Cooke & Xiao, 2021).

While Chinese women engaged in entrepreneurial fields, they subsequently promoted gender equality in various ways. Chinese women held roughly two-thirds of entrepreneurial licences in 1986, for example (Kitching & Jackson, 2002); in 2017, 560,000 Chinese women competed in the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Competition (Xinhua News Agency, 2019). This data demonstrates that female

entrepreneurial leadership develops rapidly and promotes gender equality in China. Without Chinese women's increasing participation in the entrepreneurial field, gender inequality would not continue. However, the gender gap in the entrepreneurial field still exists. Based on the 2019 data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, 3.4% of men and 1.9% of women were employed as entrepreneurial leaders in 2018, respectively (Cooke & Xiao, 2021). Consequently, there is a significant opportunity for Chinese women to participate in the entrepreneurial sector and advance gender equality.

The rise of female entrepreneurial leadership in China has become an unreversible trend. Since the early 1980s, numerous Chinese women have actively engaged in entrepreneurial activities and achieved excellent success (Kitching & Jackson, 2002). However, female entrepreneurial leadership was not officially acknowledged until the amendment of the Chinese Constitution was released. Since then, in the 1990s, 4.6 million Chinese females controlled one-third of the country's rural businesses (Kitching & Jackson, 2002). All these illustrate a decrease in the gender gap in China and indicate that female entrepreneurial leadership has been the dynamic for promoting China's economic development.

Female entrepreneurial leadership in China has also been influenced by globalisation. Concretely, Chinese entrepreneurial leadership has been significantly promoted by globalisation since China entered the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Kitching & Jackson, 2002). This is because the WTO has brought about many entrepreneurial opportunities. However, the Chinese sociocultural context has its own special attributions influencing female entrepreneurial leadership. These attributions mainly contain the social and economic impacts, cultural inertia including Taoism,

Confucianism, and Buddhism, the policy-driven, and the ideologies such as capitalism, socialism, and Marxism.

Decades of economic transition and social transformation in China have resulted in the emergence of female entrepreneurial leadership. These changes resulted from China's open and reform policy in 1979 (Zhang, 2018). In particular, the illiteracy rate of Chinese females aged 15 and older declined from 90% to 7.3% in the period from 1949 to 2017; The life expectancy of Chinese women averagely increased from 36.7 years in 1949 to 79.4 years in 2015; and the number of employed women increased from 170 million in 1978 to 340 million in 2017 (Xinhua News Agency, 2019). As a result of this development of female group in China, Chinese women have gained numerous opportunities to enter into business activities on their own initiative since 2009. For instance, 383.77 billion RMB has been loaned to 6.569 million (person-times) focusing on Chinese women who work or are self-employed in secondary and tertiary industrial sectors from 2009 to 2018 (Xinhua News Agency, 2019). This financial policy has a facilitative effect on Chinese women becoming self-employed. Based on the 2019 data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the proportion of Chinese women being self-employed (38.7%) exceeded that of Chinese men (34.9%) in 2018 (Cooke & Xiao, 2021).

Typically, the development of female entrepreneurial leaders is attributed to economic growth, the generalisation of education, and a shift in social structure, particularly the demographic shift caused by China's family planning policy, which was a birth-control policy requiring one family to only have one child (Cao et al., 2015; Zhang, 2017). In general, the development of female entrepreneurial leadership not only signifies gender equality but also promotes social change (Yadav & Unni, 2016). In recent decades, the



Chinese male population has exceeded the female population (see Appendix A5). This demographic shift demonstrates a gender structural change and a relative scarcity of women, which allows Chinese women to gain a gender advantage. For example, Chinese women are generally treated at a relatively higher level than men in a family.

## 1.2 Research Question

Research on female entrepreneurial leadership in a Western context has developed with the foci of its opportunities and challenges. However, applying cultural psychology to explore the opportunities and challenges has been less researched in a Chinese context. Therefore, this study proposes a research question as follows (derived from the extant literature and delineated in Section 2.2.2.1):

**Research Question:** How do female entrepreneurs identify their opportunities and challenges in modern China?

The research question in this study is divided into two sub-questions: i) How do the determinants influence female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China? ii) How do the determinants formulate the opportunities and challenges in modern China? The first sub-question aims to refine the determinants and categorises them into external and internal determinants according to the determinant's attributions. Specifically, the determinants that relate to contextual influences are categorised into the external determinants, such as the policy, culture, capital, and so forth; and the determinants that relate to the psychological status or mindset of female entrepreneurial leaders are categorised into the internal determinants, such as such as emotions, motivations, and aspirations. As a result, the external and internal determinants of female entrepreneurial

leadership are filtered and clustered through reviewing the extant literature and analysing the primary data.

The answers to the second sub-question contributes to the innovation of this study. This is because both the external and internal determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership often interact and play a facilitative or constrained role in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership. Therefore, the clue to finding the answers is to explore the relationship between the external and internal determinants and role of facilitator and constraints.

On account of the entire research, the two sub-questions have internal relationships. The first sub-question provides the basis and prerequisite for the second sub-question. Conversely, the second sub-question is the reflexivity of and derives from the first sub-question. Therefore, the sub-questions can be divided as follows:

1 How do the determinants of success in entrepreneurship influence female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China?

1.1 How do the external determinants of success in entrepreneurship influence female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China?

1.2 How do the internal determinants of success in entrepreneurship influence female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China?

2 How do the determinants formulate the opportunities and challenges of becoming a female entrepreneurial leader in modern China?

2.1 How do the external and internal determinants interact and further formulate the opportunities of becoming a female entrepreneurial leader in modern China?

2.2 How do the external and internal determinants interact and further formulate the challenges of becoming a female entrepreneurial leader in modern China?

### 1.3 Research Objective

The objective of this study is to identify and understand the opportunities and challenges of Chinese female founders of entrepreneurial enterprise or start-ups. The main reasons why this study selects Chinese female founders as research objectives are discussed in Section 2.2.2.5. In detail, because of the limitations of the extant research, such as the context limitations caused by focusing only on Western context and the research objective limitations caused by focusing only on prominent female entrepreneurial leaders, this study chose Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) as the research objectives.

In addition, taking account of the feasibility and convenience of the data collection, this study interviewed the Chinese female founders whose enterprise was moved from China to a Chinese-operated industrial park in Cambodia. Because of the US-China trade friction since 2018, moving enterprises to South-East Asia, particularly Cambodia, became a necessary way for survival. As I worked in that Chinese-operated industrial park in Cambodia (Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone), I can frequently communicate with them and conveniently interview them.

### 1.4 Research Significance

As mentioned, the US-China trade friction shows that institutional uncertainty is inevitable for female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China. However, this uncertainty often leads to a situation with both opportunities and challenges. Existing research has not yet investigated why it is difficult for Chinese women to recognise

entrepreneurial opportunities and overcome obstacles. Consequently, investigating the opportunities and challenges becomes necessary for female entrepreneurial leaders in contemporary China.

Even though leaders' success is attributed to their self-efforts, competitive abilities, and attainments, Western scholars argue that two prerequisites are attributed to innate endowments: i) the success or failure of their parents, and ii) their gender (March & Weil, 2005, p. 117). However, this argument generates controversies in interpreting female entrepreneurial leadership. Firstly, their research cannot explain why female entrepreneurial leadership is emerging worldwide, especially in contemporary China. Secondly, the research ignores the different impacts of social norms and social order on women and men.

The two prerequisites are neither sufficient nor necessary conditions for female entrepreneurial leadership success. Firstly, although past research illustrates that individuals with successful parents tend to be more successful than others who have less successful parents (March & Weil, 2005, p. 117), many unsuccessful individuals have successful parents. Secondly, although extant research demonstrates that men are typically more successful than women (March & Weil, 2005, p. 117) in the entrepreneurial field, it demonstrates a gender gap and raises a question of how the gender gap affects entrepreneurial success.

Research on female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China has developed slowly, and its significance has not attracted scholars' attention. In a practical view, one of the most critical problems is that Chinese women often encounter barriers in identifying and further seizing entrepreneurial opportunities. The second most important problem is that even when Chinese women identify entrepreneurial opportunities, they still face

many challenges that impede their mindset and action. Both problems can be ascribed to the interactive influences of the cultural gateway (as reported in Section 1.5, also see Appendix A4) and psychological adaptation (i.e., cognitive-evaluative and affective-emotional well-being) (Lent, 2004; Perera & McIlveen, 2014) from the perspective of cultural psychology. Consequently, this study references the two concepts to explore the opportunities and challenges of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China.

Historically, women's personal development in modern China was constrained to a family or state-owned enterprises. Since private enterprises were illegal in the PRC from 1949 to 1979 (Kitching & Jackson, 2002), entrepreneurial leadership was impossible. However, private businesses have been permitted due to the decentralisation of the economy after 1979 (Morrison, 2019). As a result, entrepreneurial leadership has emerged and spread (Kitching & Jackson, 2002). Subsequently, Chinese women's personal development and value in the entrepreneurial field makes this study meaningful in understanding female entrepreneurial leadership.

### 1.5 Research Content and Research Design

Female leadership is not isolated but integrated with other aspects of business, such as strategy and organisation. Therefore, business management would operate normally and stably only when leadership, strategy, and organisation formulate an integrated system. Since female entrepreneurial leadership is a subdomain of leadership, this study is processed within this integrated system.

Through thematical analysis and application of cultural psychology (Stephens et al., 2014), this study puts forward the concept of 'cultural gateway' to interpret the opportunities and challenges of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China.

When a cultural gateway is opened or occluded to female entrepreneurial leaders, the situations correspondingly become opportunities or challenges for them. This cultural gateway is affected by determinants such as cultural diversity, cultural inertia, geographic culture, social class and family background, government policy, feminism, and so forth. These determinants often have facilitative or constrained effects on the process of female entrepreneurial leadership through the cultural gateway.

This research emphasises both the generality and specificity of female entrepreneurial leadership. Regarding that practical issues and interdisciplinary considerations in the research methodology should be attuned and transformed to specific social situations (Gilbert, 2007; Hundleby, 2021), the generality of this study pervades domains such as female entrepreneurial leadership, entrepreneurial leadership, and leadership. From the standpoint of cultural psychology, this study identifies and differentiates female entrepreneurial leadership's specificity. Thus, from the relational construct of concepts, this study explores the commonality of three domains: feminism, entrepreneurship, and leadership.

Firstly, in the domain of feminism, this study investigates the gender influences of cultural gateways on female entrepreneurial leaders and proposes a concept 'gender gateway'; Secondly, in the domain of entrepreneurship, this study explores the influences of cultural gateways on innovation, risk-taking, and social responsibility; Thirdly, in the domain of leadership, this study discusses how female entrepreneurial leaders influence the followers by creating a family-oriented organisational culture; Fourthly, this study explores the intersected properties (Gilbert, 2007; Hundleby, 2021) of the three domains mentioned above. Therefore, this study demonstrates the generality and particularity of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China.

## 1.6 Thesis Synopsis

The subsequent sections of this thesis are organised as follows: chapter II is the literature review, which provides a systematic analysis of female entrepreneurial leadership. The first section compares the contextual influences on female entrepreneurial leadership in the Western and Chinese contexts. Then this chapter refines the opportunities and challenges that those female entrepreneurial leaders faced in a China context through a funnel filtering method: reviewing literature from entrepreneurship to entrepreneurial leadership and then to female entrepreneurial leadership.

In particular, chapter II analyses the practical development of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China by focusing on the items of the Chinese context, Chinese policy, institutional transition, and cultural inertia. Finally, this chapter analyses the theoretical framework, such as feminism and cultural psychology, and the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership. This systematic analysis identifies the research gap and puts forwards the research questions.

Chapter III, “Research Methodology”, identifies the research context and chooses interpretivism as the research philosophy. Specifically, this chapter includes samples, research procedures, interviews, and analytical frameworks. To ensure research rigour and relevance, during the interview process, this study paraphrases the research questions to alleviate the social desirability bias when participants try to amend answers to be consistent with prevalent social norms (Neuman, 2014, p. 330). Then, this chapter clarifies the researcher’s role, and research quality. Finally, this research was designed by following the ethical code to obey the research ethics.

Part IV, “Results”, addresses the research questions by employing Nvivo software and a thematic analysis approach (Campbell et al., 2017; Smith et al., 1992) to analyse the primary data. Then, this study seeks interpretations amid the theoretical framework (Neuman, 2014, p. 114) of feminism and cultural psychology (e.g., Di Santo et al., 2022; Dimant et al., 2022; Gelfand, 2012, 2021; Gelfand et al., 2020; Gelfand et al., 2017; Gelfand & Lun, 2013; Gelfand et al., 2006; Markus et al., 1982; Markus & Oyserman, 1989; Markus, 2021; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Markus & Kitayama, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 2010a) to find the social influences (Neuman, 2014, p. 114) and implications. Specifically, this chapter assesses the value of female entrepreneurial leadership and then continually analyses female entrepreneurial leadership by focusing on the entrepreneurial type, entrepreneurial process, and entrepreneurial mortality from an organisational and strategic perspective. Secondly, this chapter studies the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership across the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels.

Chapter V, the “Discussion”, introduces the concepts of “cultural gateway” (e.g., Fiske & Markus, 2012; Stephens et al., 2014) and “psychological adaptation” (e.g., Berry et al., 2002; Berry et al., 1994; Perera & McIlveen, 2014) to propose a model of female entrepreneurial leadership for coping with challenges and opportunities. Then, this chapter discusses determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership across the four levels of the CulturalCycle: the individual level, the interaction level, the institutional level, and the idea level. Finally, this chapter proposes some implications and recommendations for relevant stakeholders.

Chapter VI, the “conclusion”, firstly clarifies the basic outcomes and the research summaries to interpret the opportunities and challenges those female entrepreneurial



leaders faced in modern China. Then, the research contributions to academic literatures, policies, and managerial practices are refined systematically. Finally, this chapter assesses the research limitations and illuminates the direction of future research.

## **Chapter II. Literature Review**

This chapter of the thesis synthesises and analyses the mainstream articles on female entrepreneurial leadership. Specifically, this study adopts a thematic approach to analyse the practical and theoretical development of female entrepreneurial leadership in Western and modern Chinese contexts. Finally, this chapter refines the literature of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China to clarify the research gap.

### **2.1 The Practical Development of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership**

This study firstly reviews the practical development of female entrepreneurial leadership in both Western and Chinese contexts. To an extent, female entrepreneurial leadership developing in a Western context is a precedent to that emerging in a Chinese context. However, each displays various developments due to the influence of sociocultural differences.

#### **2.1.1 The Practical Development of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership in a Western context**

This section analyses the development of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial leadership, and female entrepreneurial leadership in a Western context. To date, most studies published on gender and entrepreneurship have become the mainstream of research on female entrepreneurial leadership.

#### 2.1.1.1 Entrepreneurship in a Western context

Entrepreneurship is recognised as a kind of leadership. However, disputes on the definition of leadership still exist among academics, mainly focusing on whether it is a shared specialised role or an influencing process (Yukl, 2013). From the perspective of a specialised role, social identity theory is used to clarify entrepreneurship as a social group within the same categorisation to achieve group identification and resultant differentiation from other social groups (Hett et al., 2020). From the perspective of influencing processes, behaviour science is used to define the concept. This means entrepreneurship is recognised as a process from the intentionality of the entrepreneur to behavioural results, such as transforming knowledge into business outcomes (Obschonka et al., 2012). However, because entrepreneurship is a complex concept, these two perspectives only provide a limited view of how to define leadership and do not provide comprehensive and precise definitions.

Entrepreneurship includes three categories: i) business entrepreneurship, ii) educational entrepreneurship, and iii) social entrepreneurship. This study concentrates on *business entrepreneurship*, normally recognised as a type of leadership in specific contexts (Cogliser & Brigham, 2004; Czarniawska-Joerges & Wolff, 1991; Vecchio, 2003). From the perspective of entrepreneurial motivation, business entrepreneurship can be categorised into opportunity-based and needs-based entrepreneurship (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017) (see Table 1). In academic fields, these two types of entrepreneurs are the mainstream of research.

Table 1 Entrepreneurial Type (Literature)

Entrepreneurship Type	Detail
Opportunity-based	Pursuing belongingness and love, esteem and, self-actualisation
Needs-based	Physiological needs and safety needs

Source: Coffiman and Sunny (2021)

In practical situations, business entrepreneurs often have standard features, such as being more risk tolerant and flexible (Ruvio et al., 2010). On the one hand, business entrepreneurs need to take risks when they face institutional uncertainty. On the other hand, the flexibility of business entrepreneurs is necessary to match the institutional uncertainty (Ruvio et al., 2010) with a quick response. Therefore, business entrepreneurs should be capable of competitive belligerency (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Ruvio et al., 2010) and be full of enterprising spirit (Covin & Slevin, 1991; Ruvio et al., 2010) for business survival and sustainability.

#### 2.1.1.2 Entrepreneurial leadership in a Western context

Entrepreneurial leadership has been developed for decades in a Western context. To date, research on entrepreneurial leadership has also been developing accordingly. Current research has surpassed predominately descriptive explorations and achieved conceptual frameworks (Henry et al., 2015). Hence, this section analyses entrepreneurial leadership starting from conceptual recognition as follows.

##### 2.1.1.2.1 Conceptual Recognition

From the above analysis of concepts of entrepreneurship as discussed in Section 2.1.1.1, *entrepreneurial leadership* is recognised as the ability to ensure stakeholders

effectively manage resources through the behaviours of seeking opportunities and advantages (Ireland et al., 2003, p. 971; Subramaniam & Shankar, 2020, p. 8). This conceptual recognition of entrepreneurial leadership scopes entrepreneurial leaders' ability, approaches, and purposes. From a processual perspective, entrepreneurial leadership refers to the active process of presenting a vision, obtaining commitments from followers, and accepting risk when confronting opportunities that result in the efficient use of available resources, as well as the discovery and utilisation of new resources in accordance with the leadership vision (Hejazi et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2015). This definition reveals how business entrepreneurs exert their ability in the entrepreneurial process.

#### 2.1.1.2.2 Abnormal Behaviour of Entrepreneurial Leadership

The preconditions of entrepreneurial leaders for launching enterprises often are the combinations of both personal skills and indeterminate return (Astebro et al., 2014, p. 49; Ireland et al., 2003, p. 971; Knight, 1921; Subramaniam & Shankar, 2020, p. 8). However, entrepreneurial leaders sometimes engage in the unprofitable activities (Astebro et al., 2014, pp. 49, 50). These abnormal behaviours of entrepreneurial leaders are not concordant with the common sense of pursuing profitable returns and the expected utility. However, the abnormal behaviours conform to the prospect theory and the risk aversion theory (e.g. Opper et al., 2017; Pollatsek & Tversky, 1970; Tversky & Kahneman, 1982, pp. 463-489; Tversky et al., 1982) from a perspective of behavioural economics (e.g. Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Thus, this study supposes that there would be a special pursuit with higher significance than the profitable returns, which may be related to the intangible aspects of entrepreneurial leadership.

### 2.1.1.3 Female Entrepreneurial Leadership in a Western context

Female entrepreneurial leadership has been recognised when female-led entrepreneurial activities have become economically more potent in the past decades. As a result, the United States had 9.1 million woman-led businesses by 2018, growing at a rate 1.5 times faster than other small businesses over the previous 15 years (Gleeson, 2019). The rapid growth rate of women-owned businesses provides research evidence for scholars to reassess the traditional hypothesis of female underperformance compared with male counterparts from a perspective of postmodern feminist epistemology (Dean et al., 2019). On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders' contribution to economic growth is required to be explored and analysed through a metanarrative approach. Furthermore, the contribution of female entrepreneurial leaders is embodied in the fact that the rise of female entrepreneurial leadership has broken through the boundaries of industries. For instance, female-owned entrepreneurial enterprises have been distributed globally in every industry of the economy (Kuratko, 2007). In addition, by 2012, female entrepreneurial leaders had extended their range from hair salon owners to high-tech fanciers (VanderBrug, 2013). The extended industrial scope of female entrepreneurial leaders suggests an increasing gender equality in contributing to socioeconomic development. All the above data demonstrates that female entrepreneurial leadership has become a strong force in reformulating the economic world and social recognition.

Why is female entrepreneurial leadership emerging in a Western context? Firstly, the shift towards a more feminist perspective in Western culture promotes women's awakening of group sense. Feminism is essentially the thought and sociopolitical movement to discover, comprehend, and reduce gender inequality (Pollard, 2009, p.

29). The feminist movement objectively promotes female entrepreneurial leaders' self-awareness and self-realisation. After a decade of development, the latest feminist movement has progressed into entrepreneurial feminism, which concentrates on the structural challenges in female entrepreneurial leaders' access to resources such as financial capital (Ughetto et al., 2020). The emergence of entrepreneurial feminism suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders are noticing the systematic and macro barriers at the institutional and idea level that they confront in entrepreneurial activities. Inspired and encouraged by feminism, Western women can legitimately pursue their rights to gender equality in their career development. Consequently, the present study is processed through the lens of postmodern feminist epistemology.

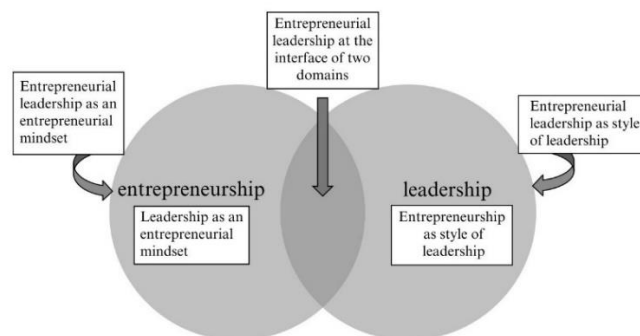
Secondly, women's improved aspirations and intentions to pursue the entrepreneurial dream can contribute to this emerging female entrepreneurial leadership. In detail, their entrepreneurial dreams contain equal opportunity, economic growth, and upward mobility (Kuratko, 2007). As a result, female entrepreneurial leadership has emerged rapidly worldwide in recent years. For example, 49% of new companies in the United States were created by women in 2021, up from 28% in 2019 (Masterson, 2022). This statistical data suggests a change from gender inequality to proximately gender equality in entrepreneurial fields in the United States. This achievement of female entrepreneurial leaders in the Western context is far higher than that of their counterparts worldwide. Specifically, women lead one-third of high-growing enterprises globally and one-third of innovative enterprises worldwide by 2021 (Wilson, 2023) Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders play a central role in the dynamics of economic development worldwide (Harrison & Leitch, 1994; Kuratko, 2007; Leitch et

al., 2013, p. 347). Consequently, women’s improved aspirations and intentions in entrepreneurial fields are realised at the individual and institutional levels globally.

### 2.1.1.3.1 Conceptual Recognition

Female entrepreneurial leadership is a compound concept that is derived from two parent concepts: leadership and entrepreneurship. From a gender perspective, this compound concept is inferred from entrepreneurial leadership, which is viewed as the interface of two domains: leadership and entrepreneurship (Leitch & Harrison, 2018) (see Figure 1). Among these two parent concepts, the concept of “leadership” positions itself is at the centre. By deduction from the definition of entrepreneurial leadership mentioned in Section 2.1.1.2.1, *female entrepreneurial leadership* can be defined as the ability that female entrepreneurial leaders cultivate themselves in the process of seeking entrepreneurial opportunity and entrepreneurial advantage to manage resources and achieve organisational goals strategically.

Figure 1 the Concept of Entrepreneurial Leadership

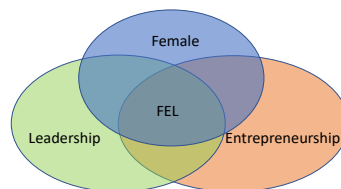


Source: Leitch and Harrison (2018)

This study uses the approach of “concepts and categories” to analyse female entrepreneurial leadership. This is because concepts are the analysis elements of

qualitative research (J. Corbin & A. Strauss, 1990). On account of analysis by Dinh et al. (2014, Appendix A); and Leitch and Harrison (2018), entrepreneurial leadership is viewed as the intersection between entrepreneurship and small business (Röschke, 2018, p. 37) from a practical perspective, which has been researched in few studies (e.g., Ensley et al., 2006; Jensen & Luthans, 2006; Röschke, 2018, p. 37; Soriano & Martínez, 2007). Deductively, female entrepreneurial leadership (see Figure 2) has shared properties of the three fundamental concepts: female, leadership, and entrepreneurship.

Figure 2 Conceptual Categorisation of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership



Source: Proposed by the Author

Through the above systematic comparison of definitions, concepts, categories, and contexts of female entrepreneurial leadership, it is necessary to distinguish between female entrepreneurial leadership and female entrepreneurs (Day, 2000). Specifically, female entrepreneurial leadership is about the behaviours, characteristics, and influences. Female entrepreneurs are those women involved in the process of entrepreneurial activities. Consequently, female entrepreneurs are the subjects and carriers of female entrepreneurial leadership. Thus, research into female entrepreneurial leadership should focus on the external displays such as behaviours, characteristics, and influences of female entrepreneurial leaders and the internal psychological determinants that affect the external display.



Female entrepreneurial leaders are influenced by cultural determinants in a given context. In a Western context, the latest research demonstrates that cultural determinants, such as cultural tightness, influence the mental representations of leaders (Stankou et al., 2022). Due to leaders' mental representation reflects their psychological adaptation, it is evident that cultural determinants can affect leaders' psychological adaptations. Additionally, leadership was found to be a strong force in the process of cultural evolution in human society (Van Vugt & von Rueden, 2020). This present finding suggests that leaders can actively shape culture at the idea level. Therefore, leaders' psychological adaptations and cultural determinants are mutually affected in a given context. In contrast to the Western context, the latest research on leadership in an Eastern context examines the correlation between entrepreneurial leadership and team creativity (Mehmood et al., 2022). This comparison suggests that Western leadership emphasises the effects at the individual level; however, Eastern leadership focuses on the effects at the institutional level. These differences reveal the cultural influences on leadership. Thus, the extant literature shows that cultural influences are a breakthrough point in research on female entrepreneurial leadership.

#### 2.1.1.3.2 Contextual Influences on Female Entrepreneurial Leadership

Individual behaviour is typically influenced by the sociocultural context in which it occurs. At this point, female entrepreneurial leadership can be examined in light of macro-level sociocultural context influences. In a Western context, female entrepreneurial leaders face dilemmas such as the ceiling effect and business-family conflict. At the macro-level, social norms and cultural stereotypes often make women lack self-confidence and career ambition in managerial positions, which further creates organisational barriers and exaggerates business-family conflict (Taparia & Lenka,

2022). Furthermore, business-family conflict is affected primarily by “the stability in workload demands” (Smith et al., 2022). These dilemmas suggest that women are challenged in career development and entrepreneurship.

Female entrepreneurial leadership differs in various cultural contexts. Particularly, the strengths and weaknesses of female entrepreneurial leadership are different between the Western and Chinese cultural contexts. However, it is insufficient to research female entrepreneurial leadership from a cross-cultural perspective (Peus et al., 2015). For example, leadership is recognised as a masculine default in both the Aisa and US contexts (Peus et al., 2015, p. 56; Schein, 2001). However, the differentiation in the cultural dimension and value orientation between the two contexts formulates a breakthrough point for analysing the strengths and weaknesses of female entrepreneurial leadership from the perspective of cultural psychology.

#### **2.1.1.3.2.1 The Opportunities for Female Entrepreneurial Leaders**

Based on the above analysis, this study explores the opportunities for female entrepreneurial leaders from the perspective of cultural psychology. Firstly, the present study on gender differences illustrate that the opportunities are mainly based on the approaches to launching start-ups, entrepreneurial motivation, and educational background (Brush, 1992). This is because gender differences play a significant role in female entrepreneurial leadership (Baker et al., 1997; Mirchandani, 1999). In particular, female entrepreneurial leaders attempt to acquire expected performance by employing excellence, hard work, and diligence for enhancement in Chinese and Western contexts (Peus et al., 2015). Secondly, the continuing learning orientation (i.e., observing peers, reading books, and learning from others) of female entrepreneurial leaders displays

opportunities for their enhancement in both the Chinese and Western contexts (Peus et al., 2015).

Thirdly, the opportunity for female entrepreneurial leaders lies in their threshold of risk-aversion. Usually, the risk is connected with the leader's preference in choosing opportunities, which is influenced by the probability distributions of risks (Pollatsek & Tversky, 1970). This means that female entrepreneurial leaders can in advance assess the risk that would be aroused by the potential projects or businesses. In practice, female entrepreneurial leaders prefer to issue low-risk measures in finance and investment (Hurley & Choudhary, 2020). In addition, the present research indicates that the proportion of women on a company's board negatively correlates with the likelihood of litigation (Adhikaria et al., 2019; Cumming et al., 2015). All these extant research findings show that female entrepreneurial leaders prefer higher risk-aversion in exploring opportunities.

Fourthly, the opportunities for female entrepreneurial leaders often lie in their affinitive relationship with stakeholders. In a Western context, leadership is conceptualised and categorised as being democratic versus autocratic (Lewin & Lippitt, 1938; Peus et al., 2015), task-led versus relationship-led (Bales, 1950; Peus et al., 2015), and transactional versus transformational (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Peus et al., 2015). Through this conceptualisation and categorisation, even though there is no apparent difference between relationship-led and task-led female entrepreneurial leadership (Peus et al., 2015), existing literature evidence suggests that female entrepreneurial leadership styles incline to be participative and democratic (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Lord et al., 2017), transformational, and transactional (Eagly et al., 2003; Lord et al., 2017). From these extant research findings, this study infers that their democratic and participative

leadership styles promote stakeholders to share ideas and facilitate female entrepreneurial leaders to find opportunities. Additionally, the transformational and transactional leadership styles facilitate female entrepreneurial leaders to be prompter and more flexible in seizing opportunities.

#### 2.1.1.3.2.2 The Challenges of Female Entrepreneurial Leaders

The challenges of female entrepreneurial leaders are often attributed to their organisational life. Organisational life, such as management performance and situations, could be understood from a dominant cultural perspective by exploring female subjugation in job roles (Griffin et al., 2017, p. 5). The extant research reveals that female entrepreneurial leaders tend to suffer gender discrimination in various situations, although they have similar socioeconomic background with their male counterparts (Buttner & Rosen, 1992; Venkatesh et al., 2017). Thus, this study in the following subsections explores the challenges of female entrepreneurial leaders, such as social biases and risk-taking, in their organisational life.

##### 2.1.1.3.2.2.1 Social Biases

Female entrepreneurial leaders face the social biases caused by their gender role in the Western cultural and social norms. For example, social biases are often displayed as gender biases, which gradually become a research theme of entrepreneurial leadership (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). Additionally, female entrepreneurial leaders often suffer undervaluation in directive or autocratic leadership (Eagly et al., 1992; Lord et al., 2017). These features make female entrepreneurial leadership challenging in development in a Western context.

In general, female entrepreneurial leaders will inevitably encounter social biases within society. Compared with male entrepreneurial leaders, these social biases lead to complex challenges for female entrepreneurial leaders (Goyal & Yadav, 2014). For instance, differentiated social expectations and attributions and unequal access to resources (Sullivan & Meek, 2012) permeate specific contexts in which a female entrepreneurial leader is involved. All these complex challenges consequently cause barriers to female entrepreneurial leaders, such as unequal earnings and related welfare and occupational segregation (Maurer-Fazio et al., 1999; Bauer, et al., 1992; Knight, 2016, as cited in Zhang, 2018).

#### 2.1.1.3.2.2 Risk-Taking

Female entrepreneurial leadership is challenged by taking risks in different situations. Risk-taking is identified as a critical ability for the success of female entrepreneurial leadership. However, this recognition varies in the Asian context (Peus et al., 2015). This variousness is reflected by the differentiation of cultural dimensions between the Chinese and Western contexts. For instance, the higher levels of individualism in American society (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004; Peus et al., 2015, p. 61) would encourage female entrepreneurial leaders to favour risk-taking and innovation for self-fulfilment.

Additionally, gender is often considered when assessing the risk-taking ability between women and men. Although women often prefer risk-taking to the same extent as men (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1025; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018), the traditional social perception insists that women often have a deficient ability at risk-taking (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1025; Croson & Gneezy, 2009). This extant finding means that women

are still underrated when confronting situations of risk-taking (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1025). Consequently, this study explores how female entrepreneurial leaders are affected by risk-taking.

### 2.1.2 The Practical Development of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership in the China context

Female entrepreneurial leadership is a new form of comprehensive leadership involving contextual scenarios and displaying various leadership styles or behaviours. This means female entrepreneurial leaders are the leadership subjects, which are very much differentiated from the traditional defaults of masculine leadership. In addition, the scope of female entrepreneurial leadership is defined within the entrepreneurial contextual scenarios. These contextual scenarios are taken into account in the leadership models normally (Chen & Bliese, 2002; Cogliser & Brigham, 2004; Cogliser & Schriesheim, 2000; Somech, 2003; Waldman & Yammarino, 1999). This makes female entrepreneurial leadership distinct from other types of leadership.

#### 2.1.2.1 Characteristics of the China context

This thesis argues that the Chinese context influences the process of Chinese women becoming female entrepreneurial leaders. This particular context is differentiated from the Western context in various aspects (Whyte et al., 1977, p. 179). In a practical view, the specialities of the Chinese context are attributed to its characteristics, such as the centralised bureaucratic political system and the sophisticated culture (Whyte et al., 1977, pp. 179, 180). Therefore, research on female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context needs to consider Chinese cultural specialities and their influences on female entrepreneurial leadership.

With private wealth accumulated, the corresponding sociocultural change has happened in Chinese thought. For example, extant research found that the level of self-attentional focus has been rising over time, however, the level of concern for others has been decreasing (Li, 2022). This sociocultural change means that collectivism is decreasing, and individualism is increasing in a China context. Furthermore, this sociocultural change in the Chinese context is congruent with the trend of individualism increasing worldwide (Santos et al., 2017). Although the essential nature of these Chinese characteristics is collectivism, the younger generation tends to be attuned to individualism and rejects collectivism (Ma et al., 2016). This sociocultural change has become a trend because the Confucianism as a traditional sociocultural foundation is undermined within the country by modernisation.

In general, contemporary China has faced socioeconomic problems. For instance, although entering into an era when China becomes more visible and proactive globally (Vangeli, 2022), China still needs to overcome issues such as fertility decline, population ageing, and educational inequality (Hannum et al., 2019, p. 626). These problems can subsequently reflect the Chinese characteristics, including numerous features, which have, in turn, influenced female entrepreneurial leadership. For instance, the sociocultural change that individualism increases and collectivism decreases, making females actively pursue their self-employed careers. However, cultural inertia, such as Confucian culture, also inhibits females reasonably from dealing with family-business conflict. Fortunately, modernisation facilitates Chinese women through education and training to promote them to accept the values of self-improvement (Blalock & Lyu, 2023).

### 2.1.2.2 China policy

The China policy context considerably impacts female entrepreneurial leadership. For example, the policy can impact female entrepreneurial leaders' pursuit of career development (Joplin et al., 2003; Peus et al., 2015, p. 57). Since China adopted an open-and-reform policy firstly implemented in Southern China, the practical development of female entrepreneurial leadership has been synchronised with economic development history in modern China. Additionally, the Third Plenary Session (held between December 18 and 22, 1978) of the 11th Central Committee adopted a resolution (Shen, 2018) mandating China's institutional transition from a planned-economy to a market-economy with an opened national market to Western countries. Subsequently, this policy arouses two significant changes: the market transition in the economic field and the institutional transformation in the social field. These changes show an opportunity for Chinese women to launch their enterprises.

The market economy policy legitimately guarantees the business activities of private economic owners and practically promotes them, including female and male entrepreneurs, to launch their enterprises. However, women are also constrained in the process of socioeconomic change. For instance, females need to balance their entrepreneurial and familial roles in business-family situations liberally (Peus et al., 2015, p. 6; Shu & Zhu, 2012, p. 1103). In this regard, women face more challenges when accessing entrepreneurial activities.

The family planning policy changes traditional Chinese concepts and lays the foundation of Chinese feminism. This is a "one-child" policy, which means Chinese parents cannot emphasise boys more than girls as a tradition because they have no option but to accept the reality when they have a girl. Therefore, Chinese women



acquire almost the same access as men when they engage in society. However, this policy often generates some negative effects. For instance, Chinese couples with a girl generally have a higher likelihood of divorce than those with a boy (Xu, Yu, and Qiu 2015; Zeng et al. 2002, as cited in Ma et al., 2019). However, the extant research found that having more children connects with a lower divorce likelihood (Ma et al., 2019). This means that the family-planning policy leads to the disintegration of social structures. Consequently, significant and adverse life events, such as divorce or unemployment (George et al., 2016; Venkatesh et al., 2017) and parental psychological control (Su et al., 2022), can affect the development of female entrepreneurial leadership.

#### 2.1.2.3 Institutional Transition

Being a socialist country, modern China is differentiated from Western countries such as the US and the UK. Meanwhile, modern China has unique characteristics compared with other socialist countries, including Cuba, Vietnam, Laos, and North Korea. The key reason for the difference and speciality lies in the fact that modern China has been progressing its institutional transition (Wu, 2019) from the centralised planning economic system to the market economic system (Peus et al., 2015, p. 6) via conducting the Open and Reform policies and market economic policies in 1979. Because of this ongoing institutional transition, scholars observed that new venture entrepreneurship has been influenced in a China context (Hemmert et al., 2021a). The extant research investigated how institutional transition shapes entrepreneurial opportunities (Tolbert et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2022). As a result, the entrepreneurial context and opportunities constitute the prerequisites for Chinese female entrepreneurs to launch small businesses or start-ups.

The institutional transition and subsequent marketisation described above have led to two notable changes over the past two decades. On the one hand, social class mobility has gradually reduced and, therefore, has social stratification strengthened (Zhou & Xie, 2019, p. 1810). For example, the saying ‘do not lose in the starting line’ has formulated a social consensus and been popular among Chinese parents. The profound reason is that, though not specific to China, social wealth has accumulated in the middle and upper classes, and they intend to utilise almost all of the resources they mastered to seize almost all the entrepreneurial opportunities. Comparatively, the lower social class has fewer resources to get opportunities.

On the other hand, more entrepreneurial activities have been driven by unidirectional social mobility across industries. In detail, social mobility has increased from agricultural to non-agricultural industries (Leung, 2002; Peus et al., 2015, p. 6; Zhou & Xie, 2019, p. 1810). This has subsequently led to more Chinese females launching an enterprise. This is because the expansion of higher education in China can tremendously promote rural intergenerational mobility concerning occupational-socioeconomic status (Duan et al., 2022). Therefore, Chinese rural women can acquire sufficient skills and resources as well as urban women to realise their career goals. Furthermore, when the Chinese government allowed the state-owned enterprises to transfer to private enterprises, the uncompetitive staff of state-owned enterprises were propelled to be laid off. Subsequently, many unemployed females have had to launch small businesses or initiate start-ups to change their career path.

This kind of social change, including social value change and structure change as discussed in Sections 2.1.2.1 and 2.1.2.2, affects the development of female entrepreneurial leadership. The social value change refers to the Chinese emphasising

individualism more than collectivism (Ma et al., 2016) when they become wealthier. Regarding the increase of individualism in modern China from 1978 to 2017, individual independence has become a personal pursuit for Chinese people (Ogihara, 2023). Therefore, being an entrepreneurial leader becomes necessary for the young generation to realise personal freedom in financial and spiritual fields.

The social structure change means that, on the one hand, China has been entering into an increasingly ageing society; on the other hand, the traditional family connection has been weakened due to the past big family or clan having been divided into several small families. Therefore, the ageing society influences young generations with more pressure on personal development. Additionally, a small family reduces the possibility that young generations get support from the clan because their individualistic tendency often separates from other clan members (Ogihara, 2023). All these issues negatively affect the advancement of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China.

#### 2.1.2.4 Cultural Inertia

Although changes happen in policy and ideology, sociocultural fields, and education, cultural inertia also plays a significant and permanent role in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership. Cultural inertia reflects that societies are dynamic and self-extended entities (Armenta et al., 2022; Zarate Jr et al., 2012, p. 634). Consequently, female entrepreneurial leadership in China is also affected by dynamic and self-extended sociocultural mixtures, such as the Marxist and socialist cultures, the Chinese traditional culture, and the penetration of Western culture. Although Marxism and socialism are dominant cultures in modern China, their impact in society has decreased in the new era because of the insufficient dissemination of socialist culture (Chen, 2022). However, although Chinese entrepreneurial leaders have less interest in paying

attention to it, the official resources and regulations are necessary for their survival and sustainable development.

The impact of traditional culture on female entrepreneurial leaders has also been decreasing. To begin with, the Chinese traditional culture, comprised of three fundamental cultures: Confucian culture (Javidan et al., 2006, p. 82), Taoism culture, and Buddhism culture, has inhibited the development of female entrepreneurial leaders. This is because women in the traditional Chinese cultural context are required to stay at home and take care of their children, not work outside or study (Franzke et al., 2022). However, modern Chinese culture has evolved from traditional to socialist culture and has simultaneously been penetrated by Western cultural influences (Peus et al., 2015, p. 6; Wang et al., 2005). This has subsequently weakened the impact of Chinese traditional culture. However, traditional cultural values, in general, affect an individual's attitude to gender roles at the organisational level (Peus et al., 2015). Consequently, although Western culture and the tremendous success of Western female entrepreneurs have an attraction to young Chinese females, the inertia of traditional culture still influences the motivation and behaviours of Chinese women at different levels.

## 2.2 The Theoretical Development of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership

The extant research typically focuses on female entrepreneurial leaders and their behaviours and characteristics in entrepreneurial contexts. Normally, entrepreneurial leaders mutually interact with the context (such as the China context above) (Amatori, 2010, p. 10). Thus, scholars explore and refine female entrepreneurial leadership among the segments of various contexts. Chronologically, these scholars include Yadav and Unni (2016), Ahl and Marlow (2012), Ahl (2006), Gundry et al. (2002), Mirchandani (1999), Fischer et al. (1993), Birley (1989), and Bowen and Hisrich (1986). This

chronological development is recorded to trace and reflect the theoretical development of female entrepreneurial leadership. Additionally, the concept of entrepreneurial leaders should be more expansive to meet the context of being dynamic and fast-paced (Cogliser & Brigham, 2004). Therefore, this study explores female entrepreneurial leadership by examining how contextual determinants influence female entrepreneurial leadership mutually.

This study applies three contextual lenses to the research context in which entrepreneurial leadership is involved. The first lens refers to the conceptual context. According to this first lens, research on female entrepreneurial leadership should differentiate leadership and leaders themselves. Inferred from the lens of conceptual context, research on female entrepreneurial leadership needs to be distinguished from that on female entrepreneurial leaders (Day, 2000). The second lens refers to the theoretical context constructed by the previous research results (Day, 2000). To date, concepts and theories of cultural psychology have not been applied to explore female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. The third lens means practical context, which includes the latest organisational activities and ongoing development (Day, 2000) in developing countries (De Vita et al., 2013), particularly in China.

Entrepreneurial context can be segmented by its influence scale into national and organisational contexts. The organisational context is composed of various aspects: i) human capital philosophy to maximise the potential of employees; ii) organisational routes which promote entrepreneurship; and iii) strategic vision for progressing entrepreneurial action (Covin & Slevin, 2002, p. 313; Miles, 2000). However, research on entrepreneurial leadership in small entrepreneurial enterprises receives scant attention (Cogliser & Brigham, 2004; Jensen & Luthans, 2006; Leitch et al., 2009;

Leitch et al., 2013, p. 348; Vecchio, 2003) and is, to date, still in its infancy (Jensen & Luthans, 2006, p. 650; Leitch et al., 2013, p. 348). Thus, from the three contextual lenses, applying cultural psychology to study female entrepreneurial leadership in small entrepreneurial enterprises formulates a research gap that needs to be filled.

### 2.2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study applies two theoretical frameworks: feminism and cultural psychology, to interpret female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. Although the two theoretical frameworks afford different perspectives, there is an intersection between them: social norms. Therefore, social norms become a breakthrough point in applying these two theoretical frameworks.

#### 2.2.1.1 Feminism

Feminism has been initiated in Western countries and has undergone three waves in both Western and Chinese contexts in asynchronous periods. This means that feminism's development in the Western context is ahead of that in Chinese context. Although feminism in the Western and Chinese contexts has its differences, the essentiality of feminism in both contexts is its criticality to traditional social norms.

##### 2.2.1.1.1 Feminism and Female Entrepreneurial Leadership

The present research on feminism focuses on the particular characteristics of women: femininity. From a cultural perspective, femininity refers to cultural aspects intersecting with female gender roles (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1024). Furthermore, "gender role" refers to the cultural expectations and norms that distinguish which behaviours or characteristics are attributed to a male or female (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1024;

Eagly et al., 2000; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). The present research shows an understanding on feminism from a cultural perspective and that further benefits a comprehension on leadership as well as female entrepreneurial leadership. From a feminist perspective, *leadership* is defined as the ability to realise transformation, sharing, and empowerment (Du, 2017, pp. 28, 29). Inferred from this definition of leadership, an understanding on female entrepreneurial leadership is to explore how female entrepreneurial leaders behave to realise transformation, sharing, and empowerment.

#### 2.2.1.1.2 Feminist Qualitative Research Method

The feminist qualitative research method mainly focuses on gender diversity, however, it arouses contentiousness and complexity in an academic field (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 282). As a result, mature methodologies and approaches are required to address these challenges, particularly at their intersection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 282). In this case, research on female entrepreneurial leadership positions itself at the intersection of challenges when using the feminist qualitative method. However, this method affords a perspective of gender diversity as a breakthrough point to study female entrepreneurial leadership.

The feminist qualitative method often converges on the practise processes of female entrepreneurial leaders' events, choices, and activities. Feminists argue that gender is socially formulated and recreated via practical processes (Wharton, 2005, as cited in Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Gatrell & Swan, 2008; Stead & Hamilton, 2018, p. 91). Therefore, this study emphasises not only the determinants such as gender and participants themselves but also the cultural and material production (Calas et al., 2009:

555 cited as in Stead & Hamilton, 2018, p. 93) in their entrepreneurial events, choices, and activities.

#### 2.2.1.1.3 Feminism's Relevance with the China Context

Female entrepreneurial activities in a Chinese context generate practical relevance to feminist research. Currently, research on feminism progresses with notable achievement in the theoretical, methodological, empirical, and experimental fields (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 281; Messer-Davidow, 2002). Undermining westernising and homogenising assumptions about female leadership is becoming the latest research trend (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 281). This new trend in research gives a direction for studying female entrepreneurial leadership in China.

#### 2.2.1.2 Cultural Psychology

Cultural psychology provides a new approach to explore female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. Referencing cultural psychology, this study identifies that social norms have become a breakthrough point in the research process. Specifically, individual behaviours tend to maintain concordance with social norms (e.g., cultural inertia). This is because, for instance, individuals who explicitly breach the social norms of their gender roles are considered as deviants and can suffer socioeconomic punishments (Cheryan & Markus, 2020). In general, cultural psychology, based on social norms, deals with the relationship between an individual's internal and external sides.



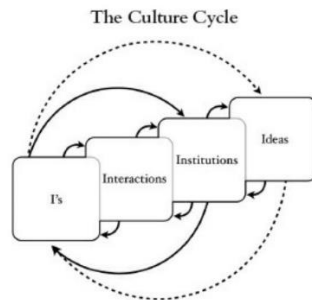
#### 2.2.1.2.1 Concept of Cultural Psychology and its Research Development

Western scholars such as Steven J. Heine, Hazel Rose Markus, and Michele J. Gelfand developed cultural psychology by comparing Western and Eastern cultures. Specifically, Heine (2015, p. 1) described cultural psychology as the discipline of how sociocultural norms practically express, control, modify, and permeate the human psyche, resulting in variations in mind, self, and emotion rather than universal psychological experiences for humanity. Cultural psychology thereby provides a theoretical framework to research female entrepreneurial leadership through the relationship between external sociocultural context and internal psychological response. This interpretation distinguishes and recognises the roles of cultural traditions and social practice in the psychological process and its results for humankind. Therefore, how individuals' psychological responses adapt to the facilitative or constrained influences of sociocultural context becomes the core issue of cultural psychology. Current research on cultural psychology also questions major psychological assumptions about meaning, self-esteem, and how people understand genetic constructs (Heine, 2015). Consequently, cultural psychology is a good fit for this study because leadership research works with these points.

This study references the Culture Cycle, which is composed of four elements: I's, Interactions, Institutions, and Ideas and formulates an irritative structure (Markus & Conner, 2014) (Figure 3). This Cultural Cycle was proposed by Markus and Conner (2014, p. 16) as a theoretical framework to analyse and interpret complicated interdisciplinary phenomenon between culture and psychology. According to this framework, on the upper left corner of the culture cycle, I's (self, psyche, soul, and mind), referring to female entrepreneurial leaders, exert influences through interactions,

institutions, and formulated ideas; on the lower right corner of the Culture Cycle, ideas retroact on the institutions, interactions, and I's. This mutually reinforcing process in interpreting Chinese female entrepreneurial leadership is discussed in Section 5.1.3, Chapter V.

Figure 3 The Culture Cycle



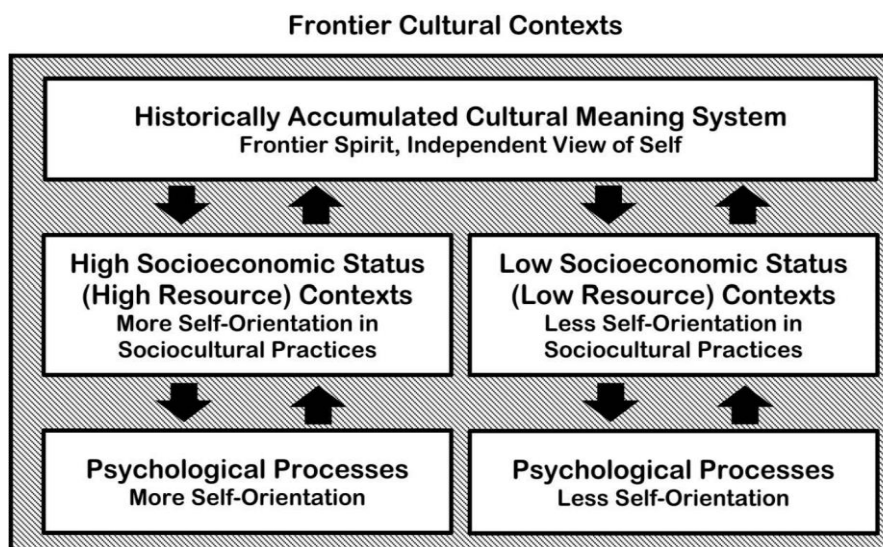
Sources: Markus and Conner (2014, p. 16)

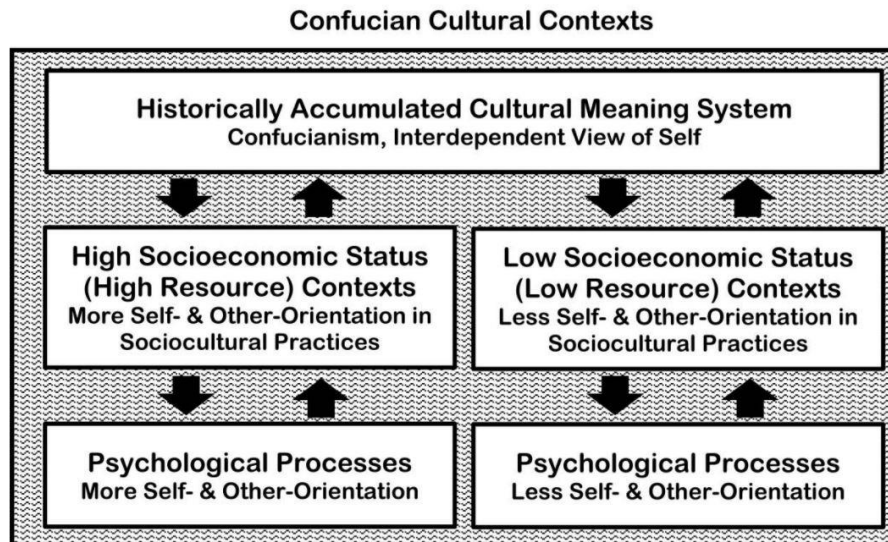
From a cultural perspective, female entrepreneurial leadership exerts influence across various levels (e.g., individual level, institutional level, and so forth.). Additionally, across multiple levels of culture in terms of female entrepreneurial leadership, cultural defaults, especially the masculine defaults (Cheryan & Markus, 2020), show a feasible route to explore the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. This is because masculine defaults impact the cultural fields across multiple levels, further resulting in the gender disparity that permeates society. As a result, conducting systematic research on female entrepreneurial leadership can utilise the cultural defaults within the framework of culture cycle (e.g., Cheryan & Markus, 2020, pp. 1029-1030; Hamedani & Markus, 2019; Markus & Conner, 2014; Markus & Kitayama, 2010b). Consequently, the present study responds to a recent claim by practitioners and scholars on interpreting gender disparities (Barker et al., 2010; Cheryan & Markus, 2020). These claims include gender biases against female

entrepreneurs, demanding access to resources for female entrepreneurs, and discrimination against female entrepreneurs from mainstream cultural values.

Recent research in cultural psychology explored the cultural value orientation by focusing on individuals' independence and dependence and found that the other-oriented and self-oriented cultural values are influenced by social norms such as gender roles and socioeconomic status (Markus & Conner, 2014); Miyamoto et al. (2018) proposed a research model (see Figure 4) of the mutual constitution by researching the relationships between cultural context, socioeconomic status context, and an individual's psychological and social value orientations. This research model shows a feasible route to analyse female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context through aspects of culture, psychology, and society. Therefore, the theory of cultural psychology indicates that this study needs to explore the relationships between female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological processes status and their social value orientations.

Figure 4 Cultural Psychology Model of in Frontier and Confucian Cultural Contexts





Source: Miyamoto et al. (2018, p. 339)

Furthermore, Gelfand’s research developed cultural psychology by exploring cultural looseness and tightness (Gelfand et al., 2006), which refers to the rigidity of sociocultural norms and the severity of societal sanctions (Gelfand et al., 2006, p. 6). Comprehensively, the extant research formulates theoretical frameworks including independence-dependence, cultural tightness-looseness, other-oriented value and self-oriented value. This latest research on cultural psychology in a Western context and the abovementioned theoretical framework “Cultural Cycle” are referenced to interpret female entrepreneurial leadership in a China context in Chapter V.

#### 2.2.1.2.2 Cultural Psychology in a China context

Cultural psychology affords a research route that combines sociocultural patterns and psychological correlates (Miyamoto et al., 2018, p. 438). For instance, through research on the association between socioeconomic status and different types of social values (e.g., self-oriented social values, other-oriented social values) in various cultural contexts (e.g., Confucian cultural context, Frontier cultural context, African cultural

context, Ex-communist cultural context, Latin American cultural context, Middle East cultural context, South Asia cultural context, and European cultural context), scholars Miyamoto et al. (2018, p. 436) found that only individuals living in the Confucian cultural context can have both self-oriented social values and other-oriented social values. This unique characteristic of the Confucian cultural context shows a possible way to find differences between Chinese and Western entrepreneurial leadership.

The unique characteristic of Chinese Confucian cultural context is recognised as a determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China. This is because Chinese female entrepreneurial leadership is influenced by the core value of Confucian culture. Specifically, the core values of Confucian culture is: 'Benevolence' ('Ren', 仁 in Chinese) and social norms ('Li', 礼 in Chinese) (Osno, 2018, p. 5). To some extent, the core value of Confucian is reflected in the traditional concept: 'Harmony between the unification of human and nature' (Osno, 2018, p. 154) ('Tian Ren He Yi', 天人合一 in Chinese). Furthermore, these two core values of a Confucian culture are the principles of Chinese human behaviours.

In the Chinese context, cultural psychology is still underdeveloped. Past research on Chinese culture has focused on its historical development. Sinology, for example, emphasised the evolution of ancient Chinese culture and attempted to reinterpret ancient traditional concepts. However, the traditional Chinese cultural concepts, such as 'Tian Ren He Yi' (Osno, 2018, p. 154) and 'Dao Fa Zi Ran' (Dimovski et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2008), cannot be directly applied to the Cultural Cycle to interpret Chinese female entrepreneurial leadership. Although we can translate 'Tian Ren He Yi' (in Chinese '天人合一') as 'natural laws involve in human beings' and translate 'Dao Fa

Zi Ran' (in Chinese '道法自然') as 'adhere to the natural rules', due to the elementary concepts of Chinese cultures, such as 'Tian' (in Chinese '天'), Dao (in Chinese '道') (Osno, 2018, p. 155), and Xin (in Chinese '心') (Osno, 2018, p. 134), having no counterpart concepts in Western culture, the reinterpretation of Chinese culture becomes challenging to understand by Western people. As a result, this study is constrained in its ability to apply these Chinese concepts to the Cultural Cycle directly.

Despite the constraints mentioned above, there is a bridge between Western and Eastern cultures. This bridge lies in human nature. Shweder (1990) argued that the human mind operates following a set of universal and natural laws (Heine, 2015, p. 8; Shweder, 1990). This means that Western and Eastern cultures share the same set of laws based on human nature. However, different cultural dimensions (e.g., individualism and collectivism, dependence and independence, cultural looseness and tightness) influence cultural psychology to varying degrees. Therefore, this study assumes that the different cultural dimensions affect how female entrepreneurial leadership works.

The application of Cultural psychology theory to female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context has not been developed. At this point, the current study on female entrepreneurial leadership is advanced in a Western context but not advanced in the Chinese context (Yao et al., 2020, p. 222). Given the first principles, female entrepreneurial leaders have particular personal career goals or motivations for their career development, affected by the different cultural value orientations between Western and Chinese contexts. For example, while Western people tend to be independent and self-oriented, Chinese people tend to be interdependent and both self-oriented and other-oriented (Miyamoto et al., 2018). However, in the West, females tend

to be interdependent, and males tend to be independent (Markus & Conner, 2014). Because of this, the theory of cultural psychology can be applied to fit the situation in China.

#### 2.2.1.2.3 A Perspective from Chinese Philosophy

Given that female entrepreneurial leadership in the Chinese context cannot be separated from Chinese cultural influences, Chinese philosophy should be used to investigate the fundamentals of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China. The oldest and most fundamentalist philosophy is the ‘The Supreme Ultimate’ or ‘Taiji’ (i.e., supreme polarity (Perkins, 2019), 太极 in Chinese), which refers to the coexistence of two primal contradicted or contrasting elements in an integrated system. The two elements of Taiji, named Yin and Yang (Osno, 2018), refer to anything with the property of being contradicted but coexisting. For instance, the word “Taiji” can mean “female” and “male,” “positive” and “negative,” “good” and “bad”, and so forth.

The extant research infers that as Yin and Yang are in an equal position in the Taiji system, females and males should be in an equal position in the human world (Nie et al., 2023, p. 238). However, as described in previous literature Section 1.1, a gender gap has existed for a long time in Chinese society from the modern to the contemporary era. As a result, this study questions why the equality thought of Taiji philosophy has not been implemented in socioeconomic practice. This question will be explored in Section 5.2.3.2.

#### 2.2.2 The Research Development of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership

Research on female entrepreneurial leadership was initiated 1976. This is because the first academic article on female entrepreneurial leadership was published in 1976

(Schwartz, 1976; Yadav & Unni, 2016). In this article, Schwartz (1976) interviewed 20 female entrepreneurs and concluded that their motivations were the same as those of males: the need for success, economic reward, independence, and work satisfaction (Mas-Tur et al., 2015). This past research laid the foundation for gender comparison studies.

Research on female entrepreneurial leadership became prominent in 1999. For example, 20 scholars from 13 countries held the first academic conference in Stockholm, Sweden and shared their knowledge of female entrepreneurial leadership, enterprise creation and growth, and further clustered articles to formulate the inaugural edition of the Diana Book Series as the conference achievement (Brush et al., 2020). This conference set a precedent for subsequent academic conferences on female entrepreneurial leadership. Since then, they have held 14 international conferences, which led to 11 books and 10 special issues in top academic journals (Brush et al., 2020). In current times, research on female entrepreneurial leadership has become one of the mainstream research topics in the West (Fasbender & Ang, 2019), which was published as a report by Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Elam et al., 2022).

The extant research comprehensively reveals an overview of research on female entrepreneurial leadership, particularly the practical relevance for female entrepreneurial leaders and the research rigour for the insights of theory building (Röschke, 2018). The theoretical development process shows a demarcation time of 1990. Before 1990, research on female entrepreneurial leadership was only among a few scholars' research interests. However, since 1990, leadership performance has become the mainstream in research on female entrepreneurial leadership.



### 2.2.2.1 Research Themes in the China context

The extant research on female entrepreneurial leadership mainly concentrates on three themes. The first theme is about the motivations and reasonability of female entrepreneurial leadership. Specifically, this theme includes the aspiration that female entrepreneurial leaders make themselves different from others, the inner strengths of female entrepreneurial leaders, and so forth. This theme indicates how female entrepreneurial leaders identify the entrepreneurial opportunities in managerial practices. The second theme is about the behaviours of female entrepreneurial leaders. This theme often comprises how female entrepreneurial leaders adhere to principles and how female entrepreneurial leaders authorise followers. The third theme refers to the barriers that female entrepreneurial leaders often encounter. These barriers often contain the patriarchal or political constraints (Zhang, 2018), a gender bias in social norms, limited markets, networks, and resources (Malhotra et al., 2012; Venkatesh et al., 2017), and obstacles to preferring organisational positions to being homemakers (Goyal & Parkash, 2011; Sharma, 2013; Venkatesh et al., 2017). This theme implies how female entrepreneurial leaders identify barriers of what happened in practical context. However, these three research themes are still underdeveloped in developing countries (Venkatesh et al., 2017) and that formulates a research gap in modern China. Consequently, a research question is proposed as reported in Section 1.2: how do female entrepreneurial leaders identify their opportunities and challenges in modern China?

#### 2.2.2.1.1 The Determinants of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership

To address the research question stated in the previous section, this study refines the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership. The present study shows that the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership has aroused scholars' interests. For

instance, Aparisi-Torrijo and Ribes-Giner (2022) researched the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership by preventing regenerating the gender bias errors that were reproduced in the traditional leadership and entrepreneurship research. The determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership can be classified as quantitative or qualitative, based on their properties and attributions. More specifically, the quantitative determinants are related to enterprise performance, while the qualitative determinants are related to female entrepreneurial leaders or their business recognition (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017). Additionally, the influences of the positive and negative roles of the determinants should be identified and classified (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017) according to whether they promote or inhibit female entrepreneurial leadership in identifying opportunities.

According to the impact extent, the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership can be divided into multiple levels, such as the social level, institutional level, group level, and individual level (Peus et al., 2015, p. 56; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). However, the role of these determinants is not systematically evaluated in the extant research. Thus, this study evaluates the role of these determinants in the following three Sections: 2.2.2.1.1.1, 2.2.2.1.1.2, and 2.2.2.1.1.3.

#### 2.2.2.1.1.1 Determinants at Macro-Level

Macro-determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership are often attributed to economic, political, cultural, and societal segments in various geographic and national contexts. In Italy, for example, these determinants are refined as: i) economic globalisation as a driving force in the domestic market; ii) state actions; and iii) the evolution of the economic context as a result of political unification (Amatori, 2010, p. 13). These determinants in Greece are attributed to: i) traditional legacies, ii) national

modernisation, and iii) merchant diaspora (Pepelasis, 2010, p. 43). Subsequently, these Western results afford a reference to the research on female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China.

The dominant culture in modern China respects the value of quality as reported in Section 1.1. As one aspect of the value of equality, gender equality promoted by All-China Women's Federation (ACWF, 2023) has also become the social norm and policy in modern China (Blalock & Lyu, 2023), which resultantly promotes the development of female entrepreneurial leadership (Blalock et al., 2023). The dominant culture in modern China also strengthens collectivism. This is differentiated from Western culture, which emphasises individualism. For example, while leadership in China's cultural context is recognised as group-focused behaviour, the research on leadership in the Western cultural context asserts leadership as an individual-focused activity (Menon et al., 2010). From the perspective of cultural psychology, the differentiation between collectivism and individualism reflects the cultural value deviation, such as independence versus interdependence, and self-oriented value versus other-oriented value.

The present study recognises most macro-determinants as not facilitating female entrepreneurial leadership. Generally, these determinants include national culture, social norms (e.g., gender stereotypes (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017; Gupta et al., 2014), biased recruiting, unequal selection practices), policy, and industry (Gundry et al., 2002). Gender stereotyping, for example, is recognised as a significant barrier to female entrepreneurial leadership (Heilman, 2012; Peus et al., 2015, p. 56), and in the Western context, a woman's gender role defaults to that of a mother or wife (Yadav & Unni, 2016); similarly, women's gender role in the Chinese context is as the same cultural

default as that in the Western context in terms of social recognition (Xu et al., 2022). Additionally, past studies recognise the social class of women as a significant determinant in female entrepreneurial leadership (Bowen & Hisrich, 1986) and a cultural context (Birley, 1988) as one of the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership (Yadav & Unni, 2016). All these social determinants influence the mindset of women when engaging in entrepreneurial activities.

When assessing the macro-determinants by their facilitative and constrained attributions, the present study finds literature evidence that masculine stereotypes (Gupta et al., 2014), attribution clash of gender roles (Heilman & Haynes, 2008, as cited in Peus et al., 2015, p. 56) , and bias treatment (Peus & Traut-Mattausch, 2007, as cited in Peus et al., 2015, p. 56) are constraints for the advancement of female entrepreneurial leadership. However, the national culture and social norms in a Western context have facilitative force for female entrepreneurial leadership. For example, national culture can empower female entrepreneurial leaders (Kantor, 2002), or social norms can support female entrepreneurial leaders at a higher level (Baughn et al., 2006; Sullivan & Meek, 2012). These findings can be used as a comparison for research on female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China.

However, cultural determinants are more complicated in a Chinese context, such as cultural diversity and geographic culture, which also influence female entrepreneurial leadership with results of challenges or opportunities. For instance, in rural areas of China, the income and return of female entrepreneurial leaders depend on the relative significance of entrepreneurship and its wage level in the local economic context (Walder, 2002; Wu, 2019). This differs from female entrepreneurial leadership in urban areas, where there is a higher level of economic context and sufficient entrepreneurial

opportunities. However, on most occasions, the national culture and social norms are neutral for both women and men. Additionally, most policies in China on entrepreneurship are pro-female entrepreneurial leadership because they are released to promote women development, as discussed in the second paragraph of this section. Table 6 (see Appendix A1) shows the macro-determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership and assessment.

#### 2.2.2.1.1.2 Determinants at Meso-Level

Determinants at the meso-level (see Table 7 in Appendix A1) mainly include the business-family relationship, contextual attributes at the institutional level (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017; Elam & Terjesen, 2010), and access resources and the related costs that need to be borne by female entrepreneurial leaders (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017; Wu & Chua, 2012). From a cultural perspective, how the Confucian patriarchal norms and values affect Chinese women's choices on business-family still become a research theme (Liu, 2023). For business-family relationships, the present literature demonstrates that when a woman successfully balances work and family responsibilities, she can boost the firm's growth or performance (Jennings & McDougald, 2007; Shelton, 2006). However, the enterprises of female entrepreneurial leaders often need to be home-based (Fasci & Valdez, 1998). For characteristics of their institutional context, female entrepreneurial leaders are negatively affected by second-order gender effects (Wu & Chua, 2012, p. 444), wage inequality, public child-care costs, and perceptions (Elam & Terjesen, 2010). However, there are common determinants influencing both female and male entrepreneurial leaders. Specifically, female entrepreneurial leaders intend to acquire access to financial resources, human capital, and associated costs. This demonstrates that access to resources and associated

costs, and minimal access to high-quality social networks, are sensitive to female entrepreneurial leaders.

#### 2.2.2.1.1.3 Determinants at Micro-Level

At the micro-level, determinants include persistence for success, entrepreneurial motivation, entrepreneurial career, entrepreneurial education, entrepreneurial skills, life and work experiences, risk-taking, gender gap, entrepreneurial strategy, social networks, role models, and family background and support (see Table 8 in Appendix A1). In detail, determinants such as entrepreneurial vision (Ruvio et al., 2010), persistence for achievement, entrepreneurial education, entrepreneurial skills, life and work experience, risk-taking, and entrepreneurial strategy are assessed as promotive determinants to female entrepreneurial leadership. The other determinants, including entrepreneurial motivations, social networks, role models, and family background and support, are evaluated as having constrained or neutral influences on female entrepreneurial leadership. Moreover, determinants such as assertive self-interests, absence of role models, and lack of self-confidence (Peus et al., 2015, p. 56; Peus & Traut-Mattausch, 2007), and the participation extent of female entrepreneurial leaders (Ahl, 2006) are categorised as significant barriers to female entrepreneurial leadership. The above table shows the main literature findings on micro-determinants, including business-family relationships, self-images, entrepreneurial skills (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017; Powell & Eddleston, 2013), motivations (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017; Díaz-García & Brush, 2012), planning and strategy for firm growth (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017; Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013), and the traits of entrepreneurs in the high-tech industry (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017; Dautzenberg, 2012). Specifically, although the educational level is recognised as one of the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership (Banks et

al., 2017), there is no evidence to prove that a low level of education can preclude female entrepreneurial leadership (Fischer et al., 1993). This argument supports that, from the neoliberal perspective, merely self-effort is acknowledged as the primary determinant of the status and reward for female entrepreneurial leadership (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). Research on female entrepreneurial leadership then needs to evaluate how these determinants influence female entrepreneurial leadership.

#### 2.2.2.1.2 The Categories of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership

The present study categorises the type of entrepreneurial leadership based on entrepreneurship research. Typically, the synthesis of entrepreneurial behaviour and mindset formulates entrepreneurship (Renko et al., 2015; Subramaniam & Shankar, 2020, p. 9). Consequently, inferring the categorisation of entrepreneurship, this study categorises female entrepreneurial leadership into needs-based and non-needs-based categories.

#### 2.2.2.2 Analysis on Research Development of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership

Research on female entrepreneurial leadership in its early stage is engaged in the intersection of entrepreneurship and leadership. First, female entrepreneurship was neglected in its early stages because it was viewed as homologous to female leadership. Part of the reason is attributed to the social norms that entrepreneurship is defaulted as masculine. Hence, gender was recognised as not influencing entrepreneurship and valueless in studying entrepreneurship (Baker et al., 1997; Bruni et al., 2004; Fasbender & Ang, 2019).

However, in the late 1990s, female entrepreneurship became notable in the academic field (Yadav & Unni, 2016). The reason is that female entrepreneurs in that period

promoted the Western economy to develop (Fasbender & Ang, 2019; Sarfaraz et al., 2014); thus, female entrepreneurship research became valuable (Yadav & Unni, 2016) in Western academia. Consequently, this change inspires the research development of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context.

### 2.2.2.3 Analysis of Current Research Theories

In terms of female entrepreneurial leadership, current theories include institutional theory (Brush et al., 2009), post-structural feminism, feminism, career theory (Fischer et al., 1993; Mirchandani, 1999), process theory, expectancy theory (Henry et al., 2016), psychological theory, and sociological theory. Although these theories afford a path to the extant study, due to the mainstream leadership theories' defaulting on the research object as male leaders, scholars argue that directly applying them generates unreliability and invalidity for the interpretation of female entrepreneurial leadership (Moore, 1990). As a result, reframing female entrepreneurial leadership's theoretical fundamentals, models, or prototypes (De Bruin et al., 2006; Fischer et al., 1993; Moore, 1990), categories (Mirchandani, 1999), and stereotypes from gender perspectives (Ahl & Nelson, 2010) in developing country contexts (Goyal & Yadav, 2014; Gundry et al., 2002) is unavoidable.

The context that female entrepreneurial leadership is engaged in plays an essential role in this study. In general, context can be divided into various categorisations, such as the family context, social context, cultural context, and organisational context. According to studies by Ahl (2006) and De Bruin et al. (2007), context influences female entrepreneurial leadership at three levels: the macro level (society and culture); the meso-level (institutions or organisations); and the micro-level (family, team, or group).



Furthermore, Huang et al. (2021) argued that most of the issues of Chinese entrepreneurial leadership are associated with the particular Chinese context and the new developments in China. This argument points out the significance of contextual determinants in researching entrepreneurial leadership. Because contextual determinants systematically contain the social, economic, cultural influences, and so forth, research on female entrepreneurial leadership needs to explore the contextual determinants from a holistic and inclusive perspective (Huang et al., 2021).

#### 2.2.2.4 The latest Research Trend

The latest research trend in female entrepreneurial leadership is congruent with the research cutting-edge of leadership. Research on leadership in the new era since 2010 has focused on different categorisations of leadership: i) leaders, ii) the leading process, and iii) the position of leadership in a causal chain. Carton (2022) systematically reviewed recent leadership papers and found that the research on leaders themselves has progressed and developed in great health; however, research in the latter two categorisations is still haphazard. This means research on female entrepreneurial leadership needs to concentrate on the leading process of female entrepreneurial leadership and the position of female entrepreneurial leadership in a causal chain.

The above discussion of the present study by Carton (2022) shows how contextual determinants influence female entrepreneurial leadership, which is still underdeveloped in a Chinese context. This is congruent with the research gap as reported in Section 2.2.2.1. Currently, the demand for analysing leadership from the perspective of cross-culture is growing in prevalence (Bryman, 2004; Gardner et al., 2010; Lau, 2002; Peus et al., 2015, p. 2) and formulating the research cutting-edge of female entrepreneurial leadership. From an epistemological standpoint, female entrepreneurial leadership

study needs to be shifted from itself (i.e., personal traits containing self-efficacy, motivations, intentions, decision models, entrepreneurial orientation, venture financing, performance, and firm growth strategies) to the social orders that female entrepreneurial leadership is involved in (Ahl, 2006). This means the context, which is indicated by the social order, becomes the research cutting-edge of female entrepreneurial leadership. In detail, the rising themes of the research cutting-edge contain policy issues (Goyal & Yadav, 2014), social networks, social capital (De Bruin et al., 2007), female leadership expectations, and the effectiveness of female leadership (Antonakis & House, 2014; House et al., 2004; Peus et al., 2015, p. 57) at various levels. All these reflect those social orders influencing female entrepreneurial leadership. This has been reforming the social norms, which is on the cutting-edge of the latest research.

#### 2.2.2.5 The Limitations of the Extant Research

Current research on female entrepreneurial leadership mainly covers the scope within a Western context. For example, the research objects are typically limited to Western female entrepreneurs. Subsequently, one of the limitations of existing research is the insufficiency of generalisability (Ruvio et al., 2010). Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China are also necessary as research objects. Another limitation is that current research objects, on most occasions, are prominent female entrepreneurial leaders. Therefore, referencing the necessity of enlarging research objects to female entrepreneurial leaders from SMEs (Zhang, 2018), this study focuses on those Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders who are in the top team of SMEs.

Feminism is not sufficient to reveal female entrepreneurial leadership. For instance, the present study faces challenges including inappropriate applicative analysis tools,

inadequacies in scale covering, and confusion on level-of-analysis (Antonakis et al., 2004; Coglisier & Brigham, 2004; Low & Macmillan, 1988; Vecchio, 2003; Wortman, 1987). Furthermore, although feminism affords a lens of gender differences and inequality to interpret female entrepreneurial leadership, it is insufficiency to analyse the cultural influences in the present study. Subsequently, cultural psychology is necessary for this study.

### 2.3 Research Gap

This section systematically explains the research gap as identified in Section 2.2.2.1 and discussed in Section 2.2.2.4. The current theory is limited to interpreting the latest practical development of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China. In Western contexts, however, the present study has advanced in the field of female entrepreneurial leadership. As a result, the gap between theory and practice such as the “research-practice gap” (Sharma & Bansal, 2020) or the “science–practice gap” (Banks et al., 2016, p. 2205) in research on female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China is formulated. The essence of this gap is that research improvement does not meet the needs of practice development. One of the reasons for this research gap is that limited academic articles focus on female entrepreneurial leadership in the Chinese context. However, although the percentage of Chinese women launching businesses increased to the peak of 22.4% in 2011, this data has declined to 9.2% in 2018 (Huang et al., 2021). This change shows that female entrepreneurial leadership has been facing barriers in the Chinese context. Furthermore, this change implies that the research on female entrepreneurial leadership has not played its role of relevance in impacting the practical reality (Kieser et al., 2015; Sharma & Bansal, 2020) in modern China.

Specifically, the ‘theory-practice gap’ in this study includes the gender and contextual gaps. Specifically, traditional research defaulted to the masculine as the basic set of entrepreneurial leadership and less research was conducted from the gender perspective. As a result, significant issues such as the “presence, extent, and growth” (Banks et al., 2016, p. 2205) of female entrepreneurial leadership are aroused. Thus, in current times, the gender research gap in the domain of entrepreneurial leadership has been formulated and continues to expand in a Chinese context. Thus, this study is necessary to bridge the gender research gap.

The contextual research gap means that the existing theory is constructed in the Western context, and few studies concentrate the research foci in the Chinese context. The main reason is attributed to the unsynchronous research development in the domain between the Chinese and Western contexts. Furthermore, most existing studies on leadership are motivated by the Western context, i.e., the European context, the American context where the Anglo-American domains have evolved, and the British context (Law, 2013; Wang & Shirmohammadi, 2016, p. 138). More generally, the Western, Chinese, and Middle Eastern contexts are distributed in sequence in the gender and feminism spectrum from developed to underdeveloped status. Therefore, this spectrum shows the contextual and gender research gaps in female entrepreneurial leadership in China’s context.

While female entrepreneurial leadership is emerging in China, the research gap has widened in recent years. For example, one of the contextual gaps is the taken-for-granted individualism with leadership (Zhang & Cone, 2018) in the Western context rather than the collectivism with leadership in a Chinese context. As a result, scholars shifted their research interest to the Chinese context (Chan et al., 2013, p. 108; Peus et

al., 2015; Wang & Shirmohammadi, 2016, p. 138). In particular, scholars argue that studying the significant determinants of female leadership that contribute to organisational performance is essential for current research (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Peus et al., 2015, p. 2). Thus, research is required to explore major determinants influencing female leadership (Peus et al., 2015) in differentiated cultural contexts (Palrecha et al., 2012, p. 148; Peus et al., 2015, p. 57). Subsequently, a question is raised to narrow the research scope into specific leadership domains (Chan et al., 2013; Peus et al., 2015, p. 2): what are the facilitative and constrained determinants among them?

In the Chinese context, how female entrepreneurial leaders affect followers is underdeveloped. In detail, the research themes, including their social exchange relationship, the reciprocity between female leaders and their followers, and how the vision of female leadership makes sense for followers, are less studied (Cogliser & Brigham, 2004). Additionally, research on follower development is underdeveloped (Cogliser & Brigham, 2004; Day, 2000). To some extent, follower's response is a side perspective to understanding female entrepreneurial leadership. Therefore, researching leadership from a follower's perspective is feasible to explore how leaders influence, challenge, develop, or inspire followers (Cogliser & Brigham, 2004). This argument indicates that in order to understand female entrepreneurial leadership, the related organizational culture needs to be analysed. This study, therefore, explores how female entrepreneurial leaders influence the organizational culture as reported in Section 4.3.2.2.

### **Chapter III Methodology**

This chapter aims to elaborate the methodology applied in the entire research process. Specifically, this chapter includes sections such as research context, research design,

researcher role, research quality, and research ethics. Furthermore, this chapter designs the research methods from aspects including research philosophy, research rigour and relevance, the cutting-edge of research methods, research framework, sample, approach, research procedure, interview, and analytical framework.

### 3.1 Research Context

Modern China is scoped as the research context. This context is formulated by the context segments: social and economic context, political context, and cultural context. All the segments of the Chinese context are differentiated from their counterparts in the Western context. In addition, the present study is a context-specific and single-country study (Tsui, 2007, p. 1353). Therefore, this study has its innovation and significance compared with existing research mainly conducted in the Western context.

### 3.2 Research Design

This research adopts the qualitative method. The qualitative research method refers to a set of numerous interpretive approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 46) and a scoped practice that situates the observer in various social contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 43). Because quantitative methods are inadequate to interpret leadership across various cultural contexts (Avolio et al., 2009; Bryman, 2004; Parry et al., 2014; Peus et al., 2015, p. 58; Pratt, 2009), this study selects qualitative methods as a requisite and feasible plan to research female entrepreneurial leadership.

In terms of method feasibility, qualitative methods are applied to explore the research question. This is because the qualitative and quantitative methods are suitable for the research questions with different attributions (Miner-Rubino & Jayaratne, 2007). To an extent, the attributions of research questions reflect the demand for method selection to

guarantee the coherence of research methods. Thus, the “research onion” model (Saunders et al. (2019b) (see Appendix A3) is referenced to keep coherence between research questions and research method selection.

The interview approach is selected to meet the criteria of this research, including the reliability, feasibility, and convenience of conducting research. The primary data are then analysed from a cross-cultural standpoint using the thematic analysis method. This is because Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders are involved in the Chinese context and cannot be segregated from the cultural influence of Western context in an era of globalisation.

### 3.2.1 Research Philosophy

Interpretivism is applied as the research philosophy in this study to explore the research data and interpret the research findings. For female entrepreneurial leadership, interpretivism is a scientific ideology that entrepreneurial processes originate through conscious activity and interaction at the tier of the individual (Packard, 2017, p. 536). Scholars argue that entrepreneurial leadership is a series of the decision-making processes (Hitt et al., 2011; Packard, 2017, p. 536; Zhang & Cone, 2018, p. 66) or a flow of events, which has characteristics of fluidity across both time and space (Langley, 1999, p. 692; Pettigrew, 1992). This viewpoint is attributed to the scholar Deleuze (1993, 1994); and Deleuze and Guattari (1988). However, their research involved the Western context (Zhang & Cone, 2018). Furthermore, several paradoxes in the process should be solved, such as order versus chaos, and stasis versus change (Zhang & Cone, 2018). In addition, the roots of Chinese philosophy (i.e., Taiji) as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.3

(e.g. Cheng, 1991; Jullien, 1999; Mair, 1991; Shen, 2003; Zhang et al., 2011) are applied to interpret the findings in Chapter IV.

### 3.2.2 Research Rigour and Relevance

Research rigour and relevance are connected to the research design to guarantee the quality of the research. In particular, the research rigour is concordant with the theory fundamentals. The theoretical fundamentals of female entrepreneurial leadership include social identity theory, expectancy theory (Sullivan & Meek, 2012; Vroom, 1964), career construction theory, and feminism. When applying these theoretical fundamentals to this study, the variance-oriented approach (Mohr, 1982, as cited in Langley, 1999, p. 692) is used. Specifically, the variance-oriented approach is referenced in analysing determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China.

Because the present study often covers existing and emergent theories (Bansal & Corley, 2012) with its proper categorisations, it needs to clarify the preconditions of this study to ensure the research is rigorous with the theory categorisation. In detail, the preconditions incorporate:

- 1) Without a particular context, this research is meaningless.
- 2) The determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership are diversified and interacted.
- 3) Social division leads to gender differences in entrepreneurial leadership.
- 4) The cultural divide impacts the female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China.
- 5) The female entrepreneurial leadership is reflexivity of a sociocultural context.

Because of these preconditions, the data narrative approach deals with rigorous research issues. This can be attributed to the reason that the data narrative approach describes the data collection, analysis, and the findings of actual data (Bansal & Corley, 2012).



The central focus of this study is to identify the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership and the interactions among the determinants. However, how the determinants and their interactions affect the innovation performance of followers is not explored (Yang & Wang, 2013). Furthermore, the influence of the determinants and their interactions at multiple levels may differ (Dansereau et al., 1995; Yang & Wang, 2013). Thus, this study explores the determinants and interactions across different levels.

The research relevance is related to Chinese women, particularly Chinese female entrepreneurs. At the individual level, Chinese women can better understand the concept of female entrepreneurial leadership and even promote it. Finally, this study can generalise the impact of female entrepreneurial leadership on the company at the institutional level and facilitate social improvement at the social and national levels.

### 3.2.3 Cutting-Edge of Research Method

In recent years, adaptive research methods have emerged for investigating female entrepreneurial leadership. One of them is using quantitative approaches as a data-driven method (Dinh et al., 2014) to explore the empirical evidence and to study female entrepreneurial leadership as an independent variable (Ahl & Nelson, 2010). However, there is another arising qualitative method that uses a cross-boundary approach (Lord et al., 2017) or expands the research area of female entrepreneurial leadership by overcoming the theoretical constraints of feminism from flexible and critical perspectives (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). Finally, the latter qualitative method as reported by Ahl and Marlow (2012) is applied to this study.

The Western context primarily influences the research methodology of female leadership. To some extent, these methodologies of female leadership are from the US (Peus et al., 2015), with the foci of cross-cultural comparison amid the American and Asian contexts (Van Emmerik et al., 2010; van Emmerik et al., 2008). In further discussion, the qualitative methods can benefit from a real sense of leadership (Bryman, 2004, p. 763; Peus et al., 2015, p. 59) in the Chinese context. Additionally, the redesigned traditional methods are feasible to conduct. Scholars argue that constructionist methods (Hughes et al., 2012), in-depth qualitative methods, or post-structural feminist methods (Henry et al., 2016) to research female entrepreneurial leadership are feasible, based on the heuristics of an increasing number of papers in top journals, niche journals, and conferences on the topic.

#### 3.2.4 Research Framework

This research reviews the literature via data collection to find the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership. First, secondary data on female entrepreneurial leadership are gathered from Durham University's library database and Google Scholar. Secondly, the secondary data are refined, clustered, and synthesised to formulate the research themes and categorisations. Thirdly, the research scope has been defined over the past 40 years since China released the open and reform policy in 1979. This is because the policy brought significant change to China in various fields. Additionally, the interview approach is adopted to collect the primary data. Finally, the significant determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership in the Chinese context are refined and configured by a thematic analysis.

This study analyses the collected data by referencing the theories of cultural psychology. In particular, this research references the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) as discussed in

Section 2.2.1.2.1 and focuses on the unique characteristics of Confucian culture affecting the female entrepreneurial leader's psychological status and social value orientation. For example, as Chinese culture emphasises harmony and order especially, the impact of pursuing harmony and order on the female entrepreneurial leader's psychological status and social value orientation are emphasised in Chapter V.

### 3.2.5 Sample

This research focuses on female founders whose role is to lead and manage entrepreneurial companies (Leitch et al., 2012 cited as in Stead & Hamilton, 2018, p. 93). To comprehensively understand the female entrepreneurial leadership, this study needs to interview female founders and their stakeholders, such as the male partners, the senior managers, followers. This is because, on the one hand, entrepreneurial leadership spreads across the management team of start-ups, which includes leaders such as the Chief Executive Officer (Hui & Craen, 1997), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), and Chief Operation Officer (COO). On the other hand, only interviewing female founders cannot avoid the subjective bias of female founders. Thus, interviewing their stakeholders becomes necessary and can reduce the subjective bias. To make theoretical sampling facilitate the data analysis (Charmaz, 2007), the participants are selected according to their working years, gender, position, industry, and ages (see Table 10 in Appendix A10). Thus, the participants include the female founders and senior managers in entrepreneurial companies and their related stakeholders, such as the business partners and followers.

In practice, the interview participants are from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) located in an industrial park: Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone, Cambodia. Because this industrial park is operated by a Chinese company, it is attractive to the

founders of Chinese SMEs who encountered business difficulties in domestic China, particularly when the Sino-US trade war affected their supply chain and target market. Therefore, they moved to this industrial park and established a new subsidiary company for survival and sustainable development. Although the SMEs are located on the industrial park in Cambodia, the leaders and management team of these SMEs are Chinese. Fundamentally, they grew in a China context and their mindset and behaviour are influenced by Chinese culture. Therefore, they are suitable to be interview participants of this study. The criteria of participants are concordant with the notion of “convenient sampling” (Shengqiang & Yan, 2014, p. 68). In addition, I worked in this industrial park and have acquaintance with these Chinese SMEs, therefore the female founders of these Chinese SMEs are convenient to me for this interview.

Even though the focus of this research is on the leadership of female entrepreneurs, the ideas of male entrepreneurial leaders should also be taken into account. This is because, on the one hand, female entrepreneurial leadership is affected by male entrepreneurial leaders in China’s context; on the other hand, the thought of male entrepreneurial leaders reflects female entrepreneurial leadership. As in business practice, female and male entrepreneurial leadership are probably coexisting in one start-up; their relationships cannot be separated. At last, in order to protect the private information of participants and to distinguish them, the male and female participants are coded in a format of ‘im-xxx’ or ‘iw-xxx’, with the meaning of the xxx<sup>th</sup> man interviewee or the xxx<sup>th</sup> woman interviewee. The demographic information of interview participants is displayed as Tables 10 and 11 (also see Appendices A10 and A11).

### 3.2.6 Research Procedure

The research procedure is designed as follows. Firstly, the critical purpose of this research is to explore the significant determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. Secondly, as the empirical material, the primary data is collected by interview. Accordingly, this research adopts a phenomenological approach. Thirdly, by applying cultural psychology, this research references the theoretical framework ‘Culture Cycle’, as discussed in Section 2.2.1.2.1. Fourthly, this research extends the interpretive repertoire to find new possibilities with critical interpretation and reflection in terms of relationships and interactions (Packard, 2017, p. 537) among the significant determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. Fifthly, this research constructs a new theoretical framework as displayed in Section 5.1.1. Finally, the new theoretical framework is assessed to check whether it challenges or supports the existing reality of female entrepreneurial leadership in the Chinese context. The above research procedure is adapted from the paradigm developed by Stead and Hamilton (2018, p. 100).

### 3.2.7 Interview

The interview proceeds to guarantee the data quality by using the native language of the participants, which is Chinese. This is because the participants can express their ideas and think precisely in Chinese, and most can only speak Chinese. Thus, participants feel comfortable expressing themselves freely (Miner-Rubino & Jayaratne, 2007). Additionally, the interview tactics are adopted to facilitate the exploration of the most meaningful primary data (Charmaz, 2007). On average, the participants’ interview process takes for about 30–60 minutes.

The quality of primary data is ensured by selecting suitable participants. In this research, the participants incorporate female and male entrepreneurial leaders and their followers. The reason for selecting male entrepreneurial leaders is that their mindset and behaviours affect female entrepreneurial leadership, and female entrepreneurial leaders cannot be segregated from the field of male entrepreneurial leaders.

The criteria of participants are regulated to guarantee the quality of primary data. In detail, data credibility and consistency (J. Corbin & A. Strauss, 1990, pp. 419, 421) formulate the essence of data quality. Firstly, participants' attributions, such as their working experience, educational level, age range, and gender, are clustered and categorised. Secondly, the participants' free will is respected in the interview process. Thirdly, the participant quantity exceeds 100 people to guarantee the credibility of primary data. Additionally, when uncertain situations interrupt the interview process, another interview appointment is made to continue the interview another time.

The preparation work for the interview is scheduled ahead of the formal interview. Firstly, because this is a semi-structured interview (Peus et al., 2015), the Question List (Please see Table 9 in Appendix A7) for Interview is prepared in advance. Secondly, according to the ethics code, the documents, including the 'Interview Preamble' (Please see Appendix A8), which references a template (Cassell, 2015, p. 28) and the 'Consent Form' (see Appendix A9), which references a template (Cassell, 2015, p. 39; dur.ac.uk, 2020), are handed over to the participants to agree.

The interview was planned to be conducted by a face-to-face approach. However, because of the pandemic of Covid-19, face-to-face interviews were unfeasible in most of situations. Therefore, a voice call by telephone or Wechat (a Chinese social media platform) was suggested to participants to conduct the interview. Before conducting the

interview, I made an appointment with those familiar participants through a voice call. For those unfamiliar participants, I asked for a recommendation from those familiar participants or my friends. However, when the pandemic became weak, a face-to-face approach is adopted to progress the interview.

The data was collected through semi-structure interview. Before conducting the interview, I asked them about their will and intention and made an interview appointment by showing the Interview Preamble and Consent Form (see Appendices A8 and A9). Only when they had consented to the interview request could the interview be started. Particularly, interview recordings were permitted by the participants before starting interview. Then, the transcripts of the interview recordings were analysed by an open-coding (see Appendix A12) and a thematic analysis method via Nvivo.

This study categorises and codes the interview data by its attributions and themes. Then, all the datasets that have the same attributions and themes are clustered together by application of the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2007) and the approach of “concepts and categories” (Hannan et al., 2019). Additionally, research relevance (J. Corbin & A. Strauss, 1990) is noticed to accord with qualitatively analysing procedures (Saunders et al., 2019a) (see Appendix A2) during the coding process by Nvivo software.

### 3.2.8 Analytical Framework

This study identifies and refines the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership in the Chinese context by utilising the inductive analytic methodologies (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser, 1967; Glaser & Strauss, 2006; Peus et al., 2015, p. 59). Firstly, the particularity of female entrepreneurial leadership is identified from a perspective of feminism; Secondly, the generality of female entrepreneurial leadership is clarified by

referencing the Culture Cycle as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1. This is the research innovation point. Thirdly, the preconditions, the theoretical category, and the theoretical boundary are clarified during the analysis process. The research results and discussion would be incorrect if the preconditions, theoretical category and boundary were not clarified prior to data analysis.

Through comparison and integration, the study analyses the interview data in sequence, from descriptive summaries to terse categories (Carsten et al., 2010; Faris & Parry, 2011; Kramer & Crespy, 2011; Ospina & Foldy, 2010; Palrecha et al., 2012; Peus et al., 2015, p. 59). First, this study explored the tentative and elementary concepts and themes by compiling and coding the interview transcripts (J. Corbin & A. Strauss, 1990; Foldy et al., 2008; Ospina & Foldy, 2010; Peus et al., 2015, p. 59). Second, this study construes all the interview data for formulating themes and categorisation by clustering the similarities and differences (Peus et al., 2015, p. 59) of each determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. In the third, this study investigates the interconnected relationships between determinants at multiple levels of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China. Finally, the data analysis is progressed by referencing Culture Cycle as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1. During the analysis process, the reasoning approaches of induction are utilised to construct a Cultural Gateway as reported in Chapter V.

### 3.3 Researcher Role

I have scheduled and conducted the research for the whole process. To ensure efficient and effective implementation of this study, the first step is to design a viable research approach. The second step is to reduce self-influence in the interview process because self-influence should be prevented during the research process (Braches, 2015, p. 67;



Hammersley, 1989). Then, interview transcripts are compiled and coded for legibility as the third step. Finally, the fourth activity is iterating the data analysis process to guarantee the practical relevance and theoretical rigour (e.g. Sharma & Bansal, 2020).

Throughout the process of collecting and analysing data, preconception bias is considered and identified. When the participants answered the questions or recalled their past affairs, their preconceptions may have intervened in their recognition and reasoning process. Hence, the interviewer uses spoken and paraphrased words to make them easy to understand. Meanwhile, I asked interview questions from multiple perspectives. This is because the interviewer's preconception may lead to cognitive deviation of the participant's idea or meaning when analysing primary data.

On the one hand, it may not be easy to understand or feel the participant's true sense due to the different experiences and situations. For example, the researcher's indirect experience and sense gained from participants and the direct experience and sense of participants who were ever involved in entrepreneurial activities cannot be reconciled. Usually, just using empathy to feel the participant's true sense is insufficient. On the other hand, participants' cognitive deviation between indirect and direct sense cannot be eliminated, but it can be minimised to the greatest extent possible.

### 3.4 Research Quality

Research quality is assured by strictly conducting the research procedure. Subjective biases typically exist between the interviewer and the interviewees throughout the interview process. Thus, the research validity is found in the verifiability of the research interpretation of the participants' words (Alasuutari, 1995; Braches, 2015, p. 68). Thus, the subjective biases need to be reduced by checking the data transcription and coding

and by evaluating and verifying the data analysis. Therefore, the quality of the research can be guaranteed by this procedure.

This research comprehends the complexity and simplicity. This is because female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China is complicated and influenced by many determinants. Thus, the complexity of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China should be considered totally. However, considering all the determinants would confuse and cause cognitive deviation. Moreover, the weight of each determinant's significance to female entrepreneurial leaders in the Chinese context is different among all the determinants. Therefore, the peripheral determinants with a lightweight significance should not be considered as much as the core determinants with a high weight of significance. Thus, choosing which determinants have a higher significance weight is necessary. This means this study should take note of simplicity during the research process because simplicity could make research more feasible and accurate.

### 3.5 Data Analysis Process

The primary data is coded by referencing the Corley and Gioia (2004) recommended data structure. Firstly, all the transcripts of the primary data are imported into the Nvivo software for systematic analysis. Secondly, an inductive open-coding method is applied for thematic analysis. Specifically, the interview transcripts with same subjects are extracted and marked as a node in the Nvivo projects (see Appendix A12). Thirdly, all the nodes are clustered into different categories.

Fourthly, the categories that have similar attributes are merged and renamed to formulate a research theme. Fifthly, the different themes are structured according to the determinant's levels, such as the micro-level, meso-level, and macro-level. In addition,

other themes that cannot be categorised into the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership are created as parallel themes in the Nvivo projects. Therefore, coding books (see Tables 12-33 in Appendix A13) are created by categorising and synthesising the interview transcripts.

### 3.6 Research Ethics

This study uses the ethics documents to warrant the ethical issues. In detail, all the ethical issues are predicted and prepared before conducting research. The ethical clearance of interview is ensured by following and obeying the Research Ethics Policy. Then, the ethical documents are submitted to Durham University for the supervisor's approval. Subsequently, the Ethical Approval is confirmed by the supervisor of Durham University, attached as Appendix A6. Finally, this study is conducted formally when the supervisor approves the ethical documents. In the research process, all the ethical codes are compiled within the practical situation, especially in the interview sections.

Before collecting data, the researcher appointed an interview time to let the participant prepare for the interview with sufficient time. Before the interview, the confidentiality of participants was clarified and promised in the Interview Preamble (see Appendix A8) and Consent form (see Appendix A9). In addition, the participant's feelings are taken care of during the interview process. For example, they will take their time if they are reluctant to accept the interview or tired after work. Only when they have the will to accept the interview can the data collection be progressed. Meanwhile, this study controlled the interview time within two hours with a flexible time arrangement.

During the interview process, the confidentiality of participants was respected. When they were reluctant to tell their privacy information, the interviewer will stop the

personal and potentially sensitive questioning. Particularly, the personal information of participants is secured by a strict safekeeping of the recordings and transcripts. To prevent losing the interview recordings and transcripts, two personal laptops are used as the storage devices. Without permission from the participants, the recordings and transcripts are not allowed to be shared with others. At last, anonymisation of the confidentiality of participants was adopted in the analysing process of primary data.

## **Chapter IV Findings**

The objective of this chapter is to synthesise the findings from the coding process and interpret the findings from the perspective of cultural psychology. Specifically, this chapter includes components such as the value of female entrepreneurial leadership, and the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels.

Based on the demographic information of interview participants, as reported in Tables 10 to 11 (see Appendices A10 and A11) and Section 3.2.5, this study finds that: i) the number of female entrepreneurs in the service industry is greater than those in the manufacturing industry; however, the number of male entrepreneurs in the service industry is equal to those in the manufacturing industry; ii) most of the female entrepreneurs are older than 31, and their age is relatively distributed in the three age ranges: 31-40, 41-50, and >50; the age of male entrepreneurs also displays an increasing trend; iii) most of the female and male entrepreneurs are located in Eastern China. The number of females who come from eastern and southern China is far larger than that in central China and in northern and western China. These differences in geographic location suggest that entrepreneurial leaders, especially female entrepreneurial leaders,

are significantly affected by geographic determinants such as the regional socioeconomic development level and regional sociocultural properties such as tightness and looseness. These geographic determinants ultimately form a geographic culture in different regions or in areas of a given region. The demographic statistics of entrepreneur participants are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 Statistics of Entrepreneur Participants

Gender	Industry		Range Age				Location in China				
	Manufacture	Service	21-30	31-40	41-50	>50	Eastern China	Southern China	Central China	Northern China	Western China
Male	7	7	1	3	4	6	9	1	1	3	0
Female	17	27	2	14	15	13	23	6	1	11	3

The above demographic statistics provide a reference to the analysis of female entrepreneurial leadership. Specifically, this study uses the participants' demographic backgrounds as the preconditions and scope to analyse the opportunities and challenges of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China. By entirely analysing the transcripts of interview data with an open-coding method, this study clusters the codes into different themes. Then, as reported in Section 3.5, this study uses a thematic analysis method to systematically explore the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China as follows:

This study finds that female entrepreneurial leaders are confused about some issues, such as whether they can engage in the entrepreneurial industry or work in a State-Owned Enterprise; how they identify the entrepreneurial opportunities and challenges; and how their entrepreneurial enterprises could survive and sustain in uncertain contextual situations. Furthermore, among these issues, this study finds that how to identify the challenges and opportunities significantly influences their career development, which is at the core of female entrepreneurial leadership. Therefore, the

thematic analysis adopted in this chapter investigates and analyses the primary data on the issues faced by female entrepreneurial leaders in contemporary China.

#### 4.1 The values of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China

The data shows that the values of female entrepreneurial leadership, such as their value to family, self-value, value to the company, and value to society, are in sequence emphasised by the participants. This sequence illustrated the female entrepreneurial leader's assessment of the priority between other-oriented and self-oriented cultural values, which conforms to the present findings displayed in Figure 4. In contrast with the Western context, as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1 (see Figure 4), female entrepreneurial leaders often follow self-oriented cultural values. Inferring from the Culture Cycle, as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1 (see Figure 3), female entrepreneurial leaders in the Western and Chinese contexts show a cultural value difference at the idea level. This difference is probably attributed to the cultural divides between the Western and Chinese contexts, which is recognised as a preposition of female entrepreneurial leadership reported in Section 3.2.2. According to the explanation of participant (iw-008), who comes from Jiangxi Province in southern China and engages in the service industry, entrepreneurial values for family and society are emphasised simultaneously, and the value exceeds money or wealth, which are gained through entrepreneurial activities. Her explanation suggests that local sociocultural norms, such as familial concepts and collectivism in southern China, influence her mindset in terms of realising a collective transcendence of family and society.

'As my family is launching entrepreneurial enterprises abroad, first of all, we mean that our business has been operated well; and secondly, I think I have to take responsibility for society. It not only means that I now feel satisfied with my earned money.' (iw-008)

It is important to ask therefore, why do Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders tend to have both self-oriented values and other-oriented values? The reasons can be attributed to the two cultural concepts of ‘Ren’ and ‘Li’, as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.2, which are interrelated and composite the Confucian cultural core. ‘Ren’ and ‘Li’ often formulate Chinese value at the ideas level of the Culture Cycle, as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1. To some extent, the Confucian cultural core becomes the reference point of female entrepreneurial leaders making decisions. This Confucian cultural core differentiates from the value of self-effort, as revealed in Section 2.2.2.1.1.3, which is praised highly by female entrepreneurial leaders in Western context.

In modern China, the value of being an entrepreneurial leader is complex across different levels. This study finds that, in priority sequence, self-value and family value for female entrepreneurial leaders are more important than their value to society. This finding shows the self-awareness of female entrepreneurial leaders at the individual and idea levels of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Due to feminism was initiated in the Western context, as reported in Section 2.2.1.1, objectively promoting the self-awareness of women at the individual and idea levels of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), this study thereby infers that Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders are influenced by feminism within both the Chinese and Western cultural contexts. However, female entrepreneurial leaders also emphasise social values. The participant (iw-014), who comes from Beijing city in northern China and engages in the service industry, explains it as follows:

‘In terms of personal value, it may be to improve one’s status in this industry, that is, to be recognised by more people. A family value is to... fulfil your responsibilities and look after your family. We still hope to make some contributions to this industry. For example, some public welfare undertakings are still being done now. Every year, we will go to Hope Primary School to donate some materials, and then we

will present some things that the elderly needs in the nursing home. We should be contributing some charitable stuff.’ (iw-014).

The above statement reflects that the participant (iw-014) is influenced by the local sociocultural norms such as familial concepts and collectivism in northern China. This statement and the above analysis enlighten this study to delve into a question: what is the value of female entrepreneurial leaders? By synthesising the above statements and analyses, this study argues that the value of female entrepreneurial leaders lies in their self-transcendence and collective transcendence at the institutional level in northern China. The argument of another participant (iw-092), who comes from Beijing city in northern China and engages in the service industry, shows that it lies in self-awareness and self-value to realise. As a result, this argument by participant (iw-092) strengthens the above analysis about self-transcendence in northern China. This study, therefore, argues that self-awareness and self-value are attributed to the influences of feminism on female entrepreneurial leaders. Thus, this study raises a question: how can entrepreneurial values be achieved? As a participant (iw-005), who comes from Shanghai city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, explained, the value of female entrepreneurial leaders lies in practice, and this practice can be transformed into an experience that builds the family’s foundation and intergenerational transition. Considering the demographic influences, this explanation suggests that the value of female entrepreneurial leaders is attributed to self-transcendence and collective transcendence in southeastern China.

‘If I look at female entrepreneurs in this era and the past, many female entrepreneurs may be more concerned about their self-value realisation. In fact, from so many women starting a business, I see a concept that everyone has mentioned behind it: women’s self-awareness is awakening. It is more about being a better me than being an excellent wife to who I am.’ (iw-092).



‘I think the personal value of starting a business is a practice. In the process of doing this, you should have some things you want to do, including some details you want to complete. Then for the family, it is the knowledge and experience brought by your business that you can share with your lover, and it is the foundation for our common progress. At the same time, you can also pass on this wealth of experience and knowledge to the next generation, so let him understand the entrepreneurial process in the future.’ (iw-005).

This entrepreneurial practice is the foundation of an entrepreneurial spirit that constitutes the dynamics of female entrepreneurial leadership. As reported previously, female entrepreneurial leaders prioritise their value to family among other kinds of values (e.g., self-value, value to society). This means that their dynamics in engaging in entrepreneurial activities lie in their contribution to the whole family or clan. In comparison with female entrepreneurial leaders in a Chinese context, the dynamics of female entrepreneurial leaders are attributed to their self-value through self-effort, as discussed in Section 2.2.2.1.1.3. As a result, the dynamics of female entrepreneurial leaders in a Chinese context are differentiated from their counterparts in a Western context.

What female entrepreneurial leaders can contribute to their families includes not only the entrepreneurial experiences but also the entrepreneurial spirit, aiming to pass on to ‘the next generation’, as stated by participant (iw-005). Thus, female entrepreneurial leaders need to transform the entrepreneurial experience gained from entrepreneurial practice into an entrepreneurial spirit. Inferring the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), the entrepreneurial spirit indicates a transcendence from individual level to idea level, and that thereby consists of the culture of female entrepreneurial leaders’ family or clan. Participant (iw-105), who comes from Shanghai city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, explained entrepreneurial spirit in detail as follows:

'I have been thinking recently, what is the entrepreneurial spirit? An entrepreneurial spirit means that you should constantly discover opportunities, try new opportunities, create regularly, and continuously face some uncertainties and difficulties, and you should insist on getting the results and goals you want. I think these all are the necessary entrepreneurial spirit whether you are starting a business or not. I believe the entrepreneurial spirit should be cultivated, trained, and educated. Without such a spirit, all entrepreneurial enterprises will fail.' (iw-105).

She further interpreted that entrepreneurial spirit as a necessary condition for success. Her interpretation of entrepreneurial spirit reflects the influences of Shanghai's entrepreneurial culture on her mindset and recognition. This interpretation means that if female entrepreneurial leaders want success, they first need entrepreneurial spirit. When referencing the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), her statements reveal that the relationship between female entrepreneurial leaders and the entrepreneurial spirit formulates a bidirectional process from the individual level to the idea level, as well as from the idea level to the individual level. However, insisting on an entrepreneurial spirit cannot guarantee the success of an entrepreneurial enterprise. She further emphasised that entrepreneurial spirit is necessary not just for female entrepreneurial leaders themselves but also for all their followers. This means that the entrepreneurial spirit needs to be transformed into their enterprises and thereby formulate an organisational culture. Thus, her explanations suggest a collective transcendence that both female entrepreneurial leaders and their followers should retain an entrepreneurial spirit so that the entrepreneurial enterprise can survive successfully in the future. In this kind of situation, the entrepreneurial spirit reflects an organisational culture at the institutional level of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). This is different from the team spirit emphasised by the Western organisational culture.

'If you want to start a business, you should have an entrepreneurial spirit to create business and continue to create it. I think an entrepreneurial spirit is necessary if a business is to be successful. I feel more and more deeply now, especially in the company. The entrepreneurial spirit is not only possessed by the boss,

but every employee who works in an entrepreneurial company should also have the entrepreneurial spirit.’ (iw-105).

The above statement of the participant (iw-105) reflects that Shanghai’s entrepreneurial culture influences her mindset and makes her entrepreneurial mindset ascend to the level of faith and belief. Interestingly then, female entrepreneurial leaders often emphasise faith and belief as the core values of their business survival and sustainability. This means that faith and belief consist of the entrepreneurial spirit inspiring both female entrepreneurial leaders and their followers. From the perspective of cultural psychology, the faith and belief of female entrepreneurial leaders and their followers are based on the traditional Chinese culture because of cultural inertia, as reported in Section 2.1.2.4. Similar to the Western context, faith and belief are based on female entrepreneurial leaders’ corporate vision. Therefore, this study infers that the directional process between the institutional level (i.e., corporate vision) and the idea level (i.e., faith and belief) in the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) is reflected in the following statements of participants (iw-007, iw-025). To some extent, faith and belief facilitate female entrepreneurial leaders to formulate consensus with stakeholders and thereby promote the daily connectedness among them. As participants (iw-007, iw-025), who respectively come from Zhejiang Province and Shenzhen City in southeastern China and respectively engage in manufacturing and service industries, expressed faith and belief gradually accumulate in daily operation.

‘I think at least employees should have a sense of belief... You at least have both short- and long-term objectives. The short-term objectives are simple. We should survive for at least a couple of years, right? Then, in the long run, we have to develop and have our products. It is impossible without our brand products, including a training platform like mine, so I cannot do it alone. I should have someone to train them. To engage in mechanical design, you should also have an actual product. Do you know? This is what I am going to give them.’ (iw-007).

‘I do not think much about other aspects and do not know what other entrepreneurs think. But to me, it is more about how the company can survive. How can it live longer, and how can it rank high in the industry? It is more about the vision of the company. It is this vision that enables me to move forward. It is such a belief that I can move forward.’ (iw-025).

Zhejiang Provincial socioeconomic development delegates the peak of Chinese entrepreneurship in the traditional manufacturing industry. Meanwhile, Shenzhen municipal socioeconomic development delegates the top level of Chinese entrepreneurship in the scientific and technological research industry. Based on the above statements of the participants (iw-007, iw-025), this study contends that the southeastern entrepreneurial culture at the institutional and idea level influences their recognitions. Furthermore, according to the following statement of participant (iw-054), who comes from Jiangsu Province in southeastern China and engages in the manufacturing industry, faith and belief are embodied in the excellent quality of service afforded by female entrepreneurial leaders, which can in turn earn stakeholders’ mutual trust. This means that a directional process among the individual level (i.e., the quality of service), the interactional level (i.e., mutual trust), and the idea level (i.e., faith and belief) in the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) is reflected in the following statement of the participant (iw-054). For example, the narrative that ‘our philosophy is to be a partner who solves problems of our customers’, as expressed by participant (iw-054), indicates the other-oriented cultural value, which is recognised as one of the faiths and beliefs of Chinese people. Therefore, other-oriented cultural values, as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1, play a role as the common values (e.g., mutual trust) among female entrepreneurial leaders, customers, and business partners.

‘How do I get the trust of some old customers? Maybe it is because my company’s service is excellent. I do everything with great care and solve problems for customers. Our philosophy is to be a partner who solves problems for our customers. I endeavour to solve problems for the customer, not purely aim to make his money. So, as soon as the customer feels there is a problem, ... I will help him to develop some

ideas or assist him to improve in many ways. Therefore, our trust is accumulating a little bit at a time.’ (iw-054).

Jiangsu Provincial socioeconomic development delegates the high level of government-led innovation economy in modern China. Additionally, Jiangsu is recognised as an example of protecting and inheriting traditional Chinese culture. On account of these two socioeconomic and sociocultural points, this study contends that the regional culture, including the traditional and entrepreneurial culture, influences the recognition of the participant (iw-054). From the above analysis, this study infers that the value of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China can be attributed to the individual, interactional, institutional, and idea level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). At the individual level, Chinese women engaging in entrepreneurial activities promote their self-awareness, self-value, and value to their families and clan. At the interactional level, female entrepreneurial leaders construct mutual trust with business partners, customers, and followers. At the institutional level, female entrepreneurial leaders create an entrepreneurial spirit that is shared by themselves and their followers. At the idea level, female entrepreneurial leaders adhere to other-oriented values that are based on the traditional Chinese culture, such as those of Ren and Li, as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.2. These findings suggest that the value of female entrepreneurial leadership is sourced from traditional Chinese culture and modern entrepreneurial culture and thereby make female entrepreneurial leaders realise their value: self-transcendence and collective transcendence.

In contrast with the value of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China, female entrepreneurial leaders in the Western context share the same values, such as self-awareness and self-value, at the individual level. However, their entrepreneurial value to family or clan in the Western context is not as significant as in the Chinese context.

At the interactional level, female entrepreneurial leaders in the Western context adhere to the rules or regulations, which are guided by the corporate vision at the institutional level of the Culture Cycle. At the idea level, feminism improves social concepts by re-recognising and re-evaluating their contribution in both the Chinese and Western contexts.

#### 4.2 Female Entrepreneurial Leadership in modern China from an Organisational and Strategic Perspective

This study subsequently explores female entrepreneurial leadership in the Chinese context from an organisational and strategic perspective. For example, how each type of female entrepreneurial leadership exerts influence; how female entrepreneurial leaders respond to external context; and how female entrepreneurial leaders can be with themselves (i.e., self-recognition, self-control).

##### 4.2.1 Entrepreneurial Type

The study finds that most female entrepreneurial leaders' personal needs are often their entrepreneurial pursuits, which inspires them to start their own companies. This finding reflects the needs-based entrepreneurial type (see Table 1), as reported in Section 2.1.1.1. When referencing the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), this study thereby infers that female entrepreneurial leaders' needs can be categorised at the individual level. A number of participants (iw-004, im-020, and iw-024), who respectively come from Beijing city in northern China, Guangzhou city, and Jiangsu Province in southeastern China and respectively engage in the service industry, service industry, and manufacturing industry, expressed that they started their businesses to meet their personal needs, such as a better life, independence, and freedom in both spirit and

wealth. When examining the needs of female entrepreneurial leaders in the Chinese and Western contexts, this study infers that there are no discernible differences in these leaders' needs.

'Entrepreneurship type, for me, is based on my personal needs. It's what's in my heart.' (iw-004).

'I usually start a business without a reasonable period for consideration, anyway. So then why do I not go in? I did not overthink it. Or maybe it is a chance now. Perhaps it is just my hope to make some money and to make my life a little better. I did not have such a lofty ideal at the beginning. I was initially relatively simple, maybe to solve my needs, such as money.' (im-020).

'It is my personal need to make money. Just make money. Anyway, as a person, I cannot sit still. Why should I sit there if I ask myself to go to work? I cannot accept it. I am a relatively independent and free-spirited person. There is no way, so I can only start my own business.' (iw-024).

Considering that the above three participants come from northern and southeastern China and engage in both manufacturing and service industries, this study thereby infers that satisfying the personal needs of female entrepreneurial leaders is a pervasive recognition in modern China. However, the statement of the participant (iw-105), who comes from Shanghai city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, shows that female entrepreneurial leaders' needs are influenced by market demands. To this extent, female entrepreneurial leaders' needs should be matched with market demands because market demands often imply opportunities or challenges that can in turn influence their psychological responses. In an unchanging entrepreneurial environment, as narrated by participant (iw-105), this study finds that female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological responses are correspondingly less intense. This finding reflects that a female entrepreneurial leader's psychological adaptation (i.e., the extent of psychological response) in an unchanging environment is stable. Inferring from the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), psychological adaptation can be categorised at the individual level. The participant (iw-105) argued in detail as follows:

‘I do not think there has been any change in the entrepreneurial environment. This is because an entrepreneur in business is based on its market demand. So, if there is market demand, I will be willing to start a business, so I think this has nothing to do with the entrepreneurial environment.’ (iw-105)

Because Shanghai is the economic centre of modern China, which delegates the highest level of Chinese market economy, it is reasonable that the recognition of participant (iw-105) is affected by Shanghai’s socioeconomic and sociocultural influences. Furthermore, changing their self-destiny and their family’s economic status is necessary for Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders. It is evident that the values of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context, as reported in previous Section 4.1, are supported by the participant (iw-026), who also comes from Shanghai city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, in the following statement about the female entrepreneurial leaders’ needs. In contrast with female entrepreneurial leaders in a Western context, launching a start-up is not only Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders’ personal affair but also the entire family’s affair. This means that Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders are not only influenced by individualism and feminism but also affected by the traditional Chinese culture of collectivism, as reported in Section 2.1.2.1, that an individual has the mission of contributing to a family.

The above analysis indicates female entrepreneurial leaders in a Chinese context often undertake two kinds of commissions in terms of themselves and the whole family. This situation that Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders confronted is different from that of their Western counterparts. One explanation for this difference may be attributed to the different cultural meaning systems (see Figure 4) of Confucian cultural contexts and the Frontier cultural contexts reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1. However, female entrepreneurial leaders integrate the two commissions by transcending themselves to a high level. For example, when female entrepreneurial leadership develops, it will



become a lifestyle that combines life and entrepreneurial activities into an entire manner. This is supported by participant (iw-026), who states that personal needs include a sense of accomplishment and happiness, which outweigh the return on capital.

‘When I launched my enterprise, I hoped to improve my family’s financial situation. I am the eldest in the family, and gradually I began to think about realising my self-worth. So far, my influence on this industry is undeniable, and I hope to make more money and improve this enterprise. Additionally, I am looking for a way of life that suits me. In other words, entrepreneurship is not just a profession; it has become a part of my life. To some extent, the boundary between entrepreneurship and life is sometimes not explicit at my level.’ (iw-026).

Despite the fact that female entrepreneurial leaders are inspired by their personal needs and improving their family’s financial status, the key point is learning how to identify and select a feasible project. This means that female entrepreneurial leaders are required to identify the opportunities and challenges concealed in a project that they plan to engage in. When asked the viewpoint of the participant (iw-004) who comes from Beijing city in northern China and engages in the service industry, she argued that there is no lack of opportunities, but it depends on whether you are ‘synchronised or ahead of time’. This argument reflects typical Chinese thinking, namely “advance with the times”. In contrast with the Western context, there is a similar mindset named “get with it”. Taking account of this point of view, this study finds that female entrepreneurial leaders’ foresight abilities, as the participant (iw-004) argued, will be tested in making decisions about identifying a feasible project.

‘Good project opportunities are always the same and do not change much. Just see if you can find them. So, can we keep up with the times? If I feel there are rare opportunities, it means I am a little behind the times or my vision is unsuitable. Is our vision synchronised or ahead of time?’ (iw-004).

As the capital of the People’s Republic of China, Beijing concentrates the majority of resources in every aspect of people’s lives. This socioeconomic specialty of Beijing

makes individuals like the participant (iw-004) sense entrepreneurial opportunities from the perspective of timing but not resources. However, only having foresight abilities is not sufficient for female entrepreneurial leaders to seize entrepreneurial opportunities. According to the narratives of the participant (iw-025) who comes from Shenzhen city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, an entrepreneurial opportunity usually connects with a resource advantage. In some situations, even when women identify entrepreneurial opportunities, they cannot grasp or make the most of them if they have insufficient resources. This means that external determinants such as resources play a facilitative or constrained role in the process of women's seizing entrepreneurial opportunities. The facilitative or constrained roles are not static but dynamic, changing as they accompany the female entrepreneurial leaders' seeking of resources. This study thereby infers that external determinants play a role as gateways for women to engage in the entrepreneurial field. Therefore, as a participant (iw-025) explained, some entrepreneurial types are a compound of both entrepreneurial opportunity and resource advantage.

'Starting a business should be a personal need. So, there is motivation like this. Then when I have this motivation, maybe I will look for some opportunities, and then when I find some options, I have to look for many resources constantly, so it is a constant step-by-step exploration.' (iw-025).

In contrast to women in Beijing, women in Shenzhen provide a different perspective on opportunity and advantage in viewing entrepreneurial leadership. This comparison suggests internalisation from the idea level to the institutional level and then to the individual level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Female entrepreneurial leadership in practice is a complex of different entrepreneurial types. Due to the inertial influences of traditional Chinese culture, female entrepreneurial leaders often fuse their personal needs with improving family status. This finding does not only reflect a

synthesised role of both feminism and collectivism in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership but also support the Confucian cultural meaning system (see Figure 4) that has both self-oriented and other-oriented cultural values. Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders in the Chinese context often use their family's resources to launch enterprises. This reflects that collectivism and other-oriented cultures default on female entrepreneurial leaders' motivation and mindset. In contrast with female entrepreneurial leaders in a Chinese context, female entrepreneurial leaders often adhere to the individualism and self-oriented culture revealed in the Frontiers cultural meaning system (see Figure 4).

#### 4.2.2 Entrepreneurial Conditions

The entrepreneurial conditions for female entrepreneurial leaders are different from those of their male counterparts because of their different gender roles that are regulated by sociocultural norms. As a participant (iw-005), who comes from Shanghai city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, explains, the most crucial considerations in launching an enterprise are the entrepreneurial opportunity and the time allocation. This is because, on one hand, entrepreneurial leadership is defaulted as a masculine field in traditional sociocultural norms, as reported in Section 2.1.1.3.2; on the other hand, women are defaulted to undertake familial responsibilities according to these conventional sociocultural norms. On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders face similar challenges in both the Chinese and Western contexts. Therefore, the social identification of women in launching enterprises is often not the same as that of men. This explanation is corroborated by another participant (iw-007), who comes from Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and engages in the manufacturing industry. She elucidates that entrepreneurial opportunities may be

attractive to Chinese women, but embarking on an enterprise will inevitably impact the time allocation of balancing business and familial responsibilities.

‘Before starting a business, it may be necessary to understand this situation in the entire industry. There is also a time allocation of mine, my values. In the end, I want to allocate my time in home. It may have a significant impact.’ (iw-005).

‘First, it is easier for this society to identify men as entrepreneurial leaders. I think that if a woman wants to start a business, she may not get much recognition or support. Another is that this woman’s family will have a large part of the energy.’ (iw-007).

The above two participants both come from southeastern China but respectively engage in service and manufacturing industries. Their statements suggest how to allocate time is the consensus for them, no matter which industry they engage in. As a result, time allocation is one of the entrepreneurial conditions for female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China. However, the traditional Chinese philosophy on the conditions for success is applied by female entrepreneurial leaders to identify the entrepreneurial conditions. This study finds that the participants emphasise three necessary conditions for launching entrepreneurial enterprises in the application of the Chinese traditional culture: fulfilling the Tianshi (天时), Dili (地利), and Renhe (人和) simultaneously. Tianshi refers to opportunity, Dili to essential material support, and Renhe to harmonious social networks, or Guanxi in Chinese. These recognitions corroborate that Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders’ mindsets are affected by traditional Chinese philosophy. In contrast with the Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders, Western female entrepreneurial leaders are therefore influenced by Western philosophy. This study thereby infers that the bidirectional process between the individual level and the idea level in the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) is demonstrated in this analysis. As participants (im-006, iw-010, iw-105), who respectively come from Tianjin city in northern China, Gansu Province in northwestern China, and Shanghai city in southeastern China and

respectively engage in service industry, manufacturing industry, and service industry, explain:

‘I believe that you should do things at the proper time, location, and with the right people. It is just that the conditions should be met. First, I have such a team, which is my resource. Then... I found such a product. And in the current market, I think this is an opportunity. And... after some consideration and research, I discovered that the future market potential still exists. So, I think it is worth doing. So, I think the right time, place, and harmonious people are all these three points, and then we are willing to launch a business.’ (iw-010).

‘There is an old Chinese saying: the right time, place, and harmonious people. The right time means an opportunity, the right place means a particular condition, and the harmony of people means a network of relationships.’ (im-006).

‘Sometimes in China, isn’t it about the right time (Tianshi), the right place (Dili), and the harmonious people (Renhe)? So, you have to adapt to these things. For example, if you say, ‘I’m just planning this, but I can’t be at the proper time and location, and the people are not in harmony, and I don’t care.’ However, even though I want to achieve it, it seems I can’t do it.’ (iw-105)

Regarding the above three participants’ demographic background, which encompass most of the regional geographic culture and both the service and manufacturing industries, this study contends that the traditional Chinese thinking or Confucian culture influences their mindset about entrepreneurial conditions. The following interview data from the participants (iw-014, iw-097), who respectively come from Beijing city in northern China and Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and respectively engage in the service and manufacturing industries, shows that successful female entrepreneurial leaders tend to interact with their leadership members and followers. This phenomenon not only reflects the previously reported ‘Renhe’ but also illustrates that Chinese female entrepreneurial leadership is interdependent and adheres to other-oriented cultural values (see Figure 4), as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1, in the Confucian cultural meaning system. In comparison, this is different from its counterpart in the Western context, wherein the female entrepreneurial leaders and followers are

independent of each other, as inferred from the individualism and self-oriented cultural values (see Figure 4 in Section 2.2.1.2.1) in the Frontier cultural meaning system.

In particular, as explained by participant (iw-014), this study finds that female entrepreneurial leaders in a Chinese context emphasise emotional connection in their daily work to formulate an atmosphere of family. Thus, female entrepreneurial leaders and their company members are connected mutually, like family members. Taking account of these narratives by participant (iw-014), this study proposes that female entrepreneurial leaders tend to create a family-oriented culture, which is different from their male counterparts. In contrast with Chinese female entrepreneurial leadership, the extant literature has not reported the family-oriented culture in a Western context. The family-oriented culture can benefit female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological status, as a participant (iw-097) explained that her psychological status is positive as follows:

'We are more careful in doing things and will provide services to our members from multiple dimensions. In this case, it is equivalent to being a member of a family growing together, and there will be some dependencies. In this case, it will promote a link in this big family.' (iw-014).

'I feel that this can bring happiness to your heart. It is an experience that feels more pleasurable on the inside.' (iw-097).

The demographic background of the participants (iw-014, iw-097) covers both northern and southeastern China and both the manufacturing and service industries. Their demographic background indirectly reinforces the previous analysis about the influence of Confucian culture at the idea level on female entrepreneurial leaders at the individual level. Although Chinese women can find entrepreneurial opportunities if they have foresight abilities, they need to overcome the related challenges, such as allocating time to balance family and business and accumulating sufficient experiences and skills. This means that Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders are required to transcend themselves

and the contextual gateways formulated by Chinese sociocultural norms. As a result, the transcendence of self and contextual gateways reflects the bidirectional relationship between the individual level and idea level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders in the Western context are also required to achieve a transcendence of self and the contextual gateways that are formulated by Western sociocultural norms.

The contextual gateways can be recognised as the entrepreneurial challenges for female entrepreneurial leaders. In traditional Chinese culture, these challenges are summarised as meeting three conditions: Tianshi, Dili, and Renhe in a Chinese context. Tianshi and Dili can be categorised, respectively, at the idea level and the institutional level within the Culture Cycle; Renhe can be categorised at the interactional level and idea level within the Culture Cycle. Therefore, the influences of the three conditions such as Tianshi, Dili, and Renhe on female entrepreneurial leaders can be recognised as a mutual relationship between two categories within the Culture Cycle: the categories at the individual level and the categories at the remaining three levels, such as the interactional level, institutional level, and idea level. Analogous with the previously discussed contextual gateways, this study proposes that the later categories within the Culture Cycle can be named the categories of cultural gateways.

The above categorisation of the four levels of the Culture Cycle provides new perspectives on understanding the entrepreneurial conditions that Chinese women face. For example, as previously reported, although enterprises were successfully launched, female entrepreneurial leaders still need to acquire social recognition and identification. Therefore, this example reflects that social recognition and identification become cultural gateways at the idea level. This is why the reasonability of female

entrepreneurial leadership often encounters more challenges in a sociocultural context. Additionally, the cultural meaning system (see Figure 4) plays a role as a cultural gateway in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership. For example, this study finds that women's interdependent psychological schema makes female entrepreneurial leaders tend to create a family-oriented organisational culture (details are reported in Section 4.3.2.2). This finding suggests that the other-oriented cultural values in the Confucian cultural meaning system conform to Chinese women's interdependent psychological schema. In contrast with the self-oriented cultural values in the Frontier cultural meaning system, the extant research has not revealed a similar family-oriented organisational culture in Western women-led enterprises.

#### 4.2.3 Entrepreneurial Mortality

Female entrepreneurial leaders cannot avoid their enterprises' mortality since their inception. As reported in Section 4.2.2, the main challenge for female entrepreneurial leaders is to figure out what they can do to ensure their business survives in a sustainable manner. Thus, avoiding entrepreneurial mortality is an essential component of female entrepreneurial leadership. Inferring from previous analysis in Section 4.2.2, avoiding entrepreneurial mortality means female entrepreneurial leaders successfully surpass contextual gateways. On account of this interpretation of entrepreneurial mortality, there is no difference between Western and Chinese contexts. As a participant (im-045) who comes from Shandong Province in northern China and engages in the manufacturing industry explains, few entrepreneurial enterprises survive five years after their inception. Thus, entrepreneurial mortality is a crucial challenge that female entrepreneurial leaders need to address.



'I have been in the entrepreneurial business for more than 20 years. This project is in Qingdao. Several companies created at the same time as ours have already died. This was about five years ago. Only one has survived.' (im-045).

Shandong Province is not only the original place of Confucian culture but also socioeconomically dominated by SOEs. This kind of sociocultural and socioeconomic context reflects a cultural tightness in Shandong Province. This is why the participant expressed the high mortality of entrepreneurial enterprises in his hometown. The higher mortality rate of entrepreneurial enterprises is frequently the result of external determinants, such as peer competition, or internal determinants, such as their adaptability to market changes. These external determinants inevitably constitute the contextual or cultural gateways toward female entrepreneurial leaders, and the internal determinants reflect the psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders facing the external determinants. As a result, entrepreneurial mortality is a result of whether female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation can match or surpass the contextual or cultural gateways. Taking account of this provided perspective of psychology, female entrepreneurial leaders in both Chinese and Western contexts confront similar situations of resisting entrepreneurial mortality. According to one participant (im-057), who comes from Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and engages in the manufacturing industry, most enterprises in China survive for less than ten years. The first three years are the riskiest for an entrepreneurial enterprise during this period. Therefore, the third year since the inception of enterprises means a tipping point for female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation to facing contextual or cultural gateways. Participants (im-057, im-082), who respectively come from Zhejiang Province and Fujian Province in southeastern China and engage in manufacturing and service industries, make the following explanation:

‘Just say you are doing well, and someone will buy your company, or he will force your company to close. You start a business, and to what extent can you maintain it? A small business exists for ten or eight years, and either keeps operating or fails. How many years do you think small businesses in China can survive? Strangely, less than ten years. If that is beyond your ability, or if you have not kept up with the market changes after starting a business for a few years, you will also fail.’ (im-057).

‘The most challenging stage is the first three years. At present, I have not done many statistics. I do not know which one has a higher survival rate for women’s and men’s entrepreneurship.’ (im-082).

Considering that both of the above two participants come from southeastern China and engage in both the manufacturing and service industries, this study infers that Chinese women who intend to start their businesses commonly know the high mortality rate of entrepreneurial ventures. This phenomenon, on the one hand, demonstrates their foresight abilities and socioeconomic experiences; on the other hand, it reflects the psychological adaption of Chinese women in facing the entrepreneurial risks. Essentially, launching an entrepreneurial venture is not a temporary idea but rather a prudent plan. Participants (iw-052, iw-061), who respectively come from Jiangsu Province and Shanghai City in southeastern China and both of them engage in the service industry, explain, for instance, that they should acquire industrial experience before launching businesses. This explanation suggests their prudent attitudes and high risk-aversion before engaging in entrepreneurial activities. In contrast with Chinese women, the risk-aversion of Western women is revealed to be as proximal as that of Western men, as reported in Section 2.1.1.3.2.2.2. However, before embarking on enterprises, Chinese women will carefully select an industry that is conducive to their long-term development.

‘If you start a business directly after graduation, you will have a higher chance of failure. Moreover, now that we are relatively young, we should determine what we want and a direction because we can choose an industry. So, yes, our ability is not inadequate. Then again, there are many industries to choose from. However, we should determine which industry belongs to us and then go for in-depth development. This is the right one.’ (iw-052).

‘That is right, so if I did not learn it myself, I tried to learn it as much as possible, and I spent time, energy, and a small amount of money to learn it. So instead of saying I do it all at once for a while, the likelihood of failure is high.’ (iw-061).

Entrepreneurial mortality is recognised as a significant determinant of Chinese women’s engagement in entrepreneurial enterprises. This determinant reflects the complexity of the mutual influences between contextual or cultural gateways and the psychological adaptation of Chinese women when assessing entrepreneurial risks. In contrast with Chinese women, whose risk-aversion is influenced by collectivism, Western women’s risk-aversion is affected by individualism, as reported in Section 2.1.1.3.2.2.2. As a result, Western female entrepreneurial leaders are found to have a lower risk-aversion than their Chinese counterparts. To some extent, entrepreneurial mortality is highly associated with the industry that one is engaged in. Thus, choosing an industry is the first reference point for making decisions. Then, a daily operation for accumulating experience is indispensable for female entrepreneurial leaders to avoid mortality. As analysed previously, the third year since the inception of enterprises is the tipping point for female entrepreneurial leaders in sustaining their enterprises. Thus, maintaining enterprises for sustainable development becomes a crucial challenge for them. Consequently, this study suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders should reference a learning curve to prudently develop their enterprises.

#### 4.3 Female Entrepreneurial Leadership Determinants in Modern China

This study finds that the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China can be categorised into two categories: contextual or cultural gateway and psychological adaptation (see Table 34 in Appendix A14, Tables 35, 36, and 37 in Appendix A15, and Table 38 in Appendix A16). From the perspective of cultural psychology, as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1, female entrepreneurial leaders are affected

by the external cultural context and thereby make psychological responses to the external cultural context. This means that the external determinants playing facilitative or constrained roles can accordingly influence the female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological responses to be positive or negative. The different female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological responses reflect their psychological adaptation. As a result, this categorisation of the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership provides a new perspective to re-understand and re-organise the theoretical framework of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Therefore, this study constructs a mapping relationship between the two categories of the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership and the four levels of the Culture Cycle, as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1, and is shown in Table 3 as follows:

Table 3 Female Entrepreneurial Leadership Determinants' Categorisation in modern China

Categories	Influences		Culture Cycle
Cultural Gateway	Uncertainty	Certainty	Ideas
	Modernisation	Tradition	
	Feminism	Social Norms	
	Liberal	Conservative	
	Cultural Diversity	Cultural Consistency	
	Innovation	Cultural Inertia	
	Democratic	Autocratic	
	Collectivism	Individualism	
	Entrepreneurial Context	Non-Entrepreneurial Context	
	Family-Oriented	Non-Family-Oriented	
Other-oriented	Self-oriented	Interactions	
Psychological Adaptation	Higher adaptative	Lower adaptive	Individuals

Table 3 displays the categorisation of the four levels of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) and their mapping relationship with the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership. Through this categorisation, this study simplifies the structure of the Culture Cycle and creates a connection between the theoretical framework and the real entrepreneurial world. Therefore, the complicated determinants of female

entrepreneurial leadership can be understood in an abstract way, which is a necessary path of theory-building.

According to the influential extent of the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership, this study refines the determinants at three levels: the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, and identifies their facilitative or constrained roles in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership. Therefore, the facilitators and constraints in the process of female entrepreneurial leadership are identified (see Table 34 in Appendix A14). For example, female entrepreneurial leaders often face challenges such as institutional uncertainty and irregularities in the business environment because they need to step ahead of time and thus find an entrepreneurial opportunity. Referencing the categorisation in Table 3, these challenges are often displayed as a means of a cultural gateway.

The cultural gateway is put forward to depict the dynamic changes between the facilitators and constraints of female entrepreneurial leadership in a given sociocultural context. The facilitators reflect the cultural tightness, and the constraints reflect the cultural tightness. On account of these reflections, the concept of cultural gateway discloses cultural properties such as looseness or tightness. For example, the cultural gateway includes the clash between modernisation and tradition, feminism and social norms, liberal culture and conservative culture, cultural diversity and consistency, innovation and efficiency, other-oriented value and self-oriented value, collectivism and individualism, democratic and autocratic. The opened and closed statuses of cultural gateways can accordingly affect female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation. Correspondingly, female entrepreneurial leaders need to ascend their psychological adaptation from a lower level to a higher level.

#### 4.3.1 Determinants at Micro-Level

The determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership at the individual level have a daily and prompt impact on female entrepreneurial leaders. These determinants typically include two aspects: the external determinants and the internal determinants. The external determinants include business-family balance and work, family support and background, and self-cultivation to learn. All these three external determinants conceive of either cultural tightness or cultural looseness which reversely make these determinants facilitative or constrained for female entrepreneurial leaders. Additionally, the internal determinants include the mindsets and confidence of female entrepreneurial leaders. These internal determinants reflect female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation, which is a response to the external determinants.

##### 4.3.1.1 Business-Family Balance and Work

In this theme, when analysing the major determinants for female entrepreneurial leaders, this study finds that female entrepreneurial leaders especially concern their business-family balance and the work aspects (e.g., work ability, job skills, work experience, work dynamics, work efficiency and effects, and work responsibility). According to the following statements of participants (iw-061, iw-062) who respectively come from Shanghai City in southeastern China and Hubei Province in southern China and both of them engage in the service industry, female entrepreneurial leaders cannot avoid conflicts between business and family. In the majority of situations, they can only care for one side. The business-family balance is attributed to the inconsistency between the defaulted women's gender roles, as reported in Section 2.1.2.2, within the traditional Chinese sociocultural norms and the requirement of female entrepreneurial leadership. Because family is recognised as a predominantly female field in the Chinese cultural

context, female entrepreneurial leaders often find it impossible to balance business and family. Therefore, this business-family balance is typically a concern for female entrepreneurial leaders. Thus, this issue is unique to female entrepreneurial leaders.

Participants (iw-061, iw-062) express this as follows:

‘First of all, I have to make it clear that I cannot balance and make trade-offs. I also wanted to start a business while I was still young and single. That is because I want to start my own business. However, if everyone who already has a family is going to start a business, as is the case, the family should be considerate of each other. So, I need to think about myself because my parents are healthy and do not need me to care for them.’ (iw-061).

‘We have different expectations for women... Then not only does society treat women, not just your expectations in the workplace, but also in the family. That is very realistic because entrepreneurship is not 100% of life. For me, entrepreneurship is relatively offensive... Because I do want to have a family. Of course, I will have children of my own. That is, starting a business is very time-consuming. I have indeed delayed my marriage.’ (iw-062).

Through investigating the demographic backgrounds of the above two participants (iw-061, iw-062), this study argues that business-family balance is a pervasive determinant for female entrepreneurial leaders that covers both the manufacturing and service industries and exists in both socioeconomically developing regions (Hubei Province) and socioeconomically developed regions (Shanghai City). Business-family balance is attributed to the family responsibilities that are defaulted to female entrepreneurial leaders in a Chinese context, which are influenced by their traditional gender role in a tight sociocultural context. In contrast, although female entrepreneurial leaders in the Western context are required to balance their business and familial responsibilities, they can take on the binary responsibilities in a loose sociocultural context. As a result, as reported in Section 2.2.2.1.1.2, Western female entrepreneurial leaders can boost their businesses when they successfully undertake business and familial responsibilities.

However, this Western situation is significantly distinct from its Chinese counterpart because of their family support and background (see Section 4.3.1.2).

Although constrained by family-business balance, younger generations of female entrepreneurial leaders transcend their psychological adaptation through a re-understanding of entrepreneurial activities. Especially, the intergenerational viewpoint of traditional familial concepts influences their industry selection. As a result, the industry that their parents entered typically influences female entrepreneurial leaders. Similarly, as reported in Section 1.4, parents can affect their offspring's career in a Western context. As one participant (iw-105), who comes from Shanghai city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, pointed out, this is very different from the female entrepreneurial leaders of the intergeneration.

'Society and the role of a woman impose some responsibilities and obligations on me that I have to take. It is like some men... He has to support his family, so he cannot stay at home for granted, right? So, I think it is the responsibility and obligation given me the role of a woman. Unless you are irresponsible, you say I do not care about my children... I think it may violate my values. My value is that I want to be a valuable person. So, it seems wrong that you do not even bear the most basic responsibilities and obligations you are given as a woman to give birth to a child.' (iw-105).

Although Shanghai is the most socioeconomically developed region in modern China, the above statements by the participant (iw-105) reveal that traditional Chinese cultural concepts, such as the familial concept, still influence Shanghai women's mindsets. On account of this point, this study argues that cultural inertia, as reported in Section 2.1.2.4, is the primary attribution of the business-family balance in modern China. However, Shanghai is a sociocultural-advanced region with a high level of modernisation. It is evident that Shanghai women have a modernisation concept. Therefore, this study infers that business-family balance is the compromise between familial concept and



modernisation concept or the eclectic result between traditional culture and modernisation culture in a Chinese context.

The work aspects as reported in above are attributed to the inequality of opportunities for female entrepreneurial leaders in acquiring social and work experiences. One reasonable explanation is that the social capital, as reported in Section 2.2.2.4, are less accessed by Chinese women than by Chinese men because of the cultural gateways at the interactional level, institutional level, and idea level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 4). The study shows that participants (iw-002, im-003), who respectively come from Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province located in southeastern China and respectively engage in manufacturing and service industries, emphasised their social and work experiences, which serve as the basis of judgment. To an extent, this partially reflects their competitiveness, work capacity, and productivity.

‘Judgement is also gained from accumulated experience; my judgement is higher.’ (iw-002).

‘This effect is enormous. Women are not necessarily inherently smarter or dumber than men. The experience of men is much richer. This experience makes men suitable for such complex and advanced jobs, giving them an advantage. Women’s experience is not rich enough, which hinders their choice of work when the opportunity arises. Therefore, for complex or advanced jobs, there are more men and fewer women who accept challenges. So, the richness of experience is a significant determinant in leadership between men and women.’ (im-003).

Although both of the two participants (iw-002, im-003) come from southeastern China, their demographic backgrounds, including their different genders and engagement in different industries, suggest that gender is a significant attribution to the different level of work experience between women and men, which can influence their leadership ability. However, this study finds that patience and tenacity are the major determinants of Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders, which become relative advantages for them when compared with their male counterparts. Benefiting from these relative advantages,

Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders are typically adept at dealing with monotonous work routines. In turn, this can make it easier for female entrepreneurs in China to sustain their businesses over time. For example, a participant (im-022) who comes from Henan Province in central China and engages in the wig manufacturing industry identified patience and tenacity as the strengths of female entrepreneurial leadership, quoted as follows:

‘In our industry, the labour intensity is very low, but it requires you to be very quiet and do a simple job with low labour intensity for a long time without feeling bored. Men will feel more bored. Therefore, many women, including the lower and middle levels, are in this management.’ (im-022).

The wig manufacturing industry that the participant (im-022) engages in requires a high level of patience and tenacity. The male participant (im-022) acknowledges that because of women’s relative advantages of patience and tenacity, women acquire leading positions in contrast to men. The relative advantages consisting of patience and tenacity reflect the psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leadership (i.e., mapping the Culture Cycle at the individual level) that is not found in the extant research within the Western context. Therefore, the determinants of patience and tenacity are identified as facilitators of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders’ patience and tenacity are recognised as their soft power.

However, lacking social and work experiences and the necessity of business-family balance play constrained roles in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. Because of the inequality in accessing social capital, female entrepreneurial leaders in a Chinese context still lack competence, such as social and work experience, compared with their Chinese male counterparts. Additionally, because of the inconsistency between traditional sociocultural norms and entrepreneurial

requirements, female entrepreneurial leaders need to undertake their binary responsibilities in a Chinese context. In contrast, male entrepreneurial leaders in a Chinese context are less affected by the business-family balance. As a result, the unequal access to social capital and the inconsistency between traditional sociocultural norms and entrepreneurial requirements place female entrepreneurial leaders in a disadvantageous position compared with their male counterparts. Consequently, these constraints on female entrepreneurial leadership at the micro-level (i.e., at the individual level of the Culture Cycle) are attributed to the cultural gateway at the idea level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). This analysis thereby provides an approach to understanding the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership, namely “attribution by transcendence”.

#### 4.3.1.2 Family Support and Background

In contemporary China, family support for female entrepreneurial leaders with a lower socioeconomic status is crucial to their advancement and success. Although Chinese female entrepreneurs face the dilemma of competing demands of work and caregiving, they can get support from family members, namely their parents or clan, to alleviate the burden of caring for the family. Especially in rural areas of China, a female entrepreneurial leader’s family background motivates her to launch a needs-based business. This study thereby infers that the role of family and its significance are the main differences in female entrepreneurial leadership between Western and Chinese sociocultural contexts. The participants (im-023, iw-005, and iw-008), who respectively come from Zhejiang Province in southeastern China, Shanghai City in southeastern China, and Jiangxi Province in southern China and respectively engage in

the manufacturing industry, service industry, and service industry, provide the following explanation:

‘How to say it? For example, a woman with a strong background can also start a business; without a strong background, a man should start a business.’ (im-023).

‘I think it is also more critical because, after all, you are also responsible for your lover. Especially for lovers, this role may take up a large part of the day. So home is more important. In some cases, giving up family is also possible. Giving up a family and then moving towards a career. That is the family and work balance. On weekends, I usually spend time with the kids. At night, I will not participate in some unnecessary activities.’ (iw-005).

‘I believe an entrepreneurial woman can care for her family and business simultaneously. I also hope that in the future, if I can take care of both sides, I think this will be a better state. While I have a career, my career is also an essential part of my life. So, I hope that if I cannot do it well, it should be done on both sides. What both sides have to do is to support each other.’ (iw-008).

Although the three participants come from either socioeconomically developing or developed regions and engage in either service or manufacturing industries, all of them emphasise the significance of family support in influencing Chinese women to embark on entrepreneurial enterprises. However, there are gender differences in terms of recognition of family support. The statement of the male participant (im-023) suggests that family support is the precondition for women to embark on entrepreneurial enterprises, but men do not need this precondition. However, the other two female participants do not emphasise this point. As a result, this study argues that a gender gateway in recognition of family support exists between Chinese men and women.

These above statements show that the inertial influence of traditional Chinese familial concepts as a complex determinant significantly influences female entrepreneurial leaders’ mindsets and behaviours. Consequently, although female entrepreneurial leaders are constrained by their familiar responsibilities, they can get multi-generational family support when launching enterprises. As a result, balancing family and business

for Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders becomes more complex than for their Western counterparts. Although there are different understandings of entrepreneurial leadership among generations, the older generation tends to pass on their experiences and skills to the younger generation. This intergenerational transition suggests that multi-generational family support can benefit female entrepreneurial leaders for stable development.

#### 4.3.1.3 Self-Cultivation to Learn.

The study finds that successful female entrepreneurial leaders actively continue learning systematically for self-transcendence. This finding conforms to the analysis, as reported in Section 4.2.1, of the typical Chinese thinking namely “advance with times”. This typical Chinese thinking is defaulted to and immersed in the normal mindsets of Chinese individuals. As a result, the mindsets and behaviours of female entrepreneurial leaders are affected by the typical Chinese thinking. This relationship reflects the directional process from the idea level to the individual level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). For example, as expressed by participants (iw-008, iw-025) who respectively come from Jiangxi Province and Shenzhen city in southern China and both of them engage in the service industry, continuing learning has become a necessary skill for female entrepreneurial leaders.

‘Of course, on the one hand, I am also constantly learning. But, on the other hand, I am also constantly summarising in practice. Every business I do, dealing with every customer, includes these things. So, I am also constantly learning.’ (iw-008).

‘We also have a strategy, which we did not have before. Even though I have little knowledges about strategy, subconsciously, I know how the company’s future development direction should go. It is possible to think about it in advance. What are we going to do in the next three years? So, I will go ahead and plan... Therefore, I also have some new understanding of strategy, and I will also learn some such knowledge related to strategy, that is, some methodology, to learn.’ (iw-025).

Both of the above two participants (iw-008, iw-025) engage in the service industry and come from either socioeconomically developing or developed regions. However, they both recognise the significance of continuous learning for their self-transcendence. The reason that female entrepreneurial leaders emphasise continuous learning is attributed to their overcoming the challenges posed by the rapid change of an external entrepreneurial environment. This is because the experience that they accumulate often has limited effects on guiding their entrepreneurial actions. Based on what the participant (iw-025) stated above, this study finds that continuous learning is a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. This finding suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders can prepare in advance to cope with the contextual gateways formulated by the rapid change of an external entrepreneurial environment through continuous learning. This behaviour of female entrepreneurial leaders reflects typical Chinese thinking, namely “repair the house before it rains”. In contrast, there is a similar Western saying, “save money for a rainy day”, which expresses the same thinking. As a result, continuous learning is an effective approach for female entrepreneurial leaders to make their psychological adaptation match the contextual gateways.

However, whether female entrepreneurial leaders can insist on continuous learning depends on the situations they face. One of the situations that influences female entrepreneurial leaders significantly is the business-family balance, as reported in Section 4.3.1.1, which can reduce their learning time. As a result, the clash between family and business undermines the facilitative role of continuous learning for female entrepreneurial leaders. The main reason for this phenomenon is attributed to women’s familial roles, which are regulated by traditional sociocultural norms in the Chinese

context. For instance, one participant (im-057), who comes from Zhejiang Province and engages in the manufacturing industry, argued that women's learning ability would be weakened when they got married and were required to undertake the responsibilities of educating their children.

'After a lady gets married, her ability to study inevitably deteriorates because she does not have time to study. Women should take care of the family at night and help their children study. You can see that China's education system is not sound... Parents should dedicate at least two hours a night to tutoring children, dramatically impacting women. Men usually eat and drink for socialisation, and thus, in the evening, women have to tutor children.' (im-057).

The above statement by the male participant (im-057) reveals that even in socioeconomically developed regions, Chinese women cannot avoid the constraints generated by traditional gender roles and familial concepts, which can weaken their time and ability in self-cultivation to learn. As a result, this study infers that cultural inertia, as reported in Section 2.1.2.4, still influences Chinese women's self-transcendence. However, this study finds that continuous learning is necessary for female entrepreneurial leaders to make the right decisions when they face uncertainty. Referencing the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), this finding suggests that continuous learning approaches the mindsets and further psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders in coping with the contextual gateways. Because empirical evidence and experience are not sufficient conditions to predict the future, female entrepreneurial leaders emphasise continuing learning to ensure that they can sustain their business through 'advance with times', as reported in the beginning of this subsection. For example, one participant (iw-004), who comes from Beijing city in northern China and engages in the service industry, expressed that she focuses on learning new things and doing things under pressure when she takes risks.

‘Your past empirical evidence is just a reference. The more I think it is a continuous learning ability; One learns based on judgments about the future. That experience is an aid or auxiliary. Because the future has not happened yet, it is not the same as the past.’ (iw-004).

Considering the participant (iw-004) comes from Beijing City, which is the capital of the People’s Republic of China, this study infers that her demographic background influences her recognition of continuous learning. What she emphasised is the timing of doing things and preparing for the future, which conforms to the analysis of her statement on entrepreneurial opportunities in Section 4.2.1. From the above analysis, this study suggests that self-cultivation is a significant attainment that distinguishes entrepreneurial leaders from non-entrepreneurial people. This study thereby identifies that the ‘self-cultivation to learn’ is a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. The interview data, in particular, shows that female entrepreneurial leaders value self-cultivation as a skill and the ability to overcome institutional uncertainty (see also Section 4.3.3.2.4). Moreover, due to their unbeneficial position in a socioeconomic context, female entrepreneurial leaders realise that self-cultivation is fundamental to their enterprises’ survival and sustainability. Because of this self-cultivation process, they can acquire knowledge and skills and maintain their entrepreneurial mindset (see also Section 4.3.1.4). Thus, they can continually improve their capacity for resilience to conquer challenges. That is, the ‘self-cultivation to learn’ is a facilitative determinant for female entrepreneurial leaders, enhancing their psychological adaptation to cope with cultural gateways.

#### 4.3.1.4 The Mindset of Female Entrepreneurial Leaders

Having an entrepreneurial or traditional-working mindset is a prerequisite for female entrepreneurial leaders to distinguish themselves from others. In this process, an entrepreneurial mindset reflects a female entrepreneurial leader’s psychological



adaptation at the individual level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). On account of this point, entrepreneurial mindsets are embodied in entrepreneurial behaviour at the individual level. Conversely, entrepreneurial mindsets are regulated by the cultural gateway at the institutional and idea levels. Therefore, an entrepreneurial mindset is a foundation for female entrepreneurial leadership. As one participant (iw-040), who comes from Beijing city in northern China and engages in the service industry, explained, this study finds that female entrepreneurial leaders expand their entrepreneurial mindsets to all team members. This finding suggests the collective transcendence of female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China.

‘Because everyone is different, some people want to do things, and some just want to work. The work-thinking means I just finished it. The thinking of doing things is suitable for entrepreneurship, which is very similar to the thinking of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial thinking means that no matter whom the company belongs to, I treat the company like ours. And then what I am doing is what I should do as an individual, on my own as a unit.’ (iw-040)

What the participant (iw-040) stated reflects the strengthened collectivism in northern China, especially in Beijing, where he comes from. This reflection means cultural consistency from the idea level to the individual level within the Cultural Cycle (see Figure 3). Therefore, this study finds that sociocultural norms influence the mindset of Chinese women. This finding reveals the directional process from idea level to individual level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Specifically, if the self-recognition of female entrepreneurial leaders is modernised, open, and self-confident, they can surpass the cultural gateways formulated by traditional social norms of gender. However, a male participant (im-023), who comes from Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and engages in the manufacturing industry, argues that men continue to believe that women should be housewives and men should be entrepreneurial leaders. This argument illustrates that those men’s recognition remains

unchanged as in traditional times. In contrast, Chinese women's recognition of themselves has developed in modern times. This comparison reveals a large recognition gap between Chinese men and women. However, when talking about female entrepreneurial leaders, participants (iw-008, iw-046), who respectively come from Jiangxi Province in southern China and Jiangsu Province in southeastern China and both engage in the service industry, explain that the self-recognition of female entrepreneurial leaders is more developed than that of men.

'A female's responsibility lies in serving her husband and teaching her children; a male can launch an entrepreneurial enterprise.' (im-023).

'Social concepts about women are gradually improving. The business environment is improving, and there are more and more women, so I think social concepts about women may increase. It will not stop. In the past, for example, women may have been too weak, some things could not be done, or something else. It may be found later that women are also powerful and can do many things.' (iw-008)

'I do not think there is considerable confusion in this regard, and I do not say that there will be differences between men and women in entrepreneurship. However, right now, in my view, entrepreneurship is what you are looking for... how you are more resilient to that, what kind of person do you want to be, and then you do what you want to do, just be brave. As for the eyes of others, maybe I do not care much about it, so I may not think that society treats female entrepreneurial leadership differently. So, I am less sensitive to this information.' (iw-046).

From the demographic backgrounds of the three participants (im-023, iw-008, and iw-046), this study contends that even in socioeconomically developed regions, such as Zhejiang Province, cultural inertia still affects the regional culture and thereby influences the local male entrepreneurial leaders' mindset towards their female counterpart. This situation conforms to the previous analysis about family support, as reported in Section 4.3.1.2. However, female entrepreneurial leaders' self-awareness and self-realisation reflected in the above statements suggest a larger gender gateway in terms of the conceptual reasonability of being an entrepreneurial leader between women and men in modern China.

Entrepreneurial mindsets exert influences on female entrepreneurial leaders' judgement when they make decision. Inferring from the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), female entrepreneurial leaders' judgement is affected by the determinants at the interactional level, institutional level, and idea level. As a result, understanding the entrepreneurial mindsets of female entrepreneurial leaders needs to transcend the individual level to the upper level of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). This study thereby named this comprehending process the 'transcendence for understanding'. For example, in terms of entrepreneurial judgement, the data from participants (iw-005, iw-008, iw-013), who respectively come from Shanghai city in southeastern China (moving from Anhui Province), Jiangxi Province in southern China, and Jiangsu Province in southeastern China and respectively engage in service industry, service industry, and manufacturing industry, suggests that it is irrelevant to gender. Instead, they believe it relates to their experiences, contextual sensitivity, and professional knowledge, which are at the individual level of the Culture Cycle. Participants (iw-005, iw-008, and iw-013) explained as follows:

'Judgment is okay, in my opinion. However, I do not think it is very appropriate to separate men and women. This judgement, of which I speak, is comprised of your industry-related knowledge, experience, and perception. When doing business analysis, business judgements should be rational.' (iw-005).

'There will be fewer people doing it at the beginning. Of course, I think doing this involves more professionalism, but that does not mean I cannot do it if I think the opportunity is good. First of all, you have to check whether I can do this.' (iw-008).

'Judgement is based on individuals, not gender. Some enterprises can become the top 500 in our city; some can become the top 500 in the country, and others can become the top 500 worldwide. It should be that the patterns and judgements of each corporate boss are different, but you cannot say that his gender causes his judgements to be different. I do not think it has anything to do with gender. It is purely a matter of personality and personal experience.' (iw-013).

The three female participants (iw-005, iw-008, and iw-013) come from either socioeconomically developing or developed regions and engage in either service or manufacturing industries. Their statements suggest that their mindset is open-minded and conforms to cultural looseness in these regions. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this analysis discloses the internalisation of Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) from the idea level to the institutional level and then to the individual level. Consequently, this study infers that the mutual relationship between female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation and cultural gateway at different levels is reflected in the cultural consistency between the statements of the three participants (iw-005, iw-008, and iw-013) and their demographic backgrounds.

The mindsets of female entrepreneurial leaders dynamically develop along with their increasing years of entrepreneurial experience. When asked how the participants assessed their mindsets, they responded that their mindset often developed to be mature, inclusive, and adaptive in the advancement of their entrepreneurial leadership. This response reinforces the findings of self-cultivation to learn, as reported in Section 4.3.1.3, and indicates the progress and evolution of their mindsets. Through analysing their statements, this study finds that their psychological status becomes stable and strong along with their mindset development over time. This finding suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders' mindset development can facilitate their psychological adaptation. For example, one participant (iw-025) who comes from Shenzhen city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry stated that her inner thoughts currently do not fear any difficulties since she leads and manages her entrepreneurial enterprise, which is developing from small-scale to medium-scale.

'From the very beginning, we were a small company that was very uncertain. Then every step of the way... we seem to feel that we cannot go on, but then I have to solve it later... So, an immense feeling for me now is that my heart has become very strong, ... any difficulties are not complicated for me now, that is, I think this is a very normal thing. ... Our mentality will become more stable and sufficient... I can face it calmly. This is the immense feeling I have felt in the past ten years.' (iw-025).

The above statement of the female participant (iw-025) suggests cultural consistency between her entrepreneurial and open-minded mindset and the cultural looseness inherent in Shenzhen City's entrepreneurial culture. On account of this point, this study argues that the entrepreneurial and open-minded mindset of the female participant (iw-025) is influenced by Shenzhen City's entrepreneurial culture. Consequently, this analysis reinforces the previous analysis about the internalisation from the idea level to the institutional level and then to the individual level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3).

This study thereby finds that female entrepreneurial leaders need to change their traditional working mindset to formulate an entrepreneurial mindset. Only through these entrepreneurial mindsets can they conquer the challenges caused by external sociocultural norms. This analysis indicates that female entrepreneurial leaders' entrepreneurial mindsets reflect their psychological adaptation to coping with cultural gateways inherent in external sociocultural norms. This means that entrepreneurial mindsets are a facilitative determinant for female entrepreneurial leaders. In practice, this mindset change is a dynamic process that develops along with enterprise development. When female entrepreneurial leaders' entrepreneurial mindset develops increasingly, their psychological adaptation can fundamentally improve and thereby influence their followers.

#### 4.3.1.5 The Confidence of Female entrepreneurial Leaders

The confidence of female entrepreneurial leaders is widely recognised as a binary determinant affecting their entrepreneurial leadership. When female entrepreneurial leaders have sufficient confidence, they can acquire high psychological adaptation to deal with the contextual or cultural influences; when female entrepreneurial leaders have insufficient confidence, they can acquire low psychological adaptation to deal with the contextual or cultural influences. As a result, this study argues that sufficient confidence is a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership, and insufficient confidence is a constrained determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership.

The confidence of female entrepreneurial leaders not only comes from themselves but also depends on their family support. For example, as reflected by participant (im-009), even if they fail in entrepreneurial activities, family support can still set up a foundation for them, making them confident. On account of this point, family support benefits Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders by improving their confidence and thereby facilitating their psychological adaptation. According to the arguments of participant (im-009), who comes from Henan Province in central China and engages in the service industry, family support positively influences the confidence of female entrepreneurial leaders, which encourages them to embark on entrepreneurial enterprises.

‘For an entrepreneur... the support of my family is critical for me to do things right after graduation. Because without the support of my family, I might have figured out what I would do on my own. So, under this general logic, I think the help of the family should be significant. The second is support for your psychology, which complements each other. Without such support, it is difficult for an entrepreneur to complete this journey. Yes, it is the confidence brought by the family. ... If I lose everything, I will continue to work for a company when I return.’ (im-009).

The above statement of the male participant (im-009) reveals that family support is also important to male entrepreneurial leaders' confidence. His statement suggests that family support at least sets the foundation for entrepreneurial leaders' enterprises. The above-analysed confidence of female entrepreneurial leaders is restated by another female participant (iw-008) who comes from Jiangxi Province and engages in the service industry. This is because, for female entrepreneurial leaders, their concerns are more about 'the sense of security', which is the 'bottom line' and should be guaranteed by the government. According to the statement of the participant (iw-008), institutional stability is a guarantee of the female entrepreneurial leader's sense of security. This means that female entrepreneurial leaders' confidence not only comes from themselves but also depends on institutional stability. Therefore, the directional process from the institutional level to the individual level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) is embodied in the statements of the participant (iw-008). To some extent, the sense of security plays a more important role in affecting female entrepreneurial leaders' sense of confidence. Therefore, the cultural gateway at the institutional level (i.e., policy stability, contextual stability) influences the psychological adaptation (i.e., sense of security, confidence) in this kind of situation. This is explained by the participant (iw-008) as follows:

'Now that we are starting a business, there are still some differences in gender roles between men and women in this society. If stability is ensured, our company will be able to survive better, that is, develop better. At least one of them is confident in my careers. ... I said that confidence in an enterprise plays a significant role. It also creates a sense of security for us to do business outside. When doing business, at least the bottom line is the sense of security in doing business, and I hope to be protected.' (iw-008).

In comparison of the demographic backgrounds of the male participant (im-009) and the female participant (iw-008), this study finds that both of them come from socioeconomically developing regions, engage in the service industry, and emphasise

the “foundation of enterprise” or “bottom line”. This finding suggests that their confidence is irrelevant to gender but highly depends on the open cultural gateway at the institutional level. Consequently, this study contends that cultural looseness inherent in a given sociocultural context is the source of both female and male entrepreneurial leaders’ confidence. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this analysis reinforces the previous analysis about the internalisation of the Culture Gateway (see Figure 3) from the institutional level to the individual level.

Female entrepreneurial leaders’ confidence is a significant determinant that can influence them to maintain their enterprises’ survival and sustainability. Usually, the practical barriers exceed the expectations and plans of female entrepreneurial leaders. This situation indicates that external determinants play a role as a contextual gateway that requires female entrepreneurial leaders’ confidence to realise a transcendence of themselves and a collective transcendence of the contextual gateways. On account of this point, Western female entrepreneurial leaders also need sufficient confidence to make a self-transcendence and a collective transcendence of the contextual gateway within the Western context. Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders often need to promote themselves and accumulate experience and skills. For example, when an enterprise is launched, female entrepreneurial leaders often tend to consider developing products for survival in market competition and sustainability with a concern for corporate social responsibilities and social recognition, as explained by participants (iw-005, iw-075) who respectively come from Shanghai city (moved from Anhui Province) and Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and both engage in the service industry, as follows:



‘For an entrepreneurial enterprise for me, it is all about paying attention to the people, the market, and the products. After starting a business, I think it is a sense of social responsibility and social recognition.’ (iw-005).

‘We changed to manufacture different products at that time and found that customers preferred this type of product after we made it, compared with other personal care products. After doing it, I feel more confident because I think this product has excellent potential for development for me. There are so many products... I just started to see which one is better, and then I always think this product is too good, so I will keep doing this.’ (iw-075).

Both of the two participants (iw-005, iw-075) come from socioeconomically developed regions and engage in the service industry. Especially, this study notices that the participant (iw-005) moved from the socioeconomically developing region to the socioeconomically developed region, which suggests an institutional transition from cultural tightness to cultural looseness. Their demographic background and their statements not only reflect cultural consistency but also the positive influences of cultural looseness on their confidence. Therefore, this study infers that the open cultural gateway provides positive feedback to female entrepreneurial leaders’ psychological adaptation.

This study identifies that female entrepreneurial leaders’ confidence comes from themselves (e.g., their advanced abilities in competition) and is affected by determinants such as family support and institutional stability. Considering that female entrepreneurial leaders’ confidence reflects their psychological adaptation, this study thereby infers that female entrepreneurial leaders’ psychological adaptation is mutually affected by the cultural gateways that are formulated by external determinants such as family support and institutional stability. In addition, female entrepreneurial leaders’ confidence (i.e., individual level) is related to their enterprises’ survival and sustainability (i.e., institutional level). As a result, this analysis embodies the bidirectional process between the individual level and the institutional level within the

Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) and subsequently reflects the mutual relationship between psychological adaptations and cultural gateways.

#### 4.3.2 Determinants at Meso-Level

Determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership at the meso-level or organisational level include cultural orientation, organisational culture, teamwork, and team cultivation. These meso-determinants act as intermediaries between the macro-level and the micro-level in the given situation. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this study identifies that the determinants at the meso-level are equivalent to those at the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Particularly, the family-oriented organisational culture created by female entrepreneurial leaders in their enterprises reflects other-oriented value in both psychological processes and sociocultural practices, which conforms to the present study of the Confucian cultural meaning system (see Figure 4). This study thereby finds that the family-oriented culture (i.e., at the institutional level within the Culture Cycle) indicates the female entrepreneurial leader's predilection, which is reversely influenced by the traditional sociocultural norms (i.e., at the idea level within the Culture Cycle). On account of this point, this analysis reflects the bidirectional process between the institutional level and the idea level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). However, this organisational culture objectively divides followers into ingroups and outgroups and thereby creates cultural gateways at the institutional level towards outgroup followers. Consequently, female entrepreneurial leaders are required to reduce cultural gateways at the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3).

#### 4.3.2.1 Other-oriented Culture and Self-Oriented Culture.

Female entrepreneurial leaders tend to create other-oriented cultures in their enterprises. This study thereby finds that this kind of leadership behaviour conforms to the Confucian cultural meaning system (see Figure 4), which discloses the mutual relationship of other-oriented value between psychological processes and sociocultural practices. This finding indicates cultural consistency from the institutional level to the idea level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). To an extent, this kind of other-oriented culture is a reflection of collectivism, which is a classic characteristic of Chinese traditional culture. For example, female participants (iw-008, iw-012), who come from Jiangxi Province in southern China and Jiangsu Province in southeastern China and respectively engage in service and manufacturing industries, stated that they tend to concern themselves with others more than themselves in an organisation. Additionally, these women expressed that caring about other people's ideas is necessary to unify the team members. This expression reinforces the finding that female entrepreneurial leadership is characterised by an other-oriented culture.

'While starting a business, I can train some local people, for example, some of the employees we recruited. Moreover, we can lead them to join my entrepreneurial team. Then we can bring them in a good direction and develop together. This is what I think was my original intention. Yes, that is something I want to do. When I came here, I also wanted to go gold panning. But, of course, I also wanted to contribute to the local area and do some things within my abilities.' (iw-008).

'I care for others and care about other people's ideas a little more. That is, as the management team leader, I should try my best to evaluate the ideas of other managers. However, stubbornness may not be conducive to unity.' (iw-012).

The above two participants (iw-008, iw-012) come from either socioeconomically developing or developed regions and engage in either service or manufacturing industries. This comprehensive demographic background of the two participants and

their statements suggests cultural consistency of other-oriented value in their both psychologic processes and socioeconomic practices. This analysis conforms to the Confucian cultural meaning system (see Figure 4). As a result, this study infers that the cultural meaning system can be categorised into the categories of psychological adaptation and cultural gateways (see Figure 20 in Appendix A18).

When a kind of organisational culture is formulated, it can objectively divide followers into ingroups who are following the culture and outgroups who deviate from the culture. However, female entrepreneurial leaders cannot only cover the interests of ingroup followers. In practice, the decision-making process for female entrepreneurial leaders is a compromise of ingroup and outgroup interests. This means they will be both self-oriented and other-oriented, not solely other-oriented. As a result, the organisational culture generated by female entrepreneurial leaders conforms to the Confucian cultural meaning system (see Figure 4). Female entrepreneurial leaders prioritise self-centeredness, particularly in terms of their fundamental interests. On account of this point, this kind of organisational culture embodies individualism that is based on collectivism. This study thereby proposes a concept of ‘loose collectivism’ to define the culture that has individualism on a basis of collectivism. This is argued by participant (iw-013), who comes from Jiangsu Province and engages in the manufacturing industry, as follows:

‘It can be both because it depends on the specific thing. If I insist that my idea is right and I think that is what I want to do, then I will stick to my idea. But most of the time, it should be discussed and then decided. Because you have to consider other people’s feelings, you cannot just focus on your feelings. This is often the case, but in particular circumstances, it should still be self-interested, and it cannot be said that there is no self-interest. If there is no self-interest, then I have no opinion of mine, right?’ (iw-013).

The above statement of the participant (iw-013) and her demographic background suggest the cultural consistency of both self-oriented and other-oriented values in socioeconomically developed regions. This cultural consistency reinforces the previous analysis about the Confucian cultural meaning system (see Figure 4). Additionally, Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders often display their other-oriented values in a family-oriented organisational culture. This phenomenon reflects an externalisation process from the individual level to the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). This means that female entrepreneurial leaders endeavour to realise self-transcendence at the individual level and collective transcendence of the cultural gateway at the institutional level. This is a distinguishing characteristic of Chinese female entrepreneurial leadership. In comparison with the Western context, this study infers that their other-oriented values are sourced from the Confucian cultural meaning system (see Figure 4), as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1. Therefore, the family-oriented culture can be put into the framework of the cultural meaning system for understanding. Details of family-oriented culture are analysed in Section 4.3.2.2.

#### 4.3.2.2 Family-Oriented Culture

This study finds that female entrepreneurial leaders tend to create a family-oriented culture in their organisations. The family-oriented culture is embodied in the statement of the participant (iw-096), who comes from Zhejiang Province and engages in the service industry, that female entrepreneurial leaders emphasise treating their followers as their family members. On this account, this study names this kind of organisational culture “family-oriented culture”. This finding discloses the characteristics of Chinese female entrepreneurial leadership from the perspective of organisational behaviours. In contrast, there is no comparable finding regarding female entrepreneurial leadership in

the Western context. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this family-oriented culture represents the other-oriented culture, which can promote a sense of belonging among followers. For example, one female participant (iw-096) expressed that they are concerned with their followers as family and treat them equally with a heart-to-heart attitude, which generates organisational cohesiveness.

‘We still need to be harmonious among our employees in the regular communication and exchanges. This kind of thing is like a real family, and there is no generation gap. It is just like interacting with family members... and then employees have an excellent opportunity to play. The staff need to be more concerned. Even if you are still the boss, you still have to lower yourself a bit, not to be higher than the staff, and heart-to-heart talk is still the key. So, you can see that we do not have many employees now, but the employees are attentive and take company business as their own business, so I am very relieved.’ (iw-096).

As a female entrepreneurial leader, the participant (im-096) recruited her relatives and clan members into her entrepreneurial enterprise. Compared with others who are neither relatives nor clan members, the relatives and clan members who have kinship with the participant (i-096) are easier to trust for her. Because of this kinship among her followers, she treats them as family members, which is recognised as a normal and reasonable thing. Reversely, the relatives and clan members are a kind of family support, as reported in Section 4.3.1.2 for her. As a result, the reciprocal relationship between her and her followers ascends the traditional employment relationship. The reciprocal relationship objectively forms a family-oriented culture based on kinship. In addition, considering she is from Zhejiang, where she inherited the traditional Chinese culture, especially the traditional familial concept, this study infers that another basis of the family-oriented culture is attributed to her familial concept. Precisely, her familial concept transits and expands from family to enterprise, thereby creating a family-oriented culture.

The above statement reveals that the purpose of female entrepreneurial leaders creating a family-oriented culture is to maintain a harmonious relationship among their followers. This means that Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders are affected by the sociocultural concept of harmony, as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.2. From the perspective of cultural psychology, the family-oriented culture can be attributed to the mutual relationship between the idea level and individual level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Therefore, this study provides an attribution approach to understanding family-oriented culture by transcending its institutional level to other levels within the Culture Cycle, namely 'attribution by transcendence'.

The family-oriented culture fostered by female entrepreneurial leaders in China displays a kind of soft power in their organisation. By treating followers as family members in a "softer and more flexible" manners, as stated by the participant (iw-004), female entrepreneurial leaders can shorten social distance and strengthen emotional connections among the staff. On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders successfully open the cultural gateway at the institutional level to their followers and increase their followers' psychological adaptation within their enterprises. This is largely attributed to the fact that, as a participant (iw-004), who comes from Beijing city and engages in the service industry, explained, Chinese women less often emphasise personal authority. In contrast with male entrepreneurial leaders, female entrepreneurial leaders' soft power can even be attributed to their femininity.

'Women do not stress much about this leadership authority, and everyone just completes things well. Women are not as authoritative as men... Women may be softer and more flexible regarding organisational culture and female leadership. In these cultures, I think female entrepreneurial leaders are a kind of cultural representation, which may be attributed to the influence of this matriarchal clan and family.' (iw-004).

The soft power that the participant (iw-004) possesses is not only attributed to the participant herself but also to her demographic background. Because Beijing, where she lives, is full of cultural tightness inherent in the sociopolitical influence compared with other regions of China, she needs to psychologically adapt to the cultural tightness. On account of this point, using soft power is the best approach for her to realise self-transcendence in the context of cultural tightness. Additionally, influenced by the inertia of Taoism, as reported in Section 2.1.2.4, she reasonably selects soft power as the appropriate approach. This is because women are categorised into the Yin category, which is defaulted to as having vulnerable and flexible aspects. In contrast, men are categorised into the Yang category, which is defaulted to as having strong and hard aspects. Consequently, soft power is a natural selection for female entrepreneurial leaders in the context of cultural tightness.

This study finds that female entrepreneurial leaders care about their followers' emotions, feelings, and attitudes daily because they are empathic and compassionate. This finding embodies the sympathy, collectivism, and other-oriented values inherent in female entrepreneurial leadership, which conform to the analysis of Confucian cultural meaning system (see Figure 4), as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1. Referencing the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), this finding reflects the bidirectional process between the idea level and individual level and between the idea level and the institutional level within the Culture Cycle. This analysis reinforces "attribution by transcendence", as reported previously. One participant (iw-025), who comes from Shenzhen city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, argued that her sympathy or compassion compels her to attempt to comprehend what her followers are concerned about. In addition, she can communicate with followers through psychological



counselling if they are considering leaving the organisation because they do not like its culture.

‘For example, I would be utterly reluctant if some executives wanted to leave. If anything, or they encounter some difficulties, I will do psychological work for others, and I can do it well... I can also experience the state of each person at each stage with the same sympathy. I have experienced it, and the most significant benefit of doing psychological work is that you have experienced everything personally, so you will think these are not problems. I have seen all the phenomena every day so that I can understand our current colleague’s performance at each stage very well, and I will be able to understand them better.’ (iw-025).

The above statement by the participant (iw-025) illustrates how female entrepreneurial leaders use sympathy to strengthen the connectedness between themselves and their followers. As a female entrepreneurial leader, the participant (iw-025) is not only involved in Shenzhen’s entrepreneurial culture but also affected by the inertia of traditional familial concepts that are permeated into her organisational culture. In this situation, her organisational culture is transformed into a family-oriented culture, which is characterised by loose collectivism. On account of this point, for their businesses to succeed, female entrepreneurial leaders should not only be sympathetic but also share other-oriented values. Referencing the Confucian cultural system, as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1, female entrepreneurial leaders’ sympathy embodies their other-oriented psychological process, which conforms to the other-oriented values in sociocultural practices. This interpretation reveals a mutual match between female entrepreneurial leaders’ internal psychological adaptation and external cultural gateways. When all the members of an entrepreneurial enterprise share other-oriented values, they can formulate an interdependent organisational culture. Thus, the family-oriented culture suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders establish a community

with a shared spirit and material wealth. This is how the participant (iw-024), who comes from Jiangsu Province and engages in the manufacturing industry, interprets it:

‘Everyone works together. At ordinary times, I am not haughty as a boss. They are just like brothers and sisters, right? Then it means that the salary part can be paid as much as possible. Usually, if the enterprise runs well, then the bonus on New Year’s Eve, or something, will be allocated. Anyway, it is based on one’s conscience. Anyway, they are good employees. Anyway, I give them more when I earn more, and they are happy; they never complain when I give them a little.’ (iw-024).

What the participant (iw-024) stated conforms to the Chinese traditional belief, namely “employers and followers share the good times and bad times” (有福同享,有难同当, You Fu Tong Xiang, You Nan Tong Dang, in Chinese). As a result, her statement reveals that she is influenced by the cultural inertia (see also Section 2.1.2.4) of the regional culture in Jiangsu Province. As previously analysed in Section 4.1, Jiangsu is recognised as an example of protecting and inheriting traditional Chinese culture. These above interviews show that it became clear that female entrepreneurial leaders and followers formulated a reciprocal and interdependent relationship based on the family-oriented culture. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this analysis of family-oriented culture discloses the mutual relationship between the interactional level and the institutional level within Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Thus, this study infers that the interdependent relationship in the Chinese cultural context results from their mutual recognition and expectations within the family-oriented culture. This point is also recognised by participants (iw-008, iw-024), who respectively come from Jiangxi Province in southern China and Jiangsu Province in southeastern China and respectively engage in service and manufacturing industries, based on the feedback of followers:

‘For my staff, we now have some old staff who have worked for many years. In the beginning, I felt that the first evaluation of my employees was: “My boss is very nice.” He used the word “nice” to describe

it. He said that my boss is amiable and treats me like family. So that is the case including my employees.’ (iw-008).

‘Well, for the employees of our small business, like my employee, the enterprise is their home. That is, he does whatever work it is and does whatever you want him to do. Well, in other words, the division of labour is not very clear, so they do it as if it were their own home.’ (iw-024).

The demographic backgrounds of the above two participants (iw-008, iw-024) cover both the socioeconomically developing and socioeconomically developed regions and both the service and manufacturing industries. As a result, what they stated reflects a consensus among female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China. From the perspective of cultural psychology, these above quotes reveal a reciprocal relationship between the female entrepreneurial leaders’ followers and the enterprises the followers engaged in. The reciprocal relationship reflects a psychological adaptation that refers to the maximum extent of an individual’s internal psychological status fitting the organisational culture. On account of this point, this study infers that the psychological adaptation is sourced from the defaulted assumption of human nature that all people are inherently good at birth. Like participant (iw-025) who comes from Shenzhen city and engages in the service industry, she expressed:

‘I think that ‘human beings are inherently good at birth’. I may think that everyone is good. I will assume that everyone is good. If he is not good, it is because no one corrects him, and no one gives him instructions and good direction, so he did go wrong, he did not go the right way.’ (iw-025).

As a female entrepreneurial leader, the participant (iw-025) is facilitated by the cultural looseness of Shenzhen’s entrepreneurial culture. It is evident that the fact that she lives in a sociocultural context with cultural looseness provides a precondition for her to assume the goodness of human nature. The interviews reveal that female entrepreneurial leaders tend to assume and rely on the goodness of human nature. On account of this point, there is no difference in female entrepreneurial leadership

between the Chinese and Western contexts. As reported in Section 2.2.1.2.2, Western and Eastern cultural norms default on the same assumption of human nature. This assumption of the goodness of human nature encourages female entrepreneurial leaders to foster an environment of cultural looseness where followers and employees can realise their personal development. As a result, the family-oriented culture is an open cultural gateway for followers. Participant (iw-025) demonstrates this interpretation as follows:

‘Generally speaking, I will retain employees who have done an excellent job. They hope to get better training and growth on our platform. Therefore, many employees will stay in our company as long as they join in. Generally speaking, they will stay after realising the company’s intention because I do it from the interior of my heart. When everyone comes, I feel like they are my own family.’ (iw-025).

The above statement indicates that the previously reported reciprocal relationship can be established through the following three steps: firstly, female entrepreneurial leaders intend to exert their good nature to formulate a family-oriented culture. Secondly, the family-oriented culture has externalised the intention of good nature. Thirdly, the intention of female entrepreneurial leaders can be recognised by followers. These three steps implicate an externalisation process from the individual level to the interactional level and then to the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). That is, female entrepreneurial leaders exert their influences from their internal psychological status to external action.

Comparing with male entrepreneurial leaders, this study argues that family-oriented culture is recognised as the unique attribute of female entrepreneurial leadership in China. From the statements of the participants (iw-024 and iw-075) who respectively come from Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and respectively engage in manufacturing and service industries, this study finds that the

familial concept and value have a particular significance to Chinese women, especially Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders. This finding suggests that cultural inertia, as reported in Section 2.1.2.4, still influences female entrepreneurial leaders' mindsets and behaviours in a Chinese context. In contrast, there are no comparable findings on female entrepreneurial leaders in the Western context. When Chinese women embark on enterprises, they naturally expand their familial concept and value to the entire members of the enterprise and, as a result, formulate a family-oriented organisational culture. As explained by the participants (iw-024 and iw-075) as follows:

'For the entrepreneurial company, we have always wanted staff to be in the proper position. Maybe the people on my side are relatives or friends, so I do not think of them as workers. They are all family members. Yes, the same as all family members.' (iw-024) .

'To put it bluntly when I treat them in the company... like my own family. So that is to have a team spirit that has an impact on them and to have a kind of family-like atmosphere.' (iw-075).

From the demographic backgrounds of the two participants (iw-024, iw-075), this study identifies that both of them come from socioeconomically developed regions and cover both service and manufacturing industries. The socioeconomically developed regions provide them with entrepreneurial context that conceives of cultural looseness. Additionally, they are affected by the Confucian culture, which is characterised by both self-oriented and other-oriented values. Therefore, they are both influenced by traditional Chinese culture and modernisation culture. On account of this point, this study infers that family-oriented culture is the combined effect of traditional Chinese culture and modernisation culture.

Although family-oriented culture facilitates female entrepreneurial leaders, it can also constrain their enterprises' scale of expansion. This is because a family-oriented culture

is based on kinship and close friendship among followers. Therefore, family-oriented culture becomes a cultural gateway towards those followers who are not in the scope of that kinship or close friendship. On account of this point, family-oriented culture plays a cultural gateway, dividing followers into ingroups and outgroups. During the early stages of entrepreneurial enterprise, female entrepreneurial leaders often entrust their relatives and friends with the task of establishing and operating a small business. As a result of this initial connection, female entrepreneurial leaders treat them as family members to maintain trust. One participant (iw-024), who ran a small business that manufactured oil paint and adhesives, enlisted her family members and friends to manage her enterprise. This is neither unique nor uncommon in the Chinese context; it is typical. However, this can result in unclear work boundaries and even affect the corporate culture. As explained by the participant (iw-024) who comes from Jiangsu Province in southeastern China and engages in the manufacturing industry:

‘Because in the case of our small business, it means that one person may not have a clear division of labour; that is, they have to do all kinds of work. Anyway... there is no corporate culture like that in big companies to inspire you. That is to say, this thing is relatively weak for small businesses and cannot be achieved. What can you do with them? It is only a small business compared to big companies. Big companies need rules and regulations.’ (iw-024).

The above expression reveals an apparent difference in organisational culture between small-sized entrepreneurial enterprises and big companies. This study thereby finds that a family-oriented culture is suitable for a small entrepreneurial enterprise. Therefore, family-oriented culture does connect not only with female entrepreneurial leadership but also with organisational scale. When asked about the organisational scale of entrepreneurial enterprises that those female entrepreneurial leaders are operating, the above participant (iw-024) expressed that it is small. One reasonable explanation for this phenomenon is that because the family-oriented culture originates from female

entrepreneurial leaders' kindship and close friendship, this kind of organisational culture cannot cover all their followers. Reversely, as analysed previously, the family-oriented culture prevents the outgroups from joining the ingroups among the followers.

Dialectically speaking, the above statement by the participant (iw-024) discloses the negative consequences of a family-oriented culture, such as ambiguity of responsibility and low efficiency. Another negative consequence is that a family-oriented culture can weaken the effectiveness of female entrepreneurial leadership. Specifically, when followers make mistakes or do not achieve the expected level of performance, female entrepreneurial leaders may reduce standards to punish them or even cancel the punishment. In this situation, female entrepreneurial leaders' sympathy plays the main role in influencing their decision-making. As a result, the family-oriented culture becomes a constrained determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership. Participant (iw-025), who comes from Shenzhen city and engages in the service industry, further argued as follows:

'I will treat them with sympathy, but this is also my weakness; I may overthink others. I cannot be too steadfast in my treatment of them. Thus, this is not the demeanour of a tremendous entrepreneur. Some prominent entrepreneurs just emphasise the results. You cannot emphasise the results. I am driven by performance and results, but I do not only emphasise performance.' (iw-025).

However, the negative results are not totally harmful to the entrepreneurial enterprise's operation. Indeed, low efficiency means less competitiveness, which is not suitable for the entrepreneurial enterprise's operation. However, the ambiguity of responsibility reflects a joint responsibility that a female entrepreneurial leader and her followers undertake. This is because they need to conquer the risk by creating an integrated team to increase the probability of success. However, undertaking joint responsibility is not the foundation of an entrepreneurial enterprise. The foundation is largely based on the

sincerity and affinity of female entrepreneurial leaders. This point is evident from the statements of the participants (iw-024 and iw-075) who respectively come from Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and respectively engage in manufacturing and service industries:

‘My main point is to treat people sincerely as what I would like to be treated. This enterprise is our own home. It means that it is what I told them anyway, and everyone’s efforts can be seen. If the company is good, I am sure it is also suitable for them.’ (iw-024).

‘As far as I think what women are concerned is that one of our advantages may be women’s affinity. Female affinity for certain things and teams is much higher than men. When I came back, it was the one where I blended with the atmosphere of home. When everyone was together, they would think together, and my affinity would be more substantial.’ (iw-075).

Although a family-oriented culture can lead to the weakness of female entrepreneurial leadership, it has more critical practical value for followers. This practical value emerges with the development of female entrepreneurial leadership that treats followers and leaders as an integrated team. On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders not only fulfil a transcendence of themselves but also achieve a transcendence of the followers from the individuals’ level to the interactional level and then to the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). This is why female entrepreneurial leaders tend to promote the personal development of followers by supporting them comprehensively. Participants (iw-025 and iw-008), who respectively come from Shenzhen city in southeastern China and Jiangxi Province in southern China and both engage in the service industry, explained:

‘I also consider the work level by offering guidance and assistance to make them as highly promoted as possible. However, in terms of the halo of human nature, I am generally still other-oriented.’ (iw-025)

‘When it came to later, he slowly felt like growing up. I said you should summarise what you have learned this year. Each year or every quarter needs to be summed up. So far, he said, I think I am very



grateful to the company for giving me this opportunity. He said that I had improved a lot in terms of business ability.’ (iw-008).

The demographic backgrounds of the above two participants (iw-025, iw-008) cover both socioeconomically developing and developed regions. What they stated not only reveals the loose collectivism in these regions but also their intention of collective transcendence with their followers. For example, through these arguments, this study finds that Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders tend to formulate continued learning organisations. This finding provides evidence for the externalisation process from the individual level to the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). That is, female entrepreneurial leaders externalise their mindsets and their personal-believed values to the whole enterprise. For instance, participant (iw-102), who comes from Beijing city in northern China and engages in the service industry, argued that female entrepreneurial leaders emphasise follower development in personal skills and career aspects. This argument reflects the other-oriented culture in women-led enterprises and discloses the family-oriented culture. She continues to express that female entrepreneurial leadership tends to create a family-oriented culture with shared spirit and material wealth.

‘I will give you access to resources you cannot possibly access, and you cannot even control the resources via money. I also teach them many skills, including how to do a consultation and communicate with the outside world. This includes meeting some core customers. It is impossible to take them there. The other company cannot take them, but I will take them.’ (iw-102).

The participant (iw-102) was engaged in the international training activities and thereby acquired international perceptions and experiences about staff training. According to her statement, this study argues that female entrepreneurial leaders with international backgrounds not only identify and accept family-oriented culture but also recognise its scope beyond traditional Chinese culture. However, the traditional Chinese familial

concept and the Confucian cultural meaning system (see Figure 4) still form the basis of family-oriented culture. On account of this point, whether family-oriented culture adapts to the Western context, such as the Frontier cultural meaning system (see Figure 4), or not, becomes one of the limitations of family-oriented culture.

Family-oriented culture is the key finding of this study. This finding suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders create a community of shared spiritual and material wealth. The value of the family-oriented culture lies in the collective transcendence of the whole team from individuals' level to interactional level and then to the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Although female entrepreneurial leaders create a family-oriented culture to manage their staff effectively, they are constrained by the family-oriented culture in increasing the expansion of their enterprise. Thus, this study suggests that a family-oriented culture can adapt to start-ups and small-sized enterprises. However, when an enterprise expands on a large scale, female entrepreneurial leaders should reform their organisational culture, such as by systematically formulating a rule-based culture.

#### 4.3.2.3 Teamwork and Team Cultivation

Teamwork and team cultivation are identified as facilitative determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. These two facilitative determinants are categorised at the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). However, the facilitative roles of the two determinants are undermined because of the implicit responsibilities within the family-oriented culture (see Section 4.3.2.2). This means that the cost of maintaining harmonious relationships with other members is surely attributed to the implicit responsibilities of each member. Therefore, standardisation and regulation are the main concerns of female entrepreneurial leaders in teamwork.

According to a participant (iw-007) who comes from Zhejiang Province in southeastern China (moved from Sichuan Province in southern China) and engages in the manufacturing industry, group members frequently lack the executive force to achieve because of implicit responsibilities. As a result, there is a lack of trust in the team.

‘When I was away, there was a partner, ... I even invested a little money in him, but he did not complete a single business and even took people away. This is also a lesson for me. The first lesson is about the partner. I thought that the one he said was 1, but the one he said might be 0.1, so now I have been angry several times... Therefore, we should also establish corporate rules and regulations... This is not established in a day or two. I hope there can be a standard, at least some of the norms on paper, and then they can gradually be corrected.’ (iw-007).

The participant (iw-007) had worked in European countries for years after she acquired a PhD from a university located in Finland. Considering her international working and study background, this study infers that what she complained about regarding teamwork in her entrepreneurial enterprise is attributed to their past recognition and experience that she acquired in European countries. Her statement reveals the cultural differentiation between Chinese and Western cultures in terms of teamwork. On account of this point, this study identifies that the cultural differentiation between Chinese and Western cultures forms a cultural gateway for female entrepreneurial leaders who have international working and study experience.

Although teamwork is detracted from the implicit responsibilities of team members as analysed above, team cultivation is strengthened by the traditional culture of harmony. In contrast with their Western counterparts, female entrepreneurial leaders in a Chinese context are defaulted by the traditional cultures to maintain a harmonious relationship among the members. Therefore, the harmonious relationship in the process of team cultivation is a Chinese characteristic compared with Western situations. For example, this study finds that female entrepreneurial leaders tend to try to create harmony in

relationships within organisations by displaying their affinity. This harmonious relationship with their affinity can sublimate into a family-oriented culture, as reported in Section 4.3.2.2, often generating a centripetal force surrounding female entrepreneurial leaders. A participant (iw-008), who comes from Jiangxi Province and engages in the service industry, supported the following:

‘The best part is that after we have done a project with the client, even after the project is over, we can still be together as friends. So, I think this is a good one. In fact, from the beginning to the present, I have constantly been trying to improve myself in all aspects, and I believe the team can gradually become more vigorous.’ (iw-008).

In comparison to the participant (iw-007) who has an international background, the participant (iw-008) who creates a family-oriented culture does not mention the difficulties in teamwork. An interesting thing is that the participant (iw-008) completely believes her team, not like the participant (iw-007), who finds it hard to establish mutual trust with her team. This comparison reveals the different cultural gateways for female entrepreneurial leaders who have different demographic backgrounds. This study thereby infers that westernised Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders’ psychological adaptation is hard to match the cultural gateways inherent in a Chinese culture. In contrast, localised female entrepreneurial leaders’ psychological adaptation is relatively easy to match the cultural gateway inherent in a Chinese culture.

This study finds that family-oriented culture, as reported in Section 4.3.2.2, provides a facilitative influence on team cultivation. Consistent with the analysis of family-oriented culture, the interview shows that female entrepreneurial leaders tend to mentor their followers to improve their professional skills and knowledge. This particular team cultivation can promote teamwork to a higher level. Usually, female entrepreneurial leaders are patient when interacting with followers to strengthen their relationships. In

this way, followers' concepts and recognition of their leaders and organisations are involved in the family-oriented culture, as reported in Section 4.3.2.2. A participant (iw-008), who comes from Jiangxi Province and engages in the service industry, explained as follows:

'I also met outstanding employees here and they have been with me since the early days of my business, and they have also improved and learned a lot. I also feel delighted in my heart because I let others keep making progress. When some employees come in, they may think more of themselves. He did not think about how I could progress with the company, ... Maybe he was thinking of this. For our start-up company, it may be more that everyone can get together to do things, which is the most important thing.' (iw-008).

What the participant (iw-008) stated reveals her cultural background has cultural consistency with teamwork in a family-oriented culture. In comparison to the participant (iw-007), this study infers that westernised Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders not only confront closed cultural gateways at the institutional level but also encounter the situation that their psychological adaptation mismatches the closed cultural gateways. However, participant (iw-008) did not confront the situations that participant (iw-007) faced. Therefore, this study argues that the participant (iw-008) is characterised by cultural consistency and psychological consistency between her demographic background and teamwork; however, the participant (iw-007) is not. Consequently, cultural consistency and psychological consistency are the preconditions for female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation to match the cultural gateway.

The above data show that a centripetal force (i.e., cohesiveness) plays a core role in teamwork and team cultivation. This study finds that female entrepreneurial leaders' affinity and family-oriented culture can increase the centripetal force. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this study infers that this finding suggests a

bidirectional process between the individual level and the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Because family-oriented culture embodies other-oriented culture, which deviates from Confucian culture, this study argues team cultivation within the family-oriented culture is a result of Chinese female entrepreneurial leadership affected by traditional sociocultural norms. On account of this point, this analysis suggests a bidirectional process between the idea level and the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). However, the implicit responsibilities among team members often detract from the executive capacity of their team, which will further influence their mutual trust. Thus, female entrepreneurial leaders need to comprehensively assess the influences of family-oriented culture, executive capacity, and mutual trust to improve the centripetal force of their teams.

#### 4.3.3 Determinants at Macro-Level

Determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China at the macro-level are refined in four dimensions, such as value, sociocultural status quo, socioeconomic status quo, entrepreneurial context, and feminist development. These dimensions reveal how female entrepreneurial leadership copes with the facilitators and constraints necessary to survive and sustain itself in modern China. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this study argues that the determinants at the macro-level are equivalent to the idea level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Therefore, the Culture Cycle provides a theoretical framework for understanding the determinants at the macro-level through the approach of 'attribution by transcendence' across different levels within the Cultural Cycle (see Figure 3).

#### 4.3.3.1 The Sociocultural Status Quo of China Context

The primary data via a coding process suggests that four determinants within the category of Chinese sociocultural status quo affect female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China. These determinants include cultural diversity, social inertia and cultural inertia, geographic culture and cultural divides, and a shift from collectivism to individualism. Among the determinants, ‘cultural diversity’ and ‘a shift from collectivism to individualism’ represent cultural looseness, while ‘social inertia and cultural inertia’ represent cultural tightness, and ‘geographic culture and cultural divides’ represent both cultural tightness and looseness. As a result, these determinants indicate cultural gateways toward female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China.

##### 4.3.3.1.1 Cultural Diversity

The data suggest an increasing cultural diversity insofar as different cultures are fused fairly and harmoniously in modern China. Cultural diversity represents a cultural looseness in modern China, which implies open cultural gateways toward Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders. For instance, contemporary Chinese culture includes Western culture and Chinese traditional culture. This cultural diversity illustrated a cultural inclusiveness that facilitates female entrepreneurial leaders’ ability to adapt to the environment. As a result, this study identifies cultural diversity as a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership. On the one hand, Western culture, especially feminism, arouses Chinese women’s self-awareness; on the other hand, Chinese traditional culture also impacts women’s mindsets. It is expected that a Chinese woman, for example, will assist her husband and teach the children in the family to conform to the social norms of traditional culture. These claims are supported by participants (iw-004, iw-017, and iw-077), who respectively come from Beijing city in

northern China, Guangzhou city in southeastern China, and Shandong Province in northern China, and all of them engage in the service industry, as follows:

‘Culture is slowly becoming more diverse in society. The more diversified, the better it will be for women. Instead of blindly emphasising that culture is all right, let everyone choose for themselves. I would say that cultural diversity is suitable for women.’ (iw-004).

‘I think this issue with the United States is that it is a highly free country, which means that no matter what kind of thing it is, you can talk about it as long as you want to talk about it.’ (iw-017).

‘As Western cultural influences have been increasing, the awareness of women in the workplace will indeed increase little by little, but in fact, this does not mean that you have accepted Western culture, and you do not need to assume the special responsibility and obligation of your own family.’ (iw-077).

What the above three participants (iw-004, iw-017, and iw-077) stated not only reflects that they are affected by Western culture but also indicates a cultural consistency with the cultural diversity in socioeconomically developed regions. Cultural diversity influences female entrepreneurial leaders not only at the idea level but also at the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). For example, cultural diversity is recognised by participants (iw-040, iw-077) as a crucial and facilitative determinant in influencing the opportunities for female entrepreneurial leaders. This means that cultural diversity facilitates female entrepreneurial leaders to realise the collective transcendence of cultural gateways at the idea level towards female entrepreneurial leaders. Therefore, it is understood that opportunities for female entrepreneurial leaders have been increasing for decades because of the cultural diversity that has fostered the benefits and the right environment to encourage this kind of activity. This is supported by participants (iw-040, iw-077), who respectively come from Beijing city and Shandong Province located in northern China, and both of them engage in the service industry, as follows:



‘I think cultural diversity is crucial. Something cannot be either black or white, and it has a grayscale... You have to accept its different form of existence. Yes, I think this should also be universal for boys and girls. For example, when boys and girls quarrel, I may think I am right, and the other person thinks I am not right. There is no right or wrong, but more suitable, so the counterpart is relatively wrong, like this.’ (iw-077).

‘It is because it is very diverse now, whether a city, a country, or the world, right? So, diversification. Then the ethnic groups are also diverse, the regions are diverse, and the cultures are diverse. So, there are too many options.’ (iw-040).

The participant (iw-040) has less international experience in comparison to the participant (iw-077) who has learned and worked in the UK. However, the participant (iw-040) also plans to expand her international experience in the entrepreneurial field. Based on the statements of the two participants (iw-040, iw-077), this study argues that female entrepreneurial leaders with different demographic backgrounds highly praise cultural diversity. A reasonable explanation for this compassion is that cultural diversity presents cultural looseness that allows individuals with different demographic backgrounds to realise self-transcendence.

Compared with the open Western culture, Chinese traditional culture is recognised as relatively closed. This recognition still permeates Chinese people, as supported by the statement of the participant (iw-78). However, when China shifted its development path from planned economy to market economy (see also Section 2.1.2.2) and from agricultural production to industrial production (see also Section 2.1.2.3), Chinese culture changed accordingly as its socioeconomic foundation shifted. Inferring from this logic, this study argues that socioeconomic changes can lead to sociocultural changes. The socioeconomic changes from planned economy to market economy indicate the economic participants changed from unitary to diversified. As a result, the sociocultural status changes from unitary to diversified. From these changes, this study infers that cultural diversity indicates cultural looseness. This is why Chinese

individuals' concepts and mindsets have changed to be more open than before and thereby accept the Western culture, as suggested by the following statements of participants (iw-017, iw-84). However, the gap of cultural looseness in Chinese and Western contexts still persists, as argued by participants (iw-078, iw-084, and iw-017), who respectively come from Jiangsu Province, Zhejiang Province, and Guangzhou City located in southeastern China and all engage in the service industry, as follows:

'Eastern culture is more introverted and restrained. Then Western culture is more open.' (iw-078)

'Because I go to America and Europe, where people, like any other cultural excellence, have faith; our earth is rich and colourful, so you have to learn this. It is not that your culture is the best. However, you can recognise and appreciate others.' (iw-084)

'It is preferable to seek common ground and reserve disputes for such situations. Each ethnic group and race have their characteristics, whether it is something they want to keep or something they think is more sacred.' (iw-017).

All three above participants (iw-078, iw-084, and iw-017) live in socioeconomically developed regions and perceive cultural diversity and thereby analyse things from a comparative perspective. This means that when Chinese traditional culture shifts to a modern culture similar to Western culture, female entrepreneurial leaders and their followers subsequently accept a comparative perspective in the workplace. For example, as a participant (iw-096) who comes from Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and engages in the service industry explained, this shifting process makes female entrepreneurial leaders compare the advantages and disadvantages between Chinese and Western culture to survive in a competitive and intensive market. Influenced by Western culture, cultural diversity in a Chinese context means that various ideas have a diversified space in decision-making. This phenomenon shows an undermining of cultural gateways and the emergence of democratic leadership. In contrast, influenced by the Chinese traditional culture of authoritarianism, the final decision that female

entrepreneurial leaders make can be respected with consensus. This is supported by the participant (iw-105), who comes from Shanghai city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, as follows:

‘Our Eastern culture may be more competitive. I think Chinese people are very talented. Because this can be intensive, the competitiveness of doing business is different. Unscrupulous, the feeling is that China is like this. I think entrepreneurs in Western countries may operate differently from Chinese entrepreneurs when doing business.’ (iw-096).

‘I hope everyone is as diverse as a hundred flowers and a hundred schools of thought. This is my favourite culture. First of all, because I have a strong personality, I hope others can accept my personality. Moreover, I accept other people’s different personalities. So, when everyone was discussing... everybody can say anything different, any different voice, but if we had a consensus in this room today that we are going to go in that direction from now on when you get out of this door, you have to do it in this direction.’ (iw-105).

Both of the two participants (iw-096, iw-105) come from socioeconomically developed regions. What they stated reveals that cultural diversity is deeply rooted in their mindset. This study thereby finds that the increasing trend of cultural diversity has become necessary for developing female entrepreneurial leadership. This finding suggests that cultural diversity is a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China. To some extent, cultural diversity makes it reasonable and feasible for Chinese women to launch their own enterprises. The above analysis suggests that the reasonability and feasibility of female entrepreneurial leadership are mainly sourced from the diversified space between traditionality and modernity. This diversified space also reflects cultural tightness and looseness, embodying a cultural gateway to female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China. Specifically, the increasing cultural diversity shows the increase in modernity and cultural looseness in the Chinese context. Consequently, the cultural gateway becomes open towards female entrepreneurial

leaders in the Chinese context. To some extent, this is why female entrepreneurial leadership can develop quickly over decades in modern China.

#### 4.3.3.1.2 Social inertia and Cultural Inertia

The interviews suggest that social inertia impacts the self-recognition of female entrepreneurial leadership. In a common circumstance, female entrepreneurial leaders usually feel comfortable labelling themselves as entrepreneurs, as this label will increase their social identity and social image. This means that female entrepreneurial leaders engage in the bidirectional process between the idea level and the individual level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Because social inertia and cultural inertia conceive of cultural tightness, this study thereby argues that the above analysis discloses a mutual relationship between cultural gateways at the idea level and female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation. Consequently, this study identifies social inertia and cultural inertia are constrained determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China.

The cultural gateways at the idea and individuals' levels are also inherent in the recognition of males towards female entrepreneurial leadership. For the recognition of males towards female entrepreneurial leadership, a participant (iw-017) argued that men's concept towards women is still rooted in traditional culture. Generally, social inertia generates two kinds of influences on women: on one side, women are protected by men (cared for and supported financially) due to the traditional culture of social inertia in a Chinese context; on the other side, women are constrained by social inertia. These two contradictory sides of social inertia imply cultural looseness and tightness and thereby conceive of cultural gateways to female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China. However, participants (iw-004, iw-017), who respectively come from Beijing

city in northern China and Guangzhou city in southeastern China and all engage in the service industry, responded that although social inertia exists, its influence will be reduced by increasing cultural diversity and Western influence.

‘This inertia will still exist for a short period and gradually weaken. Moreover, this social inertia will gradually weaken with the impact of multiculturalism.’ (iw-004).

‘From a deep-rooted concept, the previous concept of ownership is weakening, but everything in it is double-sided because of this ownership. At first, she will feel that it is for me to take care of myself, but at the same time, she will feel that it is for me to control myself. It is not to say that it is useless, but to be fair, I think it is a multi-faceted problem.’ (iw-017).

From the demographic backgrounds of the above two participants (iw-004, iw-017), this study finds that what they stated reveals that social inertia and cultural inertia are undermined in the socioeconomically developed regions. A reasonable explanation is that the socioeconomically developed regions are full of cultural diversity, including both traditional Chinese culture and Western culture. On account of this point, Chinese cultural inertia is weakened by the permeability of Western culture in the Chinese context. From the statements of participants (iw-053, iw-059), this study finds that the lifestyle of Western culture is attractive to Chinese young generations. This finding suggests that contemporary Chinese culture shows cultural diversity and inclusiveness towards Western culture. Inferring from the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), the cultural diversity and inclusiveness of the contemporary Chinese culture imply an open cultural gateway towards Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders. This is argued by the participants (iw-053, iw-059) who respectively come from in Jiangsu Province in southeastern China and Hong Kong, and both engage in the service industry.

‘I just found an example. For example, on March 8th, Women’s Day, there will be training in the art of women’s flower arrangement in our institute... Then they will invite some interpreters of oriental aesthetics. After they come, they will teach you how to arrange flowers. Then I think this is a process that will give everyone a rest. Yes, then you can go to socialise or something. I think this is an activity

with a little bit of oriental thinking in it. And in the West, the red wine on the wine table is the same... So, there will be that socialising... I think this is also an influence of culture on a career.' (iw-053).

'I think this traditional concept is now obsolete. There is no such obstacle. In the past, if we talked about traditional concepts, it might have been more conservative, but its influences are weakening. However, I think that China has not had this obstacle in recent years, but it is not that young people do not have this ambition. They want to start a business.' (iw-059).

It is understood that Hong Kong has been influenced by Western culture. However, in comparison to the participant (iw-059), what the participant (iw-053) stated indicates that even in Beijing, the young generation is affected by Western culture. Therefore, the cultural divides, as reported in Section 4.1, decrease among different regions in modern China. Therefore, although cultural inertia has challenged female entrepreneurial leadership, the constrained role of cultural inertia is detracted from the permeability of Western culture. Because female entrepreneurial leadership is developed more maturely in Western contexts than in Chinese contexts, Western female entrepreneurial leadership sets an example for Chinese women, especially Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders. As a result, Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders can find conceptual and cultural reasonability for themselves by referencing successful Western examples. On account of this point, Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders actively create a circular path from the individual level to the idea level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders can have sufficient confidence to conquer the inertia of traditional sociocultural norms and thereby formulate modern sociocultural norms.

#### 4.3.3.1.3 Geographic Culture and Cultural Divide

Geographic culture has been discovered to affect the mindsets of female entrepreneurial leaders. This discovery verifies a precondition for female entrepreneurial leadership. That is, the participants' geographic background can influence their perceptions and

thereby form the cultural divide impacting female entrepreneurial leadership, as reported in Section 3.2.2. The geographic determinant is also reflected in the findings of regional distributions of entrepreneurs based on Table 34 (also see Appendix A14). That is, female entrepreneurs are mainly distributed in southeastern China, and few of them come from other regions of China. This finding suggests cultural divides exist in different regions of China, characterised by different cultural properties (i.e., cultural tightness and looseness).

The interviews show that the geographic culture influences the career vision and career selection of Chinese women. Chinese women who are from different regions of China receive different cultural recognition and habitual thinking towards their career selection. Specifically, individuals in western and northern China tend to select being a government officer as their career goal; individuals in southern and eastern China tend to select entrepreneurship as their career goal. This difference in Chinese individuals' career selection can be attributed to the cultural divide within the different regions of China. From a comparison perspective, participant (im-073) who lives in Liaoning Province in northern China and engages in the manufacturing industry argued that young generations in eastern and southern China can acquire sufficient social experience and independent ability to prepare for launching their enterprises; however, it does not in northern China.

'Some boys and girls in the south can be bosses in twenty-four or five, but not in the north. The degree of independence, for example... For boys and girls in the north, tossing their clothes is their parents' business. In other words, children in the south are much more diligent than children in the north. When they came into contact with many people in society, they accumulated social experience. The children in the north have no such social experience... It is too late to involve into society... The second reason may be that the parents themselves... all the money they earn is spent on their children. Not like the South.' (im-073).

What the participant (im-073) compared of the young generations between northern and southern China is sourced from his entrepreneurial experience. He recruited employees from different regions and summarised the cultural differences among the different regions. Therefore, this study concludes that the regional cultural differences he mentioned are attributed to the geographic culture. Due to the cultural divide of geographical culture, the cultural properties (i.e., cultural tightness and looseness) of geographic culture in different regions have distinct influences on Chinese women. Conforming to the analysis above, the career selection of Chinese women is affected by the geographic culture whether it is conservative or enlightened. Conservative culture embodies cultural tightness; in contrast, enlightened culture indicates cultural looseness. For example, from a comparison perspective, a participant (im-050) who comes from Guangzhou City in southeastern China explained that women in northern China prefer being government officers to being entrepreneurs as their career goal; however, this situation is reversed in southern China.

‘We often chatted with others, and I also went to Shanghai. And then they say it is more conservative in the north. Years ago, the south was also open. Because the political centre is in the north, he has a habit of thinking, "I graduated from college; should I consider becoming an official first?" Unlike in the north, whether the people in the south could become officials or do business was a matter of their consideration.’ (im-050).

Because he was born in southeastern China, the participant (im-050) experienced the loose culture in his hometown, Guangzhou. However, he also experienced the tight culture in northern China, according to his statement. This comparison of his experience in different regions of China reveals a cultural gateway between northern and southern China. Chinese women in northern China are constrained by the local conservative cultural context and, consequently, are not encouraged to engage in the entrepreneurial field. This can be attributed to the cultural tightness in northern China that are



formulated by traditional concepts. Due to the inertial influences of traditional concepts, engaging in the government official system is less risky for individuals in northern China than becoming entrepreneurial leaders. Additionally, the impact of geographic culture on Chinese women and men is different because of the traditional cultural concept in segregated rural areas and urban areas. Comparatively, Chinese men are positioned at a high level and Chinese women are looked down on in rural areas because of the conservative atmosphere of traditional cultural concepts. Reversely, this gender gap is not apparent in China's urban areas. This is expressed by participant (iw-008), who comes from Jiangxi Province in southern China and engages in the service industry, as follows:

'I was born in the south. Yes, the impact of family planning at that time was intense. I remember that many of us were in the city then. Maybe it was better. In the countryside, you should have a boy... Family planning at that time still significantly impacted our generation after the 1980s. At that time, like in the city, sometimes I hoped to have a sister at home or a younger brother. However, then, they did not have the right to reproduce more. Therefore, only one child is in the family — relatively lonely.' (iw-008).

What the participant (iw-008) stated is her living experience, which reveals the cultural divides of geographic culture between rural and urban areas in her living region. In contrast with rural area where is full of cultural tightness, the urban area is characterised by cultural looseness. This comparison of cultural properties in urban and rural areas discloses a cultural gateway for Chinese women because of the cultural divides between the rural and urban areas. Referencing the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), the cultural gateway can affect individuals' mindsets and behaviours. For example, individuals in different micro areas, such as rural areas and urban areas, have a different inclination of career selection. In detail, individuals in urban areas are more ambitious or enterprising in their career than individuals in rural areas. This, as explained by participant (im-058), who comes from Shenzhen city in southern China and engages in

the manufacturing industry, reflects that the growing environment affects an individual's career selection.

'I have two daughters. The youngest daughter grew up in Shenzhen, a big city; the eldest daughter grew up in a village... This is related to the growing environment... My apparent feeling is that women from big and small cities whose values seem to be different from those of the previous generation... Women in big cities have different values than women in small cities, and their vision should also be different. As a girl in a big city, it is tough for you to integrate into the big city. On the other hand, Shenzhen is quite remarkable... has cultivated many young and upward talents and attracted many excellent talents, including women.' (im-058).

The above explanations also show that the cultural divide generated by geographic culture influences the young generation's career selection. This study thereby infers that the cultural divide plays a role as a cultural gateway in a broad sense in influencing Chinese women's mindsets and behaviours. This is why the Chinese young generations have different career selections in rural and urban areas. This explanation is supported by the statements of the participant (iw-084), who comes from Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, that big cities are attractive to young generations because there are advanced cultural concepts that can facilitate their launch of an enterprise.

'Some women may say that they will return to this second-tier city or the county seat after graduation. Some are the pursuits of such a big city. The so-called big cities of Guangzhou and Shenzhen have high pressure and high housing prices. It still varies from person to person. Both women and men are the same. Working hard and starting a business in a first-tier city has its advanced concepts. ... Concepts vary from person to person. A city like Hangzhou is more attractive to young people.' (iw-084).

As a female entrepreneurial leader, the participant (iw-084) experiences the cultural differences among different cities in both socioeconomically developing and developed regions. What she argues reveals that the cultural divide of geographic culture can influence individuals' cultural concepts. Specifically, the cultural divide, which is formulated by the different regional sociocultural and socioeconomic statuses, also

influences the concept of how local people treat women and men. Although this study previously reported that the geographic culture in southern China is characterised by an open culture with a property of cultural looseness, the following statements by the participants (iw-085, iw-086) suggest that there are special cases in southern China, such as the Hainan and Fujian provinces. A reasonable explanation is that the local socioeconomic status is less developed than other regions in southern China, which leads to a relatively conservative sociocultural status compared to the remaining regions in southern China. As interpreted by participants (iw-085, iw-086) who respectively come from the Hebei Province in northern China and Jiangsu Province in southern China and both of them engage in the service industry, females are undervalued in southern areas that have conservative sociocultural status.

‘There is still differential treatment for girls between northern and southern China. I thought that the traditional belief that sons are better than daughters would be more severe in Hainan.’ (iw-085).

‘It has an impact. For example, you know Fujian, the most famous province in China, where the status of women is relatively low. Even women themselves are positioned in a relatively low position for women.’ (iw-086).

Although the two participants (iw-085, iw-086) come from different regions, their statement reveals that the cultural divide of geographic culture is widely evident in modern China. What they stated about the sensible geographic culture is the differential treatment of Chinese women and girls. Geographic culture in different regions of China and in urban and rural areas within a region often indicates cultural divides which thereby formulate cultural gateways toward Chinese women. The cultural divides refer to the different cultural patterns such as the conservative or enlightened cultures. The findings of geographic culture in this study suggest that female entrepreneurial leaders need to identify the conservative and enlightened cultures in different areas.

Conservative culture reflects cultural tightness, which would challenge the reasonability of female entrepreneurial leadership. However, enlightened culture reflects cultural looseness, often benefiting Chinese women to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

To an extent, geographic culture reflects the cultural diversity in different regions or cultural diversity in urban and rural areas in a region. Culture diversity means cultural looseness which subsequently indicates an open cultural gateway towards Chinese women who plan to develop their career in entrepreneurial field. Although there are many constraints (e.g., residential permit, educational qualifications) towards immigrations across different regions or moving from rural area to urban area, the open cultural gateway show entrepreneurial opportunities to Chinese women.

#### 4.3.3.1.4 A Shift from Tight Collectivism to Loose Collectivism and then to the Individualism

A notable change that has occurred in the sociocultural context of China is that, according to female entrepreneurial leaders, collectivism is decreasing while individualism is increasing. This change in the Chinese sociocultural context indicates a shift from collectivism to individualism. In contrast to the period before issuing the open and reform policy in 1978, with a consideration of cultural properties such as tightness or looseness, this study thereby argues that there is a shift from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism in modern China. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this study infers that the shift from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism suggests the emergence of cultural looseness. On account of this point, the cultural gateways tend to open towards female

entrepreneurial leaders and thereby show a probability for them to realise transcendence at the idea level of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3).

The shift from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism can be attributed to China's institutional transition, as reported in Section 2.1.2.3, from the planning system to the marketing system. For instance, this change is recognised by the interview participant (im-006) who comes from Tianjin city in northern China and engages in the service industry. He observed the social shift of ideology according to his social experiences from the initial stage of the PRC to date. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this study thereby argues that the above analysis embodies the bidirectional process between the idea level and the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). That is, along with the open cultural gateway at the idea level, the cultural gateway at the institutional level accordingly becomes open to female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China. Therefore, on the precondition of an open cultural gateway at the idea level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), Chinese women can realise transcendence at the institution level. Additionally, this change is embodied in the comparison between different generations of Chinese people. Specifically, the older generation of Chinese people tends to be more collectivist in nature, and the younger generation of Chinese people tends to be more individualistic.

'It is all about magnified individualism now. It should be said that individualism is for self-interest. This gradually emerged from the end of the Cultural Revolution Era through the back door... However, at that time, they also emphasised human feelings. After the reform and opening up, they only focused on money, which is the most obvious. How can I say this? Isn't that heightened individualism?' (im-006).

The participant (im-009) shared his personal experience during various periods of change in China. He was a member of one of the SOEs before and after the Cultural Revolution. During the institutional transition period, the SOE dismissed him, and he

began operating a maintenance workshop with his business partners. His statement and personal experience reveal a cultural transition from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism. During this cultural transition, female entrepreneurial leadership acquires its conceptual legitimacy, while the open and reform policy forces China to realise modernisation. This means that the cultural looseness caused by the open and reform policy, as reported in Section 2.1.2.3, can facilitate female entrepreneurial leaders' mindsets. On account of this point, this analysis reveals the bidirectional process between the institutional level and the individual level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) and indicates female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation can mutually match the open cultural gateway at the institutional level. As a result, female entrepreneurial leaders can identify the entrepreneurial opportunities in this situation.

The above expressions of a participant (im-006) show that the composition of collectivism and individualism changes along with the modernisation process. In detail, in the initial stage of reform and open policy, the influence of collectivism exceeds the influence of individualism. This expression indicates that a change in the status of the cultural gateway formulate by the different combinations of collectivism and individualism. However, according to the statement of the participant (iw-004) who comes from Beijing city and engages in the service industry, although individualism is increasing its weight in Chinese contemporary culture, its boundaries cannot be clearly distinguished in current times. Therefore, this study infers that the contemporary Chinese sociocultural context is characterised by loose collectivism. From the perspective of cultural psychology, loose collectivism indicates a probability of opening the cultural gateway in modern China. As a result, Chinese women who intend to realise

self-independence through launching enterprises can gain conceptual legitimacy in the sociocultural context of loose collectivism.

'I think, of course, a person is an individual first, and it is undeniable that we live in a society. Therefore, I believe that individualism and collectivism cannot be used to distinguish. I should achieve a balance between the two.' (iw-004).

As a female entrepreneurial leader, the participant (iw-004) experiences the times of coexistence of both collectivism and individualism. This sociocultural status is a reflection of loose collectivism. To an extent, according to Chinese traditional concepts, collectivism reflects altruism, and individualism reflects egoism. In essence, altruism is a kind of other-oriented value, and egoism is a kind of self-oriented value. This altruism is especially required to regulate Chinese women. For example, Chinese traditional sociocultural norms regulate a woman to take total care of her husband and son. This signifies that a Chinese woman's behaviour has to conform to other-oriented values, as revealed in the Confucian cultural meaning system (see Figure 4). On account of this point, Chinese women's other-oriented values in both psychological processes and sociocultural practices are embodied in the mutual relationship between their psychological adaptation and cultural gateways.

When Chinese women, as the identity of entrepreneurial leaders, acquire conceptual legitimacy from increased individualism, their traditional mindset of other-oriented values still influences their leadership behaviour. This means that Chinese women realise a self-transcendence of being entrepreneurial leaders, equivalent to the individual level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). On account of this point, this study argues that female entrepreneurial leaders improve their psychological adaptation through self-transcendence. However, self-transcendence is not sufficient for female entrepreneurial leaders. Their value lies in collective transcendence. For example, they

expand the other-oriented value from family to their enterprises and treat their followers the same as their family members, as reported in Section 4.3.2.2. However, when the Chinese concept shifts from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism, the accompanying concepts, such as obligations and rights, are not shifted synchronously. This has resultantly led to conceptual chaos for female entrepreneurial leaders, which has also decreased trust and increased communication difficulties. The root reason for this unsynchronous shift of concepts lies in integrity. This is argued by a participant (iw-007), who comes from Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, as follows:

‘I’m very nervous and exhausted because you don’t know if every word others say is fooling you or not... because I do not know if it is just a bluff. So, it is not like what I did in Europe. In Europe, I am very relaxed. If others say he can, he will do it; if he cannot, he will not promise. I believe it. Do not worry about it. Overall, I feel that the cost of this management (in China) is very high, and I spend much energy, you know?... None of them is honest.’ (iw-007).

The above statement by the participant (iw-007) reveals a negative consequence of the shift from loose collectivism to individualism, that is, the foundation of trust has been undermined. Considering that she is a westernised female entrepreneurial leader who lived and worked overseas for years, this study argues that her psychological adaptation cannot match the cultural gateway formulated in the cultural transition times when she returns to China and embarks on entrepreneurial enterprise. This is because trust in traditional times was based on collectivism, especially the collectivism that centres on close friendship or kinship. Now that sociocultural norms shift from loose collectivism to individualism, people have lost the foundation of trust in communication. On account of this point, the shift from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism reflects the collapse of ‘the traditional society with strong ties’ (熟人社会, Shu Ren She Hui, in Chinese) and the emergence of ‘the modern society with weak



ties'. This is why communication has become more difficult than before, as stated by the participant (iw-007). Therefore, this study infers that although the cultural gateways at the idea level are open, the cultural gateways at the interactional level are closed in the situation of loose collectivism shifting to individualism.

However, the previously analysed collective transcendence indicates that collectivism still influences Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders' mindsets and behaviours. The interviews show that the family-oriented culture as reported in Section 4.3.2.2 is a sample of collective transcendence, which embodies a kind of altruism and loose collectivism. This study finds that female entrepreneurial leaders can generate reciprocal trust in the organisation through their family-oriented culture. Due to female entrepreneurial leaders treating followers as members of an ingroup, they show their trust to the followers and also receive their trust. This sample suggests the importance of loose collectivism in influencing the psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders and their followers. When reciprocal trust is sublimated into integrity, female entrepreneurial leaders can earn the loyalty of their followers. These are explained by participants (iw-007, iw-018) who respectively come from Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and Shandong Province in northern China and respectively engage in service and manufacturing industries, as follows:

'Entrepreneurship is like someone says it will change tomorrow. I think this integrity, as well as the integrity of the entire society, significantly impacts entrepreneurship. The relationship between the cost of starting a business and this integrity is specific.' (iw-007).

'Sometimes, depending on the large customer orders, we should do it even if we lose money. Because both parties have signed a contract, we have to act according to the contract, don't we? I do not care if some customers may say that they did not act according to the contract and did not pay on time. Then we should follow the contract, which is good faith, right? That is, trust is the foundation, right?' (iw-018).

Comparing the demographic backgrounds of the two participants (iw-007, iw-018) that one is a westernised Chinese female entrepreneurial leader and the other is an unwesternised top manager in an entrepreneurial enterprise, this study infers that what they stated reveals their degree of familiarity with the cultural transition in modern China. This means the shift from loose collectivism to individualism requires new sociocultural norms to serve the Chinese people in their daily communications. In contrast, Western society solves this problem by establishing rule-based sociocultural norms. That is why the participant (iw-018) emphasises the ‘contract’ in her statement on the enterprise’s business development. Rule-based sociocultural norms conform to the requirements of a society where individualism is inherent. This study thereby finds that a shift at the idea level can lead to a change at other levels within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). This finding reinforces the approaches ‘attribution by transcendence’ (see also Sections 4.3.1.1 and 4.3.2.2) and ‘transcendence for understanding’ (see also Section 4.3.1.4).

#### 4.3.3.2 The Socioeconomic Status Quo of China Context

The socioeconomic status quo influences the gateway at which Chinese women can launch entrepreneurial enterprises. This means resource access is by whether Chinese women find it easy or difficult to launch an entrepreneurial enterprise. To an extent, the gateway of Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders is affected by the determinants within the category of socioeconomic status quo, such as social class, social networks, government policy, and institutional uncertainty. These determinants with a property of looseness or tightness represent gateways at the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) toward female entrepreneurial leaders.

##### 4.3.3.2.1 Social Class

This study finds that low social class is a constrained determinant for female entrepreneurial leaders in that social class, while non-low social class is a facilitative determinant for female entrepreneurial leaders in that social class in modern China. The interviews suggest that the social resources and freedom of female entrepreneurial leaders are affected by their social class, such as their social position and socioeconomic status. The data indicate that the determinant ‘geographic culture and cultural divides’ affects female entrepreneurial leaders’ social class between rural areas and urban areas. This study thereby finds that Chinese women’s achieving financial independence is more difficult in rural areas than in urban areas. This finding suggests that social class is affected by geographic culture and cultural divides (see also Section 4.3.3.1.3). As a result, social class implies a gateway for Chinese rural women to embark on entrepreneurial enterprises. This is supported by the expressions of a participant (im-006) who comes from Tianjin City and engages in the service industry, as follows:

‘The status of Chinese women in the family has generally improved, especially in cities. In rural areas, it generally does not appear. Mainly in cities, women’s status in the family has risen. In rural areas, not necessarily. Financial independence is needed. Non-entrepreneurial women in rural areas are not financially independent.’ (im-006).

Although the participant (im-006) lives in an urban area, he has relatives in rural areas and thereby knows about the female’s socioeconomic status in both rural and urban areas. What he stated above reveals the difference in women’s social classes caused by cultural divides in geographic cultures. Social class is an index for female entrepreneurial leaders to acquire social capital, such as social networks. One participant (iw-017), who comes from Guangzhou city and engages in the service industry, stated that social networks in China are bound to socioeconomic status. This statement reveals that the foundation of social networks is attributed to social class.

Referencing the Confucian cultural meaning system (see Figure 4), this study thereby argues that social class indicates the level of female entrepreneurial leaders' other-oriented value in both sociocultural practices and psychological processes. On account of this point, this study infers that social class reflects female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation to confronting cultural gateways at the institutional level. For example, as the participants (im-027, iw-040), who respectively come from Shanghai city and Beijing city and respectively engage in manufacturing and service industries, expressed, it is hard to change social class while being an entrepreneurial leader because the resistance force between different social classes can inhibit it. This expression suggests that social class reflects a cultural gateway towards female entrepreneurial leaders. Therefore, this study finds that social class is a binary reflection of both cultural gateways and female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation. This finding suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders are easy to establish and maintain social networks within their social class, rather than exceeding social class.

'I think this so-called social network should be tied to those things such as socioeconomic status and political status.' (iw-017).

'I do not see any class change. To achieve class change, you should be very successful as an entrepreneur. You become a leading company in an industry, a local leading company, or a listed company. A very successful business will achieve to top class. Not much has changed for the average entrepreneur; like me, it is challenging. In fact, in this way, it requires human effort. Anything is gradual. It takes time, it takes perseverance, and it takes several years of hard work. Well, that is what I thought.' (im-027)

'We cannot say that the gap between social classes is large, but there should be a resistant force because it is like this: different classes: the peasant class and the working class. First of all, their starting points are different, right?' (iw-040).

All three participants (iw-017, im-027, and iw-040) above, including male and female entrepreneurial leaders, live in socioeconomically developed regions in modern China. Especially, the male entrepreneurial leader lived in a socioeconomically developing

region (Anhui Province) and moved to a socioeconomically developed region (Shanghai City). What they stated is based on their social experiences and discloses the pervasiveness of cultural gateways caused by social classes. From the above explanations, this study finds that social class reflects cultural divides (see also Section 4.3.3.1.3), which become cultural gateways to female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China. This is evidenced by what a participant (iw-040) explained about the large “gap between social classes”. Specifically, as a resource and its related costs are not easy for Chinese women who are in low social classes, launching an entrepreneurial enterprise becomes a high-risky activity for them. This can resultantly inhibit their motivation to be entrepreneurial leaders. In contrast, as reported in Section 4.3.1.5, the non-low social class implies a bottom line to undertake the cost of entrepreneurial failure, which is a guarantee of entrepreneurial leaders’ confidence. That is, resource access is relatively easy for Chinese women who are in the middle or top social class. Thus, the entrepreneurial risk is relatively lower for them and can subsequently lead them to pursue an independent career. This comparison between situations in low- and non-low class shows the cultural gateways and the difference in their psychological adaptation.

Because changing social class is hard, as stated by the participant (im-027), female entrepreneurial leaders in low social classes are usually constrained within their social class. This finding reflects that vertical social mobility across different social classes is of lower probability. Additionally, this finding explains why female entrepreneurial leaders find it hard to expand their company’s scale. This is because an expanding company needs plenty of resources and social networks from the top social class; however, their social identity inhibits this kind of rise to the top social class. Through this comparison between different social classes, this study identifies that the low class

shows a closed cultural gateway and low psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders in that class while the non-low class implies an open cultural gateway and high psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders in that class. On account of this point, low social class indicates challenges, while non-low social class implies opportunities, respectively, for Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders in that class.

#### 4.3.3.2.2 Social Networks

In China, social networks have a crucial influence on expanding firms led by female entrepreneurial leaders. This is because social networks reflect social capital (see also Section 2.2.2.4) for female entrepreneurial leaders in terms of resources access. On account of this point, social networks imply gateways at the interactional and institutional levels within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). However, entrepreneurial leaders disagree on whether gender influences social networks. A participant (iw-105), who comes from Shanghai and engages in the service industry, argued, for instance, that there is no correlation between gender and social networks for entrepreneurial leaders. This argument shows that social networks embodying cultural gateways cannot be attributed to gender determinants. This is because the selection and maintenance of social networks is a practical necessity for both male and female entrepreneurial leaders. She went on to provide a further explanation:

‘I think social networks are a kind of resource... Some women are effortless to form this type of social relationship with... However, some women are not so easy. You have to spend much energy to maintain them. And you can only choose the relative one that is more important now, right? So, I think maintaining a relationship is inseparable from your goals, interests, and current status.... I do not think the social networks for men and women are particularly distinguished... It has nothing to do with gender.’ (iw-105).

What the participant (iw-105) stated is sourced from her social experience in terms of social networks inherent in her life in Shanghai City. Her recognition of the social networks reflects the loose collectivism in Shanghai. This means that she not only adheres to traditional culture but also accepts feminism. Social networks for female entrepreneurial leaders are viewed as social resources that can be transformed into internal organisations to promote their businesses. This means that social networks are an intersectional determinant between the interactional level and the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) for female entrepreneurial leaders. A participant (iw-103), who comes from Shenzhen city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, emphasised the importance of social networks because they are a kind of social resource that can facilitate her business development. This study thereby identifies social networks as a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership. To an extent, social networks are a kind of intimate relationship for female entrepreneurial leaders. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this analysis discloses the internalisation process of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) from the institutional level to the interactional level and then to the individual level. Referencing the Confucian cultural meaning system (see Figure 4), the other-oriented value influences female entrepreneurial leaders in both psychological processes and sociocultural practices. This is why female entrepreneurial leaders tend to share their social networks with followers. A participant (iw-102), who comes from Beijing and engages in service industry, interpreted it as follows:

‘Because we only need to rely on the business-side. “The business-side” precisely means a good relationship with peers. I think these social resources and relationships are essential. For me, we often hold some events or projects.’ (iw-103)

‘I do my best to cultivate everyone because, to be honest, startups like ours do not give employees much money; it is more of a resource plan. For example, if you help me do these things, I will give you access

to resources that you cannot possibly have access to, and you cannot even control the resources via money. I will give you more like this, and then I will also tell you whether the path you take in the future is right or wrong, which one is more suitable for you, and then I am willing to provide my resources to help you do better.’ (iw-102).

What the two participants (iw-102, iw-103) stated reflects their social experiences and recognition of social networks. Both of them mentioned that their overseas study experiences benefit their expansion of social networks. Especially the participant (iw-103) mentioned that she moved from Hunan Province to Shenzhen City to embark on her entrepreneurial enterprise because she can acquire more social networks in Shenzhen City than in her hometown, Hunan Province. On account of this point, this study argues that, as female entrepreneurial leaders, they actively behave to realise self-transcendence and collective transcendence by expanding their social networks in a reciprocal way.

Social networks are recognised as depending on social class. Referencing the cultural meaning system, social class is an index of socioeconomic status that implies the extent of self- and other- orientation in sociocultural practices and thereby influences the extent of self- and other- orientation in psychological processes, as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1. In contrast, socioeconomic status in the Frontier cultural context only implies the extent of self-orientation in sociocultural practices and thereby purely influences the extent of self-orientation in psychological processes. Additionally, social networks reflect social capital, which is at the cutting-edge of research on female entrepreneurial leadership, as reported in Section 2.2.4. This means that social capital and socioeconomic class serve as a foundation for one’s career, influencing the resources or industry knowledge that can be obtained. This interpretation is reflected in the



expression of a participant (im-082) who comes from Fujian Province in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, as follows:

‘As long as you go by yourself, you will see where your own social class is and which one you have a good relationship with. Gender does not have a significant impact... Class means that everyone lives from the beginning; as for social class, although it is difficult to say which social class is not suitable, it will form its own circle... But, of course, each has its own advantages. For example, if you have good resources and background, it will help you start a business. Because if there are some people with entrepreneurial experience in the family, there may be some guidance, knowledge, support from bosom friends.’ (im-082).

The daily responsibilities of the participant (im-082) are to expand social networks that can contribute to his business development in Xiamen City. What he recognised about social networks is irrelevant to gender but depends on family support (see also Section 4.3.1.2). An interesting thing is that his recognition of social networks in terms of gender influence is similar to the recognition of the participant (iw-105) as reported previously. From a demographic perspective, this study infers that both Xiamen and Shanghai are the earliest opened and reformed regions in modern China, and people living in these cities are thereby easier affected by Western cultures than in other regions. As a result, what they recognised about social networks was based on loose collectivism.

Due to the different social identities between men and women, their social networks have different foci and scopes. This analysis explains that social networks, as gateways, are affected by gender determinants. In comparison to the previous analysis that the social networks are irrelevant to gender determinants, this study prefers the analysis of the relevance between them. Thus, based on the interviews, this study infers that social networks could differentiate between female and male entrepreneurial leadership. For example, when asked about the view of the participant (iw-005), who comes from Shanghai and engages in the service industry, about social networks, she responded that

she did not concern herself with social networks because she would like to be involved in the family as a mother and wife. However, male entrepreneurial leaders are involved in all social networks or circles in a Chinese context. This response suggests that familial concepts of gender roles still influence female entrepreneurial leaders' social networks.

'I think that social networking for women entrepreneurs might be simple, ... I think most of the male entrepreneurs I have come into contact with prefer to expand their relationships because they like these various social circles. As a female entrepreneur, she may return to the family because of her role as a mother or wife. I do not pay much attention to this relationship. I may have more time to integrate into the family, so I am relatively simple. Home is more critical.' (iw-005).

Even though she lives in Shanghai, the most socioeconomically developed region in modern China, the participant (iw-005) is affected by traditional Chinese familial concepts. What she stated above regarding why she prefers to stay home to expand social networks is attributed to the influence of cultural inertia, as reported in Section 2.1.2.4, on her mindsets and behaviours. However, female entrepreneurial leaders have soft power as an advantage in that they can alleviate or disarm people's alertness. This finding reinforces the analysis about female entrepreneurial leaders' soft power, as reported in Section 4.3.2.2. Their soft power, which is attributed to their femininity, makes female entrepreneurial leadership different from male entrepreneurial leadership. As a participant (im-011, iw-014) who respectively come from Jiangsu Province in southeastern China and Beijing City and both of them engage in the service industry, stated, female entrepreneurial leadership tends to hold soft power in social networks. This statement suggests that the soft power makes female entrepreneurial leaders competitive at the interactional level when referencing the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). As a result, female entrepreneurial leaders' soft power implies a probability for them to open cultural gateways caused by social networks.

‘As for all relationships, I think women deal better. Firstly, let us talk about a woman. Generally, it would help if you were less vigilant. If a man comes to you for something, you should be on guard, right?... For example, if the partner is a man, what should we do if we do not cooperate reasonably and get into fights? right? Therefore, in terms of interpersonal relationships, women indeed have an advantage in dealing with men.’ (im-011).

‘I think women still have an advantage in this communication because it is easier for everyone to accept it. I think everyone’s abilities are different, and there are different things that everyone is good at. That is, men may be skilled at doing some things like negotiating, communicating, cooperating, and expanding together. As for women, they may be more meticulous, such as doing some reception, service, and membership management. The responsibilities are different, and each has its strengths.’ (iw-014).

Female entrepreneurial leaders’ soft power facilitates their abilities to maintain or expand social networks. This study thereby identifies their soft powers as a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. Female entrepreneurial leaders’ soft powers usually include their meticulous communication skills and affinity for networking. In comparison with female entrepreneurial leaders, male entrepreneurial leaders are yet to be found to have this kind of attribution within the extant literature. As a result, female entrepreneurial leaders’ soft power can be recognised as their advantage in leadership. These interpretations are supported by the arguments of the participants (iw-014, iw-105, iw-016, iw-018, iw-019), who respectively come from Beijing city in northern China, Shanghai city in southeastern China, Shenzhen city in southeastern China, Shandong Province in northern China, and Beijing city in northern China and respectively engage in service industry, service industry, service industry, manufacturing industry, and service industry, as follows:

‘A lot of men are socially poor, and women are far better socially than men.’ (iw-105).

‘Affinity is better, then communication is better, and mentality is better’ (iw-016).

‘The affinity is stronger. I think it is because it will be more delicate, such as the feelings of employees... This kind of capture will be more delicate.’ (iw-019).

‘Females have an advantage. Why do you say that? Any tricks that can be made, and any tricks that can be dismantled? I think women are better. Men are sometimes inconvenient and challenging to operate. In handling relationships, whether a man or a woman, I think women are more careful, and then they are more detailed when dealing with things, and women are more approachable with affinity.’ (iw-018).

Chinese traditional culture also encourages women to use soft power. Because Chinese women in the traditional cultural context are considered vulnerable, showing weakness is acceptable and normal. According to Taoism, as reported in Section 2.1.2.4, Chinese women are categorised into Yin aspects, which heuristically means using soft power to overcome challenges. In contrast, Chinese men are categorised into Yang aspects, which heuristically means using hard power to overcome challenges. As a result, Chinese men cannot show weakness because it can be considered shameful and consequently hurt their reputation. On account of this point, Chinese women acquire a gender advantage in expanding social networks. A participant (iw-084), who comes from Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, explains this as follows:

‘Colleagues may regard me as a close sister and are willing to talk about life development. ... Women have an advantage in communication. For example, when her project encounters difficulties, she will show weakness, so I think women have advantages in project development and public relations communication.’ (iw-084).

What the participant (iw-084) stated reflects Zhejiang’s geographic culture, which is based on the local socioeconomically developed context. Additionally, Zhejiang is recognised as an example of Jiangnan culture, which is characterised by flexibility, delicateness, and elegance. On account of this point, Zhejiang’s geographic culture makes the female entrepreneurial leaders living there capable of maintaining social networks. However, this study finds that female entrepreneurial leaders are prudent in managing their social networks. In contrast to male entrepreneurial leaders, female entrepreneurial leaders tend to spend a long time identifying and expanding social

networks. This finding suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders' mindsets are more conservative than their male counterparts. As a result, this study argues that female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation is relatively lower than their male counterparts in coping with the cultural gateways at the interactional and institutional levels within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Even though their soft power facilitated them to expand their social networks, they are less expansive in establishing and maintaining them. This analysis discloses the mutual relationship between the individual level and the interactional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). For instance, one participant (iw-008), who comes from Jiangxi Province and engages in the service industry, emphasised that when she selected customers or communicated with them, she was cautious about identifying and screening whom she could trust.

'The risk is coming, and it will be higher than before... I slowly learned to grow in the past two or three years. Because when you treat customers with sincerity, some customers may be in arrears or may not be so good in some respects, so when I have experienced this, I may also summarise it myself. I will gradually screen and filter to determine which customers I can do business with, and which may not be my customers.' (iw-008).

The prudence of the participant (iw-008) in expanding her social networks reflects her psychological adaptation to facing the cultural gateways caused by the different social networks. Regarding the fact that she comes from a socioeconomically developing region, this study infers that her low-level psychological adaptation makes her prudent in dealing with social networks in a sociocultural context with loose collectivism. Even though social networks mean different channels for entrepreneurial leaders to acquire social capital and resources, Chinese culture often defaults on social networks as a private and intimate relationship with unpublicised channels. Thus, female entrepreneurial leaders usually leverage their private and intimate relationships for external connections. This study thereby investigates that social networks for female

entrepreneurial leaders are based on their strong-tie relationships with other stakeholders. However, although this study finds that women's affinity may benefit their social networking, they often prefer staying home. This means that the familial concept of traditional sociocultural norms still influences female entrepreneurial leaders' mindsets and behaviours. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this analysis discloses an externalisation process from the individual level to the interactional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Considering that social networks reflect female entrepreneurial leaders' socioeconomic status, this study suggests that social networking is easier to establish within the same socioeconomic level and harder to maintain beyond that socioeconomic level.

#### 4.3.3.2.3 Government Policy

The following interview data shows that the open and reform policy affords, to some extent, an improved entrepreneurial environment for Chinese women. Inferring from the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), the fact that government policy impacts the opportunities of female entrepreneurial leaders reflects the directional process from the institutional level to the individual level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). As reported in Section 2.1.2.3, the improved entrepreneurial environment signifies the institutional transition in a Chinese context. Specifically, this institutional transition is a change from contextual tightness to contextual looseness and from cultural tightness to cultural looseness. This study, thereby referencing cultural psychology, argues that the fundamental reasons for this phenomenon can be attributed to government policy-generated contextual or cultural tightness or looseness. As a participant (iw-005) who comes from Shanghai city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, she explained that it brings market opportunities for both men and women.

‘The open and reform policy benefits entrepreneurship, whether it is for women or men. Like entrepreneurship, it has opened the door to the Chinese market. The broader the scope of such deals, the more opportunities they will surely bring to you.’ (iw-005).

As a female entrepreneurial leader living in Shanghai, the participant (iw-005) has firsthand experience of the socioeconomical and sociocultural changes in Shanghai after the government realised the open and reform policy. On the surface, at least, the national policy sets out to treat female and male entrepreneurial leaders equally. The above statement by the participant (iw-005) proves that the open and reform policy facilitates both Chinese women and men equally to open the cultural gateway at the institutional level and subsequently identify entrepreneurial opportunities. However, considering the fact that Chinese women have historically had a disadvantageous social status, this study argues that the open and reform policy generates relatively large benefits for Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders. A participant (iw-040) who comes from Beijing city in northern China and engages in the service industry expressed that women benefit from this policy by enabling greater autonomy for women. This expression indicates a cultural change from tightness to looseness towards Chinese women. As a result, the open and reform policy makes the cultural gateway open to Chinese women for engaging in entrepreneurial activities. Another participant (im-001) who comes from Jiangsu Province in southeastern China and engages in the manufacturing industry further suggests, for instance, that female entrepreneurial leaders are encouraged by local government policy:

‘I think the open and reform policy is not bad; that is to say, at least it gives women more autonomy.’ (iw-040).

‘Men and women are the same. Even in some places, women may be more encouraged.’ (im-001).

The above two participants (iw-040, im-001), including a male manager in an entrepreneurial enterprise and a female entrepreneurial leader, hold a positive view of the open and reform policy. What they stated above reveals that they have experienced positive sociocultural changes in their socioeconomically developed regions. The sociocultural changes reflect the catalyst role of government policy in influencing the internalisation process from the idea level to the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). For example, the following interview data show that government industrial policy stability impacts the entrepreneurial environment and therefore affects the sustainability of entrepreneurial enterprises. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this study proposes that the entrepreneurial phenomenon is attributed to policy-generated contextual or cultural tightness. On account of this point, contextual or cultural tightness implies an unsustainable mode for entrepreneurial development. Therefore, policy instability is identified as a constrained determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in China. In contrast, by adhering to the free market belief, Western governmental policy generates contextual or cultural looseness towards entrepreneurial activities. That is why Chinese female entrepreneurial leadership developed less maturely than their Western counterparts and was thereby typically constrained and unable to expand their business scale in an uncertain context. Participant (iw-024), who comes from Jiangsu Province in southeastern China and engages in the manufacturing industry, presents the following argument:

‘Many determinants are restricted. The main reason is that the profits of this business are relatively smaller and smaller... Now enterprises are difficult to expand because the government has some regulations: environmental protection, right? Supervised every day, we are unable to do anything about it. That is because of the management of hazardous chemicals. Moreover, our Jiangsu province has closed more than 130 enterprises this year.’ (iw-024).



As a female entrepreneurial leader, the participant (iw-024) takes responsibility for the issue of her enterprise's environment protection because her enterprise manufactures the chemical adhesives in Jiangsu Province. This is why she complained about the cultural tightness caused by the local government's environmental protection policy. Government policy often implies a gateway that influences the survival and sustainability of female entrepreneurial leaders' enterprises. This means that if government policy generates cultural looseness, female entrepreneurial leaders can have development redundancy and sufficient confidence to survive and sustain their enterprises. In contrast, if government policy generates cultural tightness, the situation for female entrepreneurial leaders will be totally reversed. For example, one participant (iw-004), who comes from Beijing city in northern China and engages in the service industry, stated that those industries that entrepreneurial enterprises are involved in depend on the business environment and government policy. If the government policy changes or cancels the incentives, many industries in which female entrepreneurial leaders are involved would be entirely depressed. This situation indicates a cultural tightness due to government policy lacks stability and flexibility. That is why female entrepreneurial leaders' enterprises cannot sustain the business for the long term, usually three years (see also Section 4.2.3). As a participant (iw-004) explains:

'First, the business environment in China today has also been determined by the policy; second, China's policies significantly impact the economy. Many industries may survive for three years if the policy encourages them only for three years; if the policy is not encouraged or changes, the industry is not good. So basically, it is impossible to say which industry has a century-old store that continues to develop. Basically, in China, I think it will test your judgement on this industry.' (iw-004).

Regarding the female entrepreneurial leader who lives in Beijing, this study makes sense of how the participant (iw-004) experienced the cultural tightness caused by government policy with strong political influences. What she stated reveals the

internalisation process from the idea level to the institutional level and then to the individual level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). For example, the following data show that female entrepreneurial leaders often transform government policy into their organisational culture and regulations from a female-specific perspective. This finding suggests an internalisation process from the idea level to the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). A participant (im-003) who comes from Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and engages in the service industry described that female entrepreneurial leaders tend to specify the legal regulations of female rights and formulate corporate culture and management regulations as a result. He further argued that female entrepreneurial leaders care more about female rights than their male counterparts. This argument implies the special role of female entrepreneurial leaders in forming their organisational culture, such as the family-oriented culture reported in Section 4.3.2.2, in contrast to male entrepreneurial leaders.

‘As a female entrepreneurial leader, she will take into account the corporate system and culture through policies from her female-specific perspective and take care of some fundamental rights of women. For example, the country’s legal protection for women may not be missed in her profession; and male entrepreneurs may not realise or consider it. There is a difference.’ (im-003).

As a male entrepreneurial leader, the participant (im-003) provides his understanding and entrepreneurial experience in terms of the difference in organisational cultures between men-led and women-led entrepreneurial enterprises. His comparative interpretation reveals the cultural consistency and psychological consistency of female and male entrepreneurial leadership in the internalisation process from the idea level to the institutional level and then to the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). For example, the interview also suggests that the governmental policy of family planning impacts the family structure and society’s ageing, which further

influenced the female entrepreneurial leaders. To some extent, the one-child family planning policy created a cultural tightness in modern China. As a result, the mindsets and behaviours of Chinese people are changed to be more prudent and hopeless for their future by the cultural tightness. This kind of change is contradictory to the traditional Chinese culture, which adheres to more looseness than tightness. As a result, the one-child policy is unsustainable in modern China. This is why the latest policy has allowed the birth of a second child and a third child, which will make the female entrepreneurial leaders return home. For instance, one participant (iw-005) who comes from Shanghai city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry responded that this would decrease the quantity of female entrepreneurial leaders in the China context.

‘In terms of family planning policy, this is the earliest activity in our country because our country has a relatively large population. However, now because of this ageing, after letting go of the second child, it is also possible that in the future, there will be more and more time for this responsibility of the family so that she will spend less and less time on her career. So overall, I think there may be fewer female entrepreneurial leaders. Because of this release of the second and third children, it is said that she will return to the family, and then she needs to spend more time.’ (iw-005)

The participant (iw-005) lives in Shanghai and experiences the emergence of ageing society in her community. What she stated reveals the negative effects of the family planning policy in socioeconomically developed regions. The above argument is evidenced by another participant (iw-040), who comes from Beijing city and engages in the service industry, that, when getting married or having a child, female entrepreneurial leaders are inclined to centre their family and child. Thus, their focus was shifted from career development to family. This kind of shift reinforces the previous analysis that the mindsets and behaviours of Chinese people are changed to be prudent in the context of cultural tightness and thereby are required to focus on their only one-child, who carries hope for their future lives. Taking account of this analysis,

this study finds that the traditional familial concept is still a constrained determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership. This is why a participant (i-40) argued that the ageing issue affected the family-business balance for female entrepreneurial leaders.

‘The birth policy is now... to encourage birth. Now it is because of an ageing population, and the government encourages you to have more children. Unlike before, that is to say, fewer births... right? So now, with the demographics changing, right? Therefore, some adjustments will be made to the policy. Gradually, as I get older, ...there are marriage life, family, and children, but I have not reached the ideal state. Should I go forward or stay? I also have a state of ambivalence and anxiety...After having children, my thinking will change, and I will be more family-centred and children-centred.’ (iw-040).

Entrepreneurial opportunity in China’s context is brought about by the open and reform policy. As stated by the participant (im-003) who comes from Zhejiang Province and engages in service industry, the open and reform policy is recognised as “the most significant determinant” of entrepreneurial opportunities. This study identifies that the contribution of that policy to female entrepreneurial leaders is that the policy diminishes or even eliminates the various contextual or cultural gateways that they previously confronted. For example, the open and reform policy generated a market system in modern China, which allows relative equal competition and resultantly leads to entrepreneurial opportunity occurring. As a participant (im-003) explains, as follows:

‘The biggest thing at the time was an opportunity. This opportunity refers to a historical opportunity: reform and open. In the future, the market economy will have a general direction. Therefore, under the wave of the market economy, if you have the ability, you can do business. As long as you have the ability, you have more opportunities to succeed. This is the most significant determinant.’ (im-003).

As a male entrepreneurial leader, the participant (im-003) identified and seized the early entrepreneurial opportunities in the region where the government released the open and reform policy for a pilot study. His personal entrepreneurial experience shows the effects of the cultural transition from tight collectivism to loose collectivism. It is precisely because of the cultural transition that generates a sociocultural change from

tightness to looseness that he can successfully realise his self-transcendence and collective transcendence of cultural gateways at different levels.

This study shows that the cultural tightness or looseness caused by the stability and flexibility of government policy influence an entrepreneurial leader's survival and sustainability. The stability and flexibility of government policies, such as open and reform policies and family-planning policies, have a relatively significant impact on the expectations and confidence of female entrepreneurial leaders. This analysis discloses an internalisation process from the idea and institutional levels to the individuals' level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). As a result, this study infers a directional relationship from the cultural gateways at the idea and institutional levels to female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation. Because industrial policy often changes too fast and lacks stability, female entrepreneurial leaders argue that their enterprises' survival and sustainability are accordingly influenced. To an extent, the change in government industrial policy reflects institutional uncertainty (see also Section 4.3.3.2.4) in Chinese context. This institutional uncertainty generated by government policy is quite different from the Western context because the Chinese government controls the economy with highly intensive power.

#### 4.3.3.2.4 Institutional Uncertainty

When referencing the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), this study finds that institutional uncertainty, as revealed by the statements of participant (iw-008), forms cultural gateways at the institutional level that are often faced by female entrepreneurial leaders. Institutional uncertainty refers to the unstable status or frequently contextual change at the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). For example, a participant (iw-008) who comes from Jiangxi Province and engages in service industry expressed

that she is always precautious in business activities, such as identifying and selecting customers, controlling cash flows, and trying to avoid rash development. Due to their high risk-aversion, female entrepreneurial leaders tend to be highly resilient in surviving and sustaining their enterprises.

‘In the face of such a sudden epidemic, no one could have imagined it. So, I think, first of all... we should learn to identify and distinguish customers, which is very important. ... if I have made some relatively unfamiliar, unknown customers, then we may be worried that the payment for the goods will not be recovered, or that the cash flow will be strenuous. So, there is a lot of pressure and much risk. However, if we did this kind of customer selection well in the past, it might be a little conscious.’ (iw-008).

As a female entrepreneurial leader, the participant (iw-008) never predicted the institutional uncertainty caused by the epidemic. As a result, frequent contextual changes often call for the resistance ability of female entrepreneurial leadership. This means the contextual gateways compels female entrepreneurial leaders to improve their psychological adaptation to be more resistant. For instance, although there is contextual change brought about by the pandemic, female entrepreneurial leaders can still insist on their businesses at the institutional level and resist the impact of the pandemic. To an extent, resistance ability is a kind of female entrepreneurial leader’s contingency ability that reflects whether they can sustain their enterprises for a long time. Due to female entrepreneurial leaders being sensitive to the risk of institutional change, as argued by a participant (iw-008), they usually maintain a high level of resistance ability with prudent mindsets and behaviours, as analysed in Section 4.2.3. Through the expressions of participants (iw-024, iw-075) who respectively come from Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and respectively engage in manufacturing and service industries, the interview shows that resistance ability through cross-period adjustment can be useful for maintaining a business. This is also a reflection of the psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders.

‘The sales and production of this product are OK, but the first half of the year was relatively affected. Because everyone cannot go out, the product cannot come out. Anyway, on the whole, for example, everyone is affected, and all industries are affected. Therefore, the second half of the year was relatively busy, and all the work backlogged in the year’s first half was done in the second half of the year. Therefore, it did not make much difference for the whole year.’ (iw-024).

‘The impact on me means that I can only stay in the United States and not go back to China, which is my most significant impact. I was very anxious in February, March, and April last year... workers could not go to work... By June, we were disappointed.... so, what should I do? At that time, I felt that I could only comfort myself. However, starting from the year’s second half, we did very well. Last year we completed all the performances that we fell behind on.’ (iw-075).

The above two participants (iw-024, iw-075) hold a positive and optimistic attitude when facing institutional uncertainty. This attitude is rooted in their sufficient confidence, which is under the edification of the local entrepreneurial context. In entrepreneurial practice, unexpected risks challenge female entrepreneurial leaders all the time. Thus, female entrepreneurial leaders often cannot achieve success without resilience and passion. This analysis suggests how the contextual or cultural gateways (i.e., unexpected risks) influence the psychological adaptation (i.e., resilience, passion) of female entrepreneurial leaders. On account of this point, Western female entrepreneurial leaders are required to deal with the reciprocal relationship between contextual or cultural gateways and their psychological adaptation. Specifically, according to what was expressed by a participant (iw-101), who comes from Fujian Province and engages in the manufacturing industry, this study finds that psychological adaptation is linked with passion and resilience.

‘I think that in all businesses, you have to be very resilient. My own company should persevere no matter how difficult it becomes. It is tenacity and enthusiasm... You should be happy when you do things. If you are not happy, I think you will be unable to do well. That is what we want for our brand, our culture. I think you should be persistent and resilient in whatever you do, and then you should be passionate about your life, your products, and your work. We have always told our employees that they should be enthusiastic. How can you get the job done if you do not like your work?’ (iw-101).

As a Chinese female entrepreneurial leader, the participant (iw-101) frequently travels to the US to develop her business and accept business training. What she stated reveals that she was affected by the Western entrepreneurial culture when she faced the institutional uncertainty. Dialectically speaking, this institutional uncertainty is not absolutely harmful to the enterprise of female entrepreneurial leaders. According to Taoism (see also Section 2.1.2.4), challenges and opportunities are twisted together in most cases. As argued by a participant (iw-004), she still found a business opportunity during the period of the pandemic, which was generally recognised as a challenge. From the perspective of cultural psychology, institutional uncertainty brings tightness and thereby formulates a closed gateway at the institutional level. Therefore, institutional uncertainty becomes a challenge for female entrepreneurial leaders. However, if female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation is sufficiently high, they can surpass the gateway and thereby transform challenges into opportunities. On account of this point, institutional uncertainty can make female entrepreneurial leaders develop flexibly and comprehensively. This is explained by participant (iw-004), who comes from Beijing city in northern China and engages in the service industry, as follows:

'It is nothing, just because I still found an opportunity. There are facilitators and constraints to the development of anything. On the whole, it may be a bad thing, but it is also the progress of humankind. I have not deliberately studied it, but I think there are other opportunities to seize during the epidemic.... First resilience. Second is the ability to withstand pressure; third, women's general emotions are relatively soft. I am more flexible in business than others.' (iw-004).

As a female entrepreneurial leader, the participant (iw-004) formulates the typical Chinese mindset under the edification of traditional Chinese culture in Beijing. What she stated reveals the principle of Taoism (see also Section 2.1.2.4), as analysed previously. Although institutional uncertainty indicates a situation with cultural tightness for female entrepreneurial leaders, female entrepreneurial leaders can open



the cultural gateway at the institutional level through their relatively advantages, such as resilience, endurance, and soft power (see also Section 4.3.2.2), as stated by the participant (iw-004). This means that the precondition for female entrepreneurial leaders to transform challenges into opportunities lies in their psychological adaptation. On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders need sufficient resilience, endurance, and soft power to improve their psychological adaptation. Therefore, the challenges or opportunities for female entrepreneurial leaders depend on whether their psychological adaptation matches or mismatches the cultural gateways, such as those caused by institutional uncertainty.

#### 4.3.3.3 Entrepreneurial Context

From the perspective of male entrepreneurial leaders, entrepreneurial context is recognised as a gender-irrelevant determinant. This male perspective on entrepreneurial context reflects the gender gap, as reported in Section 2.2.2.1.1.3, in their recognition of the entrepreneurial field. This may be because, for male entrepreneurial leaders, their sense of the influence of entrepreneurial context on males and females is minor or nonsignificant. Therefore, the interview data from the participants (im-001) reinforces the conclusion of the extant research that entrepreneurial leadership is masculine defaulted, as reported in Section 2.2.2.2. This explanation is supported by the participant (im-001), who comes from Jiangsu Province in southeastern China and engages in the manufacturing industry, as follows:

‘In terms of the entrepreneurial environment, especially in the current status quo of micro-business or e-commerce industries, all these have nothing to do with gender. Moreover, when employees leave, they are often engaged in activities of entrepreneurship, both men and women.’ (im-001).

The participant (im-001) makes sense of the entrepreneurial context as being irrelevant to gender. What he stated is based on his male perspective and his experience in socioeconomically developed regions. However, when looking from the female perspective, the situation changes in reverse. Although the female entrepreneurial leaders interviewed in this study seem to sense that the entire entrepreneurial context is progressing, they complain that some companies treat women unequally because of their marital status. This complaint indicates that marital status is identified as a constrained determinant for female entrepreneurial leaders' career development. Referencing the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), the complaint reflects the cultural gateways that still challenge Chinese women in entrepreneurial activities. In contrast to male entrepreneurial leaders' recognition of entrepreneurial context, female entrepreneurial leaders obviously sense the differential treatment given to them in an entrepreneurial context. Therefore, this study argues that there is still a gender gap in an entrepreneurial context. A participant (iw-013) who comes from Jiangsu Province in southeastern China and engages in the manufacturing industry argued that there are some social challenges for women in current society that are exclusive to them:

'Society should still be making progress. However, unfortunately, this society is still exclusive to women. Of course, there will still be companies that write directly when recruiting, saying that unmarried women are not needed. There should be a little bit of it. It is considered a delay in work or something.' (iw-013).

In contrast to the male participant (im-001), the female participant (iw-013) still feels the cultural tightness in her lived sociocultural context, even though both of them live in the same socioeconomically developed region. However, this study agrees with her argument that the whole entrepreneurial context in China now becomes better year by year. At the idea level of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), the previously reported finding about a shift from loose collectivism to individualism shows a cultural

looseness for female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China. As a result, an open cultural gateway at the idea level emerges for Chinese women to embark on enterprises. Additionally, female entrepreneurial leaders can freely select places or contexts where they prefer. This means that female entrepreneurial leaders open the cultural gateway at the institutional level caused by geographic culture and cultural divides (see also Section 4.3.3.1.3). However, there are still many places that are not suitable for the development of female entrepreneurial leaders because of regional the cultural tightness. When female entrepreneurial leaders find this disadvantage in a place or context, they can choose to leave and find another suitable context. These findings indicate an increasing autonomy of female entrepreneurial leaders, as evidenced by participants (iw-002 and iw-004), who respectively come from Jiangsu Province in southeastern China and Beijing City in northern China and respectively engage in manufacturing and service industries. They can switch environments more freely, as follows:

‘The company environment is much better than before, and the entrepreneurial environment is good.’ (iw-002).

‘I think the entrepreneurial environment has little to do with it. If the entrepreneurial environment is not good, it is a waste of time, which is quite a waste of time on unimportant things. I feel our time is too precious and we should go wherever we like the most. That water goes down low, and then we go where we are most popular. If it were apparent that I might feel rejected in this environment, I would leave here.’ (iw-004).

What the two participants (iw-002, iw-004) stated reveals that their lived regions conceive of cultural looseness. When investigating the relationship between entrepreneurial context and geographic culture, this study finds that across the different regions in modern China from high to low socioeconomic development levels, the sociocultural context of entrepreneurial leadership displays sociocultural gradients with a decreasing tendency of cultural looseness and an increasing tendency of cultural

tightness. This finding implies the influence of geographic culture on entrepreneurial context, which affects the strengths of cultural gateways. Specifically, the strengths of cultural gateways decrease from low socioeconomic regions to high socioeconomic regions. This is why south-eastern China, such as the Pearl River Delta and Yangtze River Delta, has become one of China's most innovative, developed, and entrepreneurial-friendly areas. This is appraised by participant (iw-005) who comes from Shanghai city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry:

'I think Shanghai has two things: one is science, and the other is innovation, which is necessary for the technological entrepreneurship of enterprises.' (iw-005).

As a female entrepreneurial leader, the participant (iw-005) summarises the entrepreneurial characteristics of Shanghai, where she lives. This means the strength of the cultural gateway in Shanghai is weakened because of its socioeconomic development, which promotes cultural looseness in Shanghai. The above-analysed findings about the relationship between the strengths of cultural gateways and the socioeconomic status of different regions are reinforced by the statements of the participant (iw-007). After she immigrated from Beijing to Suzhou and then to Hainan, she found that Hainan Province lacks entrepreneurial context. In contrast to Beijing and Suzhou, Hainan Province's socioeconomic development level is far behind. Until lived in Hainan province she did find that there were many constraints hindering her from realising her entrepreneurial and career goals. For example, in the following expressions, the participant (iw-007), who comes from Zhejiang Province in southeastern China and engages in the manufacturing industry, complains about what she encountered in Hainan Province after she moved from Beijing and Suzhou:

'First, whether they attach importance to talents and whether we acquire some related auxiliary support. Well, where I am now, they do not value talent; it has become a slogan. Second, they said to give me a

house, but I have not gotten it yet. So how much is my talent allowance? I have not seen a penny, have I? So this does not make sense. So, I will just let it go.’ (iw-007).

The experiences and statements of the participant (iw-007) reflect the internalisation and externalisation processes across the different levels within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). This means that socioeconomic status at the institutional level influences female entrepreneurial leaders at both the idea level and the individual level. For example, in the middle area of China, the entrepreneurial context for women is inferior to its counterpart in the eastern area. However, it develops better than its counterpart in the western area. Thus, in sequence from the eastern area to the middle area and then to the western area, the entrepreneurial context is gradually changing from developed to underdeveloped. One of the reasons is attributed to the extent of regional socioeconomic development. From the eastern area to the western area of modern China, the extent of regional socioeconomic development also varies from developed to underdeveloped. This is evidenced by participant (im-009), who comes from Henan Province in central China and engages in the service industry, as follows:

‘Things are changing, but at least from what we have seen, it is suitable for women to start a business as a leader. At least you rarely see a particularly well-known female entrepreneurial leader; it is just that there are very few possibilities. Compared with underdeveloped areas, we are doing pretty well... However, of course, it is not only the entrepreneurial environment but the entire business environment that is relatively high or relatively well developed.’ (im-009).

What the participant (im-009) stated from a comparative perspective is sourced from his social experiences. This study thereby infers that the strength of cultural gateways decreases from socioeconomically underdeveloped regions to socioeconomically developing regions and then to the socioeconomically developed regions. The above data indicate a correlation between socioeconomic level and entrepreneurial context and a consistency between socioeconomic level and geographic culture. As a result, the

cultural gateways caused by socioeconomic determinants and the cultural gateways caused by sociocultural determinants consistently converge from northwestern China to southeastern China. This is why the advancement of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China depends on local socioeconomic development. Especially in the western area of China, female entrepreneurial leaders expand their enterprises along with urban expansion. Thus, when the local economy is increasing, female entrepreneurial leaders can also increase their businesses, and vice versa. This is explained by participant (iw-010), who comes from Gansu Province in northwestern China and engages in the manufacturing industry, as follows:

‘Our current business is to follow up the development of the entire city and take a step in the transformation of this city... When I look at this part, I think it belongs to the coexistence of opportunities and challenges. Because the opportunity is affected by this epidemic, the channel of our online platform has been redeveloped. But what about challenges? Due to a shift in the economy, our enterprise’s future in the advertising industry will require deciding between the investment ratio and the investment direction. I think the two are interdependent.’ (iw-010).

As a female entrepreneurial leader, the participant (iw-010) lives in a socioeconomically underdeveloped region. What she stated reveals the late-development advantages and the accompanying disadvantages. Therefore, the sociocultural and socioeconomic determinants coexist and thereby influence the cultural properties of the entrepreneurial context, such as cultural looseness or tightness. As previously analysed, the sociocultural and socioeconomic statuses consistently converge into the geographic cultures. This study subsequently infers that those sociocultural and socioeconomic determinants, as reported in Sections 4.3.3.1 and 4.3.3.2, formulate a symbiotic relationship inherent in an entrepreneurial context. Consequently, whether an entrepreneurial context is facilitated or constrained towards female entrepreneurial leaders is attributed to the cultural properties (i.e., cultural

looseness and tightness) embodied in the symbiotic relationship of those sociocultural and socioeconomic determinants.

This study finds that the entrepreneurial context in modern China has become facilitative to female entrepreneurial leaders since China released its open and reform policy, which makes China realise a shift from a tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism (see also Section 4.3.3.1.4). This kind of shift means a change from cultural tightness to cultural looseness, which becomes a precondition for entrepreneurial context. That is why, after developing for years, sociocultural influences on the social sense of entrepreneurial leaders' gender have been minimised. This finding suggests that the underdeveloped entrepreneurial context in northwestern China reflects tight collectivism, the developing entrepreneurial context in central China reflects increasing loose collectivism, and the developed entrepreneurial context in southeastern China reflects increasing individualism. Therefore, an entrepreneurial context in modern China has a coexistence of tight collectivism, loose collectivism, and individualism that is affected by the geographic cultures (see also Section 4.3.3.1.3) and socioeconomic determinants (see also Section 4.3.3.2). This is why socioeconomic development benefits the development of female entrepreneurial leadership. This beneficial influence is probably displayed as that socioeconomic development can create entrepreneurial context with a cultural looseness to Chinese women's engagement.

#### 4.3.3.4 The Development of Feminism in Modern China

The data suggests that women's self-awareness in modern China has improved because of the development of female entrepreneurial leadership. However, the interviews describe that this improvement is neither comprehensive nor thorough. The profound

reason is attributed to the lack of recognition of female entrepreneurial leaders towards feminism. Specifically, female entrepreneurial leaders are either indifferent or tend to keep a distance from feminism and feminist ideals. This fact contributes to the sustaining of the gender gap between Chinese men and women in the field of business.

#### 4.3.3.4.1 The Feminist Status Quo in Modern China

The feminist status quo in modern China is shown as the widely existing gender gateways toward female entrepreneurial leaders. The gender gateway is one kind of cultural gateway because of the tightness or looseness of sociocultural norms in the gender field. The interview data shows that the status quo of feminism is not as optimistic as female entrepreneurial leaders expected because of the permeated gender gaps in modern China. The gender gaps (e.g., gender differences, gender diversity, gender inequality, gender stereotypes, and social biases), which are the biggest concerns of female entrepreneurial leaders, formulate a gender gateway. Firstly, the gender gateway is distributed in different regions because of the geographic culture. Secondly, the gender gateway lies in the industrial diversity of participants. Among these two aspects, masculine defaults are the main reasons that lead to a gender gateway at the institutional level and the idea level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3).

Although a gender gateway can influence female entrepreneurial leadership as a challenge in a Chinese context, the gender gateway is not absolutely closed to female entrepreneurial leaders. A participant (iw-005) who comes from Shanghai city and engages in the service industry stated that women often have advantages in certain industries because of their innate nature. This statement suggests an open gender gateway at the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). However, as described by a participant (im-011) who comes from Jiangsu Province and engages in



the service industry, a woman's intention of launching an enterprise can be affected by her family because she needs to take care of children. This narrative reflects that family has different significance for women and men when they face business-family balance in a Chinese context, like the situations in a Western context, as reported in Section 2.2.2.1.1.2. The gender gateway caused by business-family balance is attributed to traditional sociocultural norms. On account of this point, gender gateways at the idea level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) are still closed to women in both Western and Chinese contexts.

'Because of their congenital influence, women may have more advantages in beauty and hairdressing.' (iw-005).

'Strong women, many of whom are not married, because they did not waste those two or three years. Once the child is born, a woman will focus her mind and attention on the child, which is different from that of a man, so she will not have a lot of time and energy to start a business.' (im-011).

The above statements made by the two participants (iw-005, im-011) regarding the advantages and disadvantages of Chinese women are presented from a comparative standpoint, taking into account both male and female perspectives. Their statements disclose the gender gap in entrepreneurial fields. The gender gap is formulated because of the different gender roles and defaulted familial responsibilities for women and men in the Chinese context. In contrast to the Western context, due to the different gender roles regulated by Chinese traditional culture, as described by participant (im-043), who comes from Shandong Province and engages in the manufacturing industry, women usually do not need to undertake familial responsibilities such as buying a house and buying a car, which are defaulted as the responsibilities of men. This inequality of familial responsibilities shows a feminist advantage that is not defaulted on in the Western context. On account of this point, this study argues that the cultural inertia of

traditional Chinese culture does not totally constrain female entrepreneurial leadership. Regarding Chinese sociocultural context, which turns to loose collectivism and individualism (see also Section 4.3.3.3), Chinese women, especially Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders, acquire advantages from both feminism and traditional Chinese culture. While not undertaking these responsibilities, some Chinese women see this as an opportunity and a surprising relative advantage to pursuing their careers.

‘My personal experience is that women have certain advantages in life and career. If a woman participates in this enterprise or does one thing, she will be more focused than many men because she does not have the constraints of men, such as a family, house, car. She can do this, and it will take a certain amount of time to accumulate.’ (im-043).

What the participant (im-043) stated conforms to the sociocultural norms of his hometown, Shandong Province. An interesting thing is that he reveals the inequality among Chinese men that is inherent in Confucian culture. However, the present study ignores this kind of gender inequality during cultural transition times, such as the shift from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism, as reported in Section 4.3.3.3.1.4. This kind of gender inequality for Chinese men becomes an open cultural gateway for Chinese women when they embark on entrepreneurial enterprises.

This study finds that female entrepreneurial leaders also notice the significance of gender diversity in a team and can actively adjust the gender ratio to balance it. This finding reveals the externalisation process from the individual level to the institutional level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). As a result, female entrepreneurial leaders autonomously create organisational culture in their enterprises, such as the family-oriented culture (see also Section 4.3.2.2). This is why female entrepreneurial leaders consciously increase gender diversity, effectively reduce the gender gap, and resultantly formulate a female-benefited organisational culture. As participants (iw-025, iw-026),

who respectively come from Shenzhen city and Shanghai city in southeastern China and both of them engage in the service industry, suggested, gender diversity is increasing in the enterprises that were launched by Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders.

‘In terms of men and women, we have more women. In terms of the gender ratio, we have reached 70%.’ (iw-025).

‘In general, it is almost the same; we have more women than men, but we will gradually adjust them later. For example, for new projects, there may be more men.’ (iw-026).

What the two participants stated (iw-025, iw-026) reveals not only the feminist status quo in socioeconomically developed regions but also their feminist sense in leading their entrepreneurial enterprises. However, although female entrepreneurial leaders can actively adjust the gender gap inside their enterprises, they have limited influence on the gender gaps in the Chinese sociocultural context. At the idea level of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), feminist development is still distant from the recognition of Chinese women. Due to the solid masculine default of Chinese culture, feminism has little spatiality to develop. This explains why there are gender gaps in the field of entrepreneurial leadership. However, the gender gap does not absolutely disadvantage women. On the contrary, specific industries with greater gender diversity, such as beauty and hairdressing (see also the statements of participant iw-005 in this section), provide women with some advantages. This finding suggests that Chinese women can autonomously choose industries in an entrepreneurial context with the properties of loose collectivism and individualism. In the meantime, because of the advantages of both feminism and traditional Chinese culture, female entrepreneurial leaders are not held to the same familial responsibility standards as their male counterparts, thereby allowing them to develop their businesses with greater autonomy.

#### 4.3.3.4.2 The Feminism Influences on Female Entrepreneurial Leadership

Feminism plays an active role in influencing Chinese women's self-awareness and self-realisation. However, because feminism originates in a Western context, it needs an assimilation process by the Chinese culture to maintain cultural consistency with the mainstream Chinese culture. This is why, although feminism is emerging in the Chinese context, many women are reluctant to participate in feminist activities. The data suggests that although they realised that feminism is beneficial, they viewed feminism as part of public affairs, which are at a high distance from their daily work and lives. A participant (iw-092) who comes from Beijing city and engages in the service industry argued as follows:

'Objectively speaking, I do not know that much about feminism... It is because I feel that when a thing or a concept rises to a certain level, it is a matter of a small group of people.... Yes, this is my sense... You just put it bluntly, female entrepreneurial leaders are very busy... There are so many things to be busy with every day that she does not have time to pay attention to the matter of idealism. This is too imaginary, and the unified core is precisely what these people are doing, ... She might say that this type of female entrepreneurship is her practice... but she would never say it as a slogan, shout it out, or go out of her way to promote it.' (iw-092).

This study finds that feminism cannot be accepted by Chinese women without a localisation in a Chinese sociocultural context. As revealed by participants (iw-017, iw-088) who respectively come from Guangzhou city in southeastern China and Henan Province in central China and respectively engage in service and manufacturing industries, many female entrepreneurial leaders prefer treating feminist activities with a gentle and inclusive attitude to treating them radically or extremely. This means that Chinese women prefer liberal feminism to radical feminism. Therefore, although Chinese feminism is originated from the Western context, it has been localised with Chinese characteristics. Because the liberal feminism conforms to the Chinese

harmonious culture (see also Section 2.2.1.2.2) and radical feminism disobeys the Chinese harmonious culture, the liberal feminism instead of the radical feminism can be accepted by Chinese women. As participants (iw-017, iw-088) described, some feminists were viewed to have crossed the line into extremism. This is explained by participant (iw-17) as follows:

‘Given our many criticisms of a male-dominated society, why should we go too far in favour of women’s rights?... I think the relationship between the two is to support and help each other... However, feminist society went in the opposite direction... From the perspective of a human being, everyone should live easily... However, it is not to say that what we advocate is pure freedom. I think this is freedom within a specific range, not the younger generation who thinks they do not want to get married and want freedom.’ (iw-017).

‘I do not know much about feminism... I hope that when you discuss some things or think about some things, you can not single out this gender, so I feel that there may be some aspects: if you take this gender out and let us discuss how to describe women and how to describe men, maybe this opposite has already been established.’ (iw-088).

The above-analysed localisation of Western feminism essentially embodies an assimilation process in the Chinese sociocultural context. As a result, Western feminism is assimilated into Chinese culture, thereby forming Chinese feminism. This analysis indicates that Western feminism and Chinese feminism have different sociocultural attributions that make Western and Chinese women concerned with feminism at different levels. In contrast with Western women, Chinese women consciously keep their distance from radical feminism and are in favour of liberal feminism. As a participant (iw-077) who comes from Shandong Province and plans to engage in service industry, she argued that female work rights are natural in China, in contrast to Western countries, where they were gained through hundreds of years of fighting.

‘Feminism now, first of all, I am not an expert in this area. I can only say from what I can see. In my feelings, the right to work or contact with society is natural in our country, and the law protects it. This means that you can work if you want to work. But in Western countries, the right to work is only realised

after hundreds of years of fighting by women. So, women in Western countries cherish the opportunity to work. They will feel that in addition to taking care of the family, they can go out to contact society and go to work. It is already a very cherished right.’ (iw-077).

However, the following statement by a male participant (im-027) demonstrates there is a cognitive deviation on Chinese feminism between women and men in a Chinese context. The cognitive deviation indicates a cultural gateway between Chinese women and men. Although Chinese women prefer liberal feminism, Chinese men believe that it has developed into radical feminism. As a male participant (im-027) who comes from Shanghai city in southeastern China and engages in manufacturing industry, she argued that what he considered was that female chauvinism now dominates family affairs and has reduced males’ rights. He attributes this female chauvinism to the family planning policy, as reported in Section 2.1.2.2, which allows only one child in one family for a long period of time. However, whether female chauvinism exists in the Chinese context is a partial observation from the male perspective.

‘It is female chauvinism. In China, women are particularly independent; it is said that you often see tough girls or cowgirls in China. There are more and more women like this. When women grow up, Chinese families have one or two children. Many only-child girls are treasures at home, aren’t they? It is the same in society, right? There are always more men than women. In China, at least 60–70% of households are controlled by women, so what are the advantages? From the perspective of gender, the demographic structure of men and women in society is different. What is rare is more expensive. There are few women, and now there are many bachelors.’ (im-027).

The localisation of Western feminism in a Chinese context demonstrates cultural consistency in a diversified sociocultural context. However, the localised feminism is required to not only conform to contemporary Chinese culture but also bring benefits to Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders. The interview data shows that participant (iw-072), who comes from Liaoning Province in northeastern China and engages in the manufacturing industry, is more positive about feminist change to help women at work.

This study thereby identifies that feminist development is a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in the Chinese context. As a result, a mark of feminist development in the Chinese context is women's improving recognition of female entrepreneurial leadership. According to what a participant (iw-072) expressed, this study finds that Chinese women recognise the importance of gender equality and gender balance, with high expectations for them in the future. This recognition reflects feminist development in the Chinese context.

'I think the proportion of women getting work and life is gradually increasing. So, it should be gradually improved. And then I feel that females should develop equally with males in the future in a balanced way.' (iw-072).

Feminism in China is officially viewed as a sensitive part of political ideology. This means that the feminism developing in China needs to be localised by not only culture but also political ideology. One of the determinants is the informatisation in communist China, as stated by the participant (iw-032), who comes from Jiangxi Province in southern China and engages in the manufacturing industry. Informatisation, on the one hand, is a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in identifying entrepreneurial opportunities; on the other hand, it becomes a constrained determinant for female entrepreneurial leadership when the informatisation relates to political ideology. In contrast, feminism in the Western context, as reported in Sections 2.1.1.3 and 2.2.1.1, develops without official control. The political influences on feminism in China are argued by participant (im-032) as follows:

'From this point of view, women and men are different in China, a socialist country, and the Communist Party of China. The first is informatisation. Second, women are being paid more attention, unlike before. Third, China has put much effort into all aspects of its culture. Most of the words on the wall in our countryside are written with the tagline "Women support fifty percent of the sky" and "Men and women are equal, as are boys and girls". This impact is enormous.' (im-032).

The above statement also discloses a localisation of feminism through Chinese sociocultural influences. For example, Chinese women acquire sociocultural support, such as social attention, and benefit from the new cultural norms of gender equality, as revealed by the participant (im-032). These findings suggest that sociocultural progress in modern China undermines the cultural gateways (at the idea level within the Culture Cycle, see Figure 3) that those Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders face. This study thereby identifies Chinese feminism as a facilitative determinant for female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. The participant (iw-074), who comes from Shanghai city in southeastern China and engages in the service industry, also supports this point. For instance, she observes sociocultural change in comparison to the past, but it has yet to satisfy her expectations. Therefore, she advises using policy and legislation to enhance female rights and gender equality. Her statement illustrates that feminist development is still in the initial stage in a Chinese context.

‘China has always been a male-dominated society... There are too few female officials, so some laws cannot support the protection of women’s rights and interests. I feel a change. It should be better than before, but not much better. Compared with Europe, our country is too far behind regarding women’s rights. As far as fertility is concerned, there is a big gap in marriage law. Women’s sacrifice in marriage is not protected by law... However, the problem is that some women have poor self-awareness... Only when the cognitive level reaches a certain level will they have a collective consciousness. Then, they will feel that they should unite, help, and support each other’ (iw-074).

A trend of ‘non-marriage doctrine’ is found as a character of feminism in the Chinese context. In terms of marriage, Chinese women who believe in the ‘non-marriage doctrine’ prefer engaging in independent activities such as launching enterprises. This phenomenon implies that individualism influences Chinese women regarding individual freedom and reinforces the findings of the shift from loose collectivism to individualism (see also Section 4.3.3.1.4). Meanwhile, this phenomenon embodies a cultural diversity affected by feminism. These findings suggest why being an



entrepreneur is more attractive and beneficial for Chinese women to achieve independent status and equal status as men. This behaviour resultantly makes Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders fulfil an individual transcendence (i.e., at the individual level of the Culture Cycle, see Figure 3) of traditional sociocultural norms (i.e., at the idea level of the Culture Cycle, see Figure 3) regarding marriage. Therefore, they are reluctant to get married. This is evidenced by participants (iw-040, im-044), who respectively come from Beijing city in northern China and Xinjiang Province in northwestern China, and both of them engage in the service industry, as follows:

‘I realised that I should keep improving myself if I want to perfect myself. Then I did get an independent improvement. When I improved my ability, I felt that my mentality was OK. I do not think it matters if I get married or not. I can do it myself once I have all my wealth. Technology is so advanced these days, right? Alternatively, I use technology to solve it.’ (iw-040).

‘Isn’t it said that many people never marry? They thought about not getting married. Furthermore, they would not want to have children even if they got married. This means that men and women are identical at this point. If they do not get married, they can go outside for endeavouring. I think it might be connected with the society.’ (im-044).

In contrast to mainland China, this study finds that Hong Kong is a place where feminism develops maturely. The participant (im-059), who lives in Hong Kong and frequently transfers to mainland China, demonstrates that the Hong Kong government protects female rights and that Hong Kong society respects female rights. A reasonable interpretation is that Hong Kong has been deeply influenced by Western culture for 99 years. Hong Kong places itself at the intersection between the Chinese and Western cultures, which illustrates the advantages of geographic cultures, as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.3, in influencing the development of feminism. That is, Hong Kong became a place where Western cultures entered and permeated mainland China. However, Western culture has had a lesser impact on mainland China. From what was argued by

a participant (im-059) who comes from Hong Kong and engages in the service industry, this study infers that a feminist gap still exists between mainland China and Hong Kong.

‘There is no such problem in Hong Kong, and there is no problem with discrimination in Hong Kong. There has never been any news. Nothing significant has happened. Furthermore, I think the environment itself here is that we do not remind girls a lot about this problem. There are a lot of women in charge in Hong Kong. Our chief executive of administration is also a woman. So, I do not feel it at all. There is no such problem in Hong Kong. For so many years inland, when I was socialising, I had never seen a woman in front of me. I think it is bizarre, so this discrimination is severe.’ (im-059).

The above argument shows a comparison of feminism in Chinese and Western contexts. Due to different historical reasons, Chinese attitudes towards feminism are different from their Western counterparts. For Chinese women, liberal feminism is more acceptable than radical feminism. The main reason for this phenomenon is attributed to the fact that liberal feminism is compatible in the modern Chinese context with a characteristic of loose collectivism. As a result, the liberal part of Western feminism is assimilated into Chinese culture and subsequently transformed into Chinese feminism. However, radical feminism can often generate intensive or even hostile relationships between females and males, which is the opposite of Chinese harmony culture and society and further inconveniences in Chinese women’s communication. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this analysis reveals the internalisation process from the idea level to the interaction level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Therefore, Chinese feminism maintains cultural consistency with the mainstream of Chinese culture and thereby influences female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China.

Although Chinese women can accept liberal feminism, they often keep a certain distance from it. In general, Chinese women neither preclude nor keep close to liberal feminism. This is because, as a kind of ideology, the feminist movement in China is officially controlled by the government. As a result, the official controls generate

cultural tightness and thereby formulate cultural gateways for Chinese women. This is why, although Chinese women partly recognise feminism in modern China, their recognition of feminism is not deepening, as reported in the above interview. Therefore, Chinese women often maintain distance from feminism and avoid getting involved in it. Consequently, Chinese feminism has a limited facilitative influence on female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China.

#### 4.4 Summarises of the Findings.

This chapter concentrates on the main findings from the macro-level to meso-level, and then to the micro-level through clustering the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership. By analysing these findings, this study concludes that the external determinants are often facilitative or constrained and lead to further contextual tightness or looseness. Objectively, the contextual tightness and looseness can formulate a cultural gateway. This means if a contextual tightness plays the main role in the situations that those female entrepreneurial leaders are involved in, the cultural gateway tends to be closed; if a contextual looseness plays the main role in the situations that those female entrepreneurial leaders are involve in, the cultural gateway tends to be opened. The details are shown in Table 34 in Appendix A14 Tables 35, 36, and 37 in Appendix A15.

Simultaneously, the internal determinants often affect a female entrepreneurial leader to be an active or inactive psychological status. Specifically, a female entrepreneurial leader's active psychological status reflects her high psychological adaptation; and a female entrepreneurial leader's inactive psychological status reflects her low psychological adaptation. The details are shown in the Table 34 in Appendix A14 and Tables 35, 36, and 37 in Appendix A15.

#### 4.4.1 Findings about the Determinants at the Micro-Level

From the above analysis in Section 4.3.1, the findings about the determinants at the micro-level are summarised and shown in Table 35 (see Appendix A15). Specifically, according to the properties of the determinants (i.e., external determinants and internal determinants), this study divides the five determinants at the micro-level into two dimensions, such as the dimension of cultural gateway and the dimension of psychological adaptation. The dimension of cultural gateway includes the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership, such as business-family balance and work, family support and background, and the self-cultivation to learn; the dimension of psychological adaptation includes the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership, such as the mindsets and confidence of female entrepreneurial leaders.

This study identifies ‘business-family balance and work’ as a constrained determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. This determinant is affected by the cultural inconsistency between the entrepreneurial requirements and the traditional gender roles that are defaulted in traditional Chinese sociocultural norms. This influence of business-family balance is detracted from the sociocultural context with a cultural looseness but is intensified in the sociocultural context with a cultural tightness. However, both of these two situations suggest the significant influence of familial concepts in the Chinese sociocultural context. Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders are required to realise a transcendence to surpass the cultural gateways at the institutional and idea levels within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Additionally, although female entrepreneurial leaders have insufficient work experience in comparison to their male counterparts, they have the soft power, including patience and tenacity, to overcome the challenges.

This study identifies ‘family support and background’ as a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. This determinant is investigated as a unique characteristic of the Chinese sociocultural context. Although female entrepreneurial leaders are constrained by the business-family balance in both Chinese and Western contexts, the traditional Chinese sociocultural norms, especially the traditional Chinese familial concepts, make female entrepreneurial leaders acquire their family support with a reciprocal expectation that they can contribute to their family. On account of this point, the determinant ‘family support and background’ embodies female entrepreneurial leaders’ self-transcendence and collective transcendence in surpassing the cultural gateways.

This study identifies ‘self-cultivation to learn’ as a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. Female entrepreneurial leaders need to realise self-transcendence through the approach of ‘self-cultivation to learn’. This approach can help female entrepreneurial leaders, on the one hand, to maintain entrepreneurial mindsets and, on the other hand, to identify and seize entrepreneurial opportunities under the traditional Chinese cultural concept of “advance with the times”. Through this approach, female entrepreneurial leaders can improve their psychological adaptation and realise self-transcendence.

The findings about the above three external determinants at the micro-level suggest cultural gateways that female entrepreneurial leaders confront. The fundamentals of the three determinants are that familial concepts have significant binary influences on female entrepreneurial leaders. Specifically, on the one hand, familial concepts make Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders constrained in the traditional gender roles; on the other hand, familial concepts make Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders acquire

family support in embarking on their enterprises and make them realise self-transcendence and collective transcendence of family through ‘self-cultivation to learn’. These binary influences of familial concepts reflect both cultural tightness and looseness and thereby generate a cultural gateway for female entrepreneurial leaders. However, the familial concepts can be attributed to the role of loose collectivism (i.e., self-, and other- oriented cultural value) in affecting female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China.

This study identifies ‘mindsets of female entrepreneurial leaders’ as a determinant inherent binary effect on female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. This means having entrepreneurial mindsets or traditional working mindsets distinguishes female entrepreneurial and non-entrepreneurial leaders. Because female entrepreneurial leaders often confront the cultural gateways at the institutional and idea levels, they need to improve their entrepreneurial mindsets to make their psychological adaptations match the cultural gateways. Through this approach, they can realise self-transcendence and collective transcendence at the institutional and idea levels.

This study identifies ‘confidence of female entrepreneurial leaders’ as a determinant inherent binary effect on female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. This means that having sufficient or insufficient confidence indicates female entrepreneurial leaders’ psychological adaptation levels. That is, sufficient confidence indicates a high level of psychological adaptation, and insufficient confidence indicates a low level of psychological adaptation. The confidence of female entrepreneurial leaders not only comes from themselves but is also affected by the cultural gateways at the institutional level. On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders’ psychological adaptation and the cultural gateways formulate a circular path within the Culture Cycle (see Figure

3). Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders' confidence not only implies their self-transcendence at the individual level but also suggests their collective transcendence at the institutional level.

The findings about the above two internal determinants at the micro-level suggest female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation. This means that having entrepreneurial mindsets and sufficient confidence embodies female entrepreneurial leaders' high level of psychological adaptation, and having traditional working mindsets and insufficient confidence implies female entrepreneurial leaders' high level of psychological adaptation. Referencing the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), this study finds that female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation not only influences their self-transcendence at the individual level but also affects their collective transcendence of the cultural gateways at the interactional, institutional, and idea levels.

#### 4.4.2 Findings about the Determinants at the Meso-Level

From the above analysis in Section 4.3.2, the findings about the determinants at the meso-level are summarised and shown in Table 36 (see Appendix A15). Specifically, according to the properties of the determinants (i.e., external determinants), this study clusters the three determinants at the meso-level into the dimension of cultural gateway, such as other-oriented culture and self-oriented culture, family-oriented culture, and teamwork and team cultivation. Meanwhile, these external determinants at the meso-level and the internal determinants at the micro-level mutually influence each other. As a result, this study constructs the Table 36 (see Appendix 15) to display the mutual relationship between the two dimensions of cultural gateway and psychological adaptation.

This study identifies ‘other-oriented culture and self-oriented culture’ as a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. This determinant reveals the cultural consistency at the institutional and idea levels within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). On account of this point, this determinant conforms to the Confucian cultural meaning system, which discloses both other-oriented and self-oriented values in sociocultural practices and psychological processes. Especially, the psychological process reflects the psychological consistency of both other-oriented and self-oriented values. Therefore, the organisational culture created by female entrepreneurial leaders embodies a loose collectivism that contains individualism on the basis of collectivism. This kind of loose collectivism reflects female entrepreneurial leaders’ self-transcendence and collective transcendence of cultural gateways at the institutional level.

This study identifies ‘family-oriented culture’ as a determinant with binary roles in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. The family-oriented culture reflects the other-oriented culture and familial concepts and thereby embodies cultural consistency at the idea and institutional levels within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). On account of this point, family-oriented culture reflects a collective transcendence of cultural gateways at the institutional level. Consequently, family-oriented culture plays a facilitate role in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership. However, the findings show that the family-oriented culture constrains the development of entrepreneurial enterprises, as reported in Section 4.3.2.2. On one side, reciprocal trust is hard to expand due to the limited activities of female entrepreneurial leaders in terms of their influences on followers in the outgroup. On the other side, the family-oriented culture can make female entrepreneurial leaders vacillate on the dilemma



between achieving their strategy and caring for followers. When female entrepreneurial leaders fall into this dilemma, this, in turn, would inhibit the scale of development of their enterprises. As a result, family-oriented culture plays a constrained role in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership in this situation.

This study identifies ‘teamwork and team cultivation’ as a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. The teamwork in female entrepreneurial leaders’ enterprises is influenced by the traditional Chinese harmonious culture, which can enhance the cohesiveness of teamwork. Meanwhile, the teamwork in female entrepreneurial leaders’ enterprises is influenced by the family-oriented culture, which can lead to implicit responsibilities among followers. These two situations suggest that female entrepreneurial leaders use the traditional Chinese harmonious culture and family-oriented culture to cultivate their team. Therefore, team cultivation reflects the collective transcendence of cultural gateways at the institutional and idea levels.

#### 4.4.3 Findings about the Determinants at the Macro-Level

From the above analysis in Section 4.3.2, the findings about the determinants at the macro-level are summarised and shown in Table 37 (see Appendix A15). Specifically, according to the properties of the determinants (i.e., external determinants), this study clusters the eleven determinants at the micro-level into the dimension of cultural gateway, including four aspects: i) sociocultural determinants; ii) socioeconomic determinants; iii) entrepreneurial context; and iv) feminism. Meanwhile, these external determinants at the macro-level and the internal determinants at the micro-level mutually influence each other. As a result, this study constructs the Table 37 (see

Appendix 15) to display the mutual relationship between the two dimensions of cultural gateway and psychological adaptation.

#### 4.4.3.1 Sociocultural Determinants

This study identifies ‘cultural diversity’ as a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. Cultural diversity represents cultural looseness and thereby indicates an open cultural gateway at the idea level. On account of this point, cultural diversity provides a probability that female entrepreneurial leaders can achieve collective transcendence of cultural gateways at the idea level. Additionally, cultural diversity is attributed to the fundamental changes in sociocultural practices from the planned economy to the marketing economy. Therefore, cultural diversity reflects an open cultural gateway at the institutional level. From the perspective of cultural psychology, the open cultural gateways from the idea level to the institutional level imply an internalisation process within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). A notable example is the democratic leadership that emerges in female entrepreneurial leaders’ enterprises and becomes the organisational culture. As a result, cultural diversity facilitates female entrepreneurial leaders to realise collective transcendence of cultural gateways at the institutional level.

This study identifies ‘social inertia and cultural inertia’ as determinants with binary roles in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. Social inertia and cultural inertia represent cultural tightness and thereby indicate a closed cultural gateway towards female entrepreneurial leaders. However, social inertia and cultural inertia plays a facilitative role in determinants such as family support, as analysed previously. Therefore, social inertia and cultural inertia can benefit female entrepreneurial leaders when they need family support. In contemporary China, social

inertia and cultural inertia are undermined by the influences of cultural diversity and inclusiveness when Western culture is assimilated into modern China. As a result, female entrepreneurial leaders acquire conceptual and cultural reasonability through the assimilation of Western culture. Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders improve their confidence and thereby enhance their psychological adaptation to surpass the cultural gateway at the institutional and idea levels.

This study identifies the ‘geographic culture and cultural divides’ as determinants with binary roles in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. Because of the disequilibrium socioeconomic development status across mainland China, enlightened culture permeates southeastern China, which is a high socioeconomic development region; conservative culture permeates northwestern China, which is a low socioeconomic development region. This study thereby finds that disequilibrium socioeconomic development status leads to geographic culture and cultural divides in different regions. As a result, because of the cultural tightness and looseness of geographic cultures and cultural divides, cultural gateways at the institutional and idea levels within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) are formulated across the different regions and in different areas within one region (e.g., rural and urban areas).

From the perspective of cultural psychology, the cultural gateways between the institutional level and the idea level formulate a circular path within the Culture Cycle. Therefore, the cultural gateways at the idea level can be attributed to the cultural gateways at the institutional level, and vice versa. These cultural gateways have reverse impact on female entrepreneurial leaders’ psychological adaptation. Consequently, geographic culture and cultural divides form open cultural gateways at the idea and

institutional levels in socioeconomically developed regions or areas and closed cultural gateways at the idea and institutional levels in socioeconomically undeveloped regions or areas. On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders need to realise the self-transcendence and collective transcendence of cultural gateways at the idea and institutional levels.

This study identifies ‘a shift from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism’ as a determinant with binary roles in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. This determinant represents a change from cultural tightness to cultural looseness and embodies a trend of increasing cultural looseness. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this study argues that the cultural gateways at the idea level turn from closed to open and reversely inspire Chinese women’s self-awareness and mindsets. On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders’ psychological adaptation is accordingly affected. However, the shift from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism led to a foundational change of trust among Chinese individuals. Therefore, effective communication among Chinese people has become more difficult than before. This phenomenon can be attributed to the collapse of ‘the traditional society with strong ties’ (熟人社会, Shu Ren She Hui, in Chinese) and the emergence of ‘the modern society with weak ties’. As a result, the open cultural gateway at the idea level causes the closing cultural gateway at the interactional level.

#### 4.4.3.2 Socioeconomic Determinants

This study identifies the role of determinant ‘social classes’ as a determinant with binary roles in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China. The binary

roles of social classes depend on which class the female entrepreneurial leaders belong to. The low social class and non-low social class not only mean the relatively difficult access to social networks and resources but also reflect different sociocultural norms in those classes. Due to the influences of geographic culture and cultural divides, the social classes represent cultural gateways at the institutional and idea levels that are closed to female entrepreneurial leaders in low social class and open to them in non-low social class in modern China. From the analysis of the Confucian cultural meaning system, this study infers that those social classes reflect the mutual relationship between cultural gateways and female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation. On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders need to realise self-transcendence and collective transcendence of the cultural gateways at the institutional and idea levels within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3).

This study identifies 'social networks' as a determinant with binary roles in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. Social networks indicate social capital that female entrepreneurial leaders' access to. As a result, social networks formulate cultural gateways at the interactional and institutional levels within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). Referencing the Confucian cultural meaning system, this study infers that those social networks reflect the mutual relationship between cultural gateways and female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation. Specifically, this study investigates and finds that female entrepreneurial leaders' soft power is a relatively advantageous catalyst in their collective transcendence of cultural gateways at the interactional and institutional levels. However, traditional Chinese familial concepts still influence female entrepreneurial leaders' mindsets. As a result, female

entrepreneurial leaders show a limited psychological adaptation to match the cultural gateways at the interactional and institutional levels.

This study identifies ‘government policy’ as a determinant with binary roles in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. The binary roles depend on the cultural properties (i.e., looseness or tightness) inherent in government policy in the Chinese context. When a government policy conceives of cultural looseness, it can form an open cultural gateway; when a government policy conceives of cultural tightness, it can form a closed cultural gateway. For example, the open and reform policy and marketing economic policy generate cultural looseness and thereby open the cultural gateway caused by the planned economic policy. However, the one-child family planning policy generates cultural tightness and thereby generates a closed cultural gateway towards Chinese women. On account of this point, the cultural properties (i.e., looseness or tightness) inherent in government policy indicate the survival and sustainability of female entrepreneurial leaders’ enterprises. When government policy changes frequently, the institutional instability caused by the policy indicates cultural tightness and thereby formulates a closed cultural gateway. Female entrepreneurial leaders’ confidence is accordingly affected by the closed cultural gateway. As a result, female entrepreneurial leaders need to realise the self-transcendence and collective transcendence of cultural gateways at the institutional level that are formed by government policy.

This study identifies ‘institutional uncertainty’ as a constrained determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. Institutional uncertainty often generates cultural tightness and thereby forms a closed cultural gateway towards female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China. Due to institutional uncertainty, which

indicates a risk for female entrepreneurial leaders, their psychological adaptation is accordingly affected. Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders need sufficient resilience, endurance, and soft power to improve their psychological adaptation to realise self-transcendence and collective transcendence at the institutional level.

#### 4.4.3.3 The Entrepreneurial Context as a Determinant

This study identifies the ‘entrepreneurial context’ as a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. The interview data reported in Section 4.3.3.3 suggests a correlation between socioeconomic level and entrepreneurial context and a consistency between socioeconomic level and geographic culture. This means that entrepreneurial context is facilitated in the socioeconomically developed regions and constrained in the socioeconomically undeveloped regions. From the socioeconomically undeveloped regions in northwestern China to the socioeconomically developing regions in central China and then to the socioeconomically developing regions in southeastern China, there is a cultural gradient from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism. Therefore, the geographic culture and cultural divides form cultural gateways for female entrepreneurial leaders across different regions along with that cultural gradient.

However, although entrepreneurial context has progressed in modern China for years, there is a gender gap at the idea level between female and male entrepreneurial leaders in terms of their recognition of entrepreneurial context. In contrast to male entrepreneurial leaders, who argue that entrepreneurial context is irrelevant to gender, female entrepreneurial leaders argue that they sensed different treatment given to them in an entrepreneurial context. Therefore, this study argues that there are gender

gateways at the individual and institutional levels towards them in an entrepreneurial context.

#### 4.4.3.4 The Feminist Determinants

This study identifies the ‘feminist status quo’ as a determinant with binary roles in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. Because of the differential treatment in different regions and industries, the geographic culture and cultural divides make gender gateways at the institutional level still exist. However, the gender gateway is not totally closed to female entrepreneurial leaders in certain industries, such as beauty and hairdressing. Additionally, because of familial concepts, gender gateways at the idea level still influence female entrepreneurial leaders. Specifically, traditional gender roles constrain female entrepreneurial leaders, but family support facilitates female entrepreneurial leaders. As a result, female entrepreneurial leaders need to realise self-transcendence and collective transcendence at the institutional and idea levels within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3).

This study identifies ‘feminist influences’ as a facilitative determinant of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. Feminist influences promote female entrepreneurial leaders to realise self-transcendence (i.e., self-awareness and self-realisation). However, feminist influences need to undergo the assimilation process of Western feminism and then be transformed into Chinese feminism. This is because of cultural consistency with the mainstream of Chinese culture, such as harmonious culture. On account of this reason, Chinese women prefer liberal feminism to radical feminism in their mindsets. However, feminist influences, as a sensitive part of social ideology, are officially controlled by the communist government in modern China. This is why feminism has limited influence on women, especially female entrepreneurial



leaders in mainland China. In contrast to mainland China, feminist influences permeate Hong Kong and are accepted by the individuals in there. Therefore, feminist influences have a remote distance from Chinese women and female entrepreneurial leaders.

#### 4.4.4 Key Findings and the Related Concepts

From the above three levels of findings, this study extracts eight key findings and related concepts as follows:

i) Family-oriented Culture,

Family-oriented culture refers to a kind of organisational culture in which female entrepreneurial leaders treat their followers as family members. The basis of a family-oriented culture is kinship and close friendship. This kind of organisational culture reflects other-oriented cultural value, which shows cultural consistency with traditional Chinese culture and female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological consistency from familial situation to organisational situation.

ii) Loose Collectivism,

Loose collectivism refers to collectivism with cultural looseness. This concept is opposite of tight collectivism. The year of issuing open and reform policies (i.e., 1978) in China is the dividing line between tight collectivism and loose collectivism. The family-oriented culture is an example of loose collectivism. Loose collectivism allows individualism to exist with a basis in collectivism. Due to the cultural consistency of Confucian culture, Western culture, such as individualism, cannot be accepted by Chinese without assimilation; due to the

modernisation of China, the traditional collectivism that cultural tightness is inherent in cannot be inherited without amendment. Therefore, loose collectivism is the result of the collective effect of both the inertia of traditional Chinese culture and modernisation with cultural consistency through assimilation.

iii) Cultural Gateway,

Cultural gateway refers to mechanism formulated by the cultural tightness and looseness in a sociocultural context. When cultural looseness dominates in the sociocultural context, the cultural gateway shows open status and indicates opportunities for female entrepreneurial leaders. When cultural tightness dominates in the sociocultural context, the cultural gateway shows closed status and indicates challenges for female entrepreneurial leaders. Culture gateways are divided into three levels: the interactional level, the institutional level, and the idea level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3 in Section 2.2.1.2.1, Figure 19 in Appendix A17, and Figure 20 in Appendix A18).

iv) Gender Gateway,

Gender gateway deviates from the concept of cultural gateway. Gender gateway refers to a mechanism formulated by the cultural tightness and looseness toward women in a sociocultural context. One of the uncovered examples is differential treatment and masculine defaults (see Appendix A4). The status of gender gateways, such as open or closed, indicates opportunities or challenges to women.

v) Psychological Adaptation,

Psychological adaptation refers to women's or female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological status and undertaking capability in responding to external influences. Psychological adaptation often dynamically changes on the basis of individuals' mindsets and confidence. Psychological adaptation (see Figure 19 in Appendix A17 and Figure 20 in Appendix A18) reflects the ability of self-transcendence at the individual level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3 in Section 2.2.1.2.1).

vi) The mutual relationship between cultural gateway and psychological adaptation,

The mutual relationship between cultural gateways and psychological adaptation often forms a coupling structure of match or mismatch between psychological adaptation and cultural gateways at different levels. As a result, the match or mismatch statuses formulate four kinds of situations: opportunities, conditional opportunities, conditional challenges, and challenges (see Table 38 in Appendix A16).

vii) Self-Transcendence and Collective Transcendence,

Self-transcendence refers to persons having sufficient confidence and entrepreneurial mindsets to transcend their original psychological status and thereby improve their psychological adaptation level. Self-awareness is recognised as the starting point of self-transcendence; self-realisation is recognised as the process of self-transcendence; and self-value is recognised as the complement of self-transcendence. Collective transcendence refers to female entrepreneurial leaders and their followers surpassing the cultural

gateways at the interactional level, the institutional level, and the idea level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3).

viii) Geographic Culture

Geographic culture refers to the local culture with its properties (i.e., cultural looseness and tightness) changing along with the different regions or with the different areas in a given region. Geographic culture is the result of the mutual influences between socioeconomic development and sociocultural development. This study finds that the geographic culture displays a cultural gradient of cultural properties along with the regional socioeconomic development level. That is, from the socioeconomically undeveloped regions (e.g., northwestern China) to the socioeconomically developing regions (e.g., central China) and then to the socioeconomically developed regions (e.g., southeastern China), the regional cultural properties change from cultural tightness to cultural looseness. Therefore, geographic culture provides a reference for female entrepreneurial leaders in investigating the cultural gateway inherent in regional culture.

The above analysis basically summarises the findings about the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership at three levels and extracts key findings and related concepts. In terms of the answers to the first sub-question and second sub-question as reported in Section 1.2, this study refines the external and internal determinants (see Tables 35, 36, and 37) and thereby infers that the mutual relationship between a female entrepreneurial leader's psychological adaptation and the cultural gateway often configures and formulates four kinds of situations: opportunities, conditional opportunities, conditional challenges, and challenges (see Table 38 in Appendix A16). These four kinds of

situations display how female entrepreneurial leaders identify opportunities and challenges. This mutual relationship and its influences are discussed further in Chapter V.

This thesis finds in most situations for female entrepreneurial leaders, their internal determinants and the external determinants interact mutually in terms of their roles and effects, as revealed in Table 34 (see Appendix 14). Inferring from the Culture Cycle, as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1, this finding means that there is a cross-level relatedness among the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership. Furthermore, the cross-level relatedness penetrates a triangle of organisation, strategy, and leadership. This is because that leadership exerts its influence through organisation and strategy. Specifically, female entrepreneurial leaders can achieve their goals by transforming their entrepreneurial mindset into a behaviour and formulating a female-led organisational culture.

### **Chapter V Discussion**

This chapter aims to discuss the findings of coding from two perspectives: theoretical implications and practical recommendations. With regard to theoretical implications, this chapter discusses three aspects: i) identifying opportunities and challenges from the perspective of the cultural gateway and gender gateway; ii) survival and sustainability from the perspectives of a triangle of organisation, strategy, and leadership; and iii) transformation and competition at four levels of Cultural Cycle: individual level, interaction level, institution level, and the idea level.

From the cultural psychology perspective, this study categorises female entrepreneurial leaders as a group to identify their opportunities and challenges. From the point of

cultural divides, social norms often devalue the non-predominant group in comparison to the predominant group in a pervasive process (Hamedani & Markus, 2019). Chinese social norms also devalue female entrepreneurial leaders because of their positions as a non-dominant group in modern China. Thus, this categorisation can explain why female entrepreneurial leaders often face more challenges in Chinese society.

However, China's socioeconomic development creates an entrepreneurial context and, as a result, brings entrepreneurial opportunities for Chinese women. When women increasingly seized entrepreneurial opportunities and subsequently became female entrepreneurial leaders, as reported in Section 2.1.1.1, their ideal often was to fulfil higher-level needs (Coffman & Sunny, 2021). This situation changed the Chinese cultural concept related to Chinese women. Therefore, this conceptual change signifies those Chinese men need to culturally reacquaint with Chinese women, as reported in Sections 4.3.3.3 and 4.4.3.3, whilst Chinese women renew their cultural concepts about themselves, such as their values, roles, and influences. Consequently, this conceptual change also influences Chinese social norms and the development of feminism in China.

## 5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study in this section firstly discusses how female entrepreneurial leaders identify opportunities and challenges, which are based on the findings in Section 4.4 (also see Table 34 in Appendix A14 and Tables 35, 36, and 37 in Appendix A15). These findings are summarised and illustrated as Table 4, and then synthesised and displayed as Table 38 (see Appendix A16). Secondly, inspired by the high mortality of start-ups as reported in Section 4.2.3, this study discusses the practical issues of survival and sustainability, which are the core challenges of female entrepreneurial leaders. Lastly, on the basis of

Section 4.2.3, this study implicates how female entrepreneurial leaders realise sustainability through transformation and competition.

Table 4 The relationship among the determinant, cultural gateway, psychological adaptation, and the opportunities and challenges

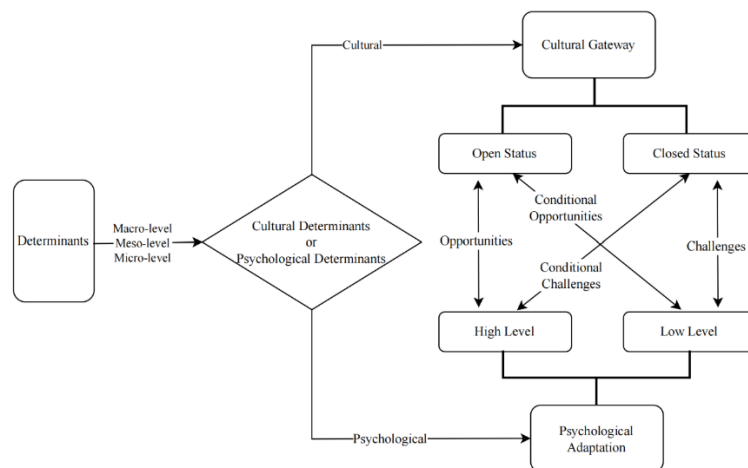
<b>Determinants</b>		<b>Role</b>	<b>Effects</b>	<b>Cultural Gateway</b>	<b>Situations:</b> whether the cultural gateway opens or close to female entrepreneurial leaders
External	Micro-, Meso-, Macro-level	Facilitative	Looseness	Opened	Opportunities
		Constrained	Tightness	Closed	Challenges
<b>Determinants</b>		<b>Role</b>	<b>Effects</b>	<b>Psychological Adaptation</b>	<b>Situations:</b> whether a female entrepreneurial leader's psychological adaptation match or mismatch the opened cultural gateway
Internal	Micro-level	Facilitative	Activeness	High Psychological Adaptation	Match: female entrepreneurial leaders tend to identify and seize the opportunities
		Constrained	Inactiveness	Low Psychological Adaptation	Mismatch: female entrepreneurial leaders tend to desert the opportunities

Inspired by the above analysis and discussion, this study infers that the extant theoretical frameworks of Cultural Cycle (see Figure 3) and cultural meaning system (see Figure 4) are implicated in categorising for deeper understanding. Firstly, according to the categories of psychological adaptations and cultural gateways, this study categorises the individual level of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) into the category of psychological adaptation and the remaining three levels of the Culture Cycle (i.e., the interactional level, the institutional level, and the idea level, see Figure 3) into the categories of cultural gateways. The categorisation of the Culture Cycle is shown in Figure 19 (see Appendix A17). By the same approach, this study categorises the Frontier Cultural Meaning System and Confucian Cultural Meaning System, as shown in Figure 20 (see Appendix A18).

### 5.1.1 Identifying Opportunities and Challenges.

From the above analysis as reported in Sections 4.3, 4.4 (also see Table 34 in Appendix 14, Tables 35, 36, and 37 in Appendix A15, and Tabel 38 in Appendix A16) and Table 4 in Section 5.1, this study proposes a model of female entrepreneurial leadership for identifying challenges and opportunities, as shown in Figure 5. Specifically, the two categories of cultural gateways with different statuses and psychological adaptations with different levels can be configured and accordingly formulate four kinds of situations: i) challenges, when female entrepreneurial leaders' low level psychological adaption confronts closed cultural gateway; ii) conditional challenges, when female entrepreneurial leaders' non-low level psychological adaptation confronts closed cultural gateway; iii) conditional opportunities, when female entrepreneurial leaders' low level psychological adaption confronts open cultural gateway; iv) opportunities, when female entrepreneurial leaders' non-low level psychological adaption confronts open cultural gateway. These four situations reversely suggest that the situation of challenges or conditional challenges indicates the cultural gateways' status becomes the main problem for female entrepreneurial leaders and the situation of opportunities or conditional opportunities indicates the female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation level becomes the main problem for them.

Figure 5 The Model of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership for Identifying Challenges and Opportunities





This model first categorises the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership at three levels and then identifies whether they are cultural or psychological determinants. Cultural determinants often formulate gateways (Stephens et al., 2014), hereby named as the cultural gateway, which with psychological determinants often affect the female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation. Psychological adaptation, as reported in Section 4.2.1, is generally regarded as unique to and universal among humans (Downes, 2021). Meanwhile, the cultural gateway and psychological adaptation that are indicated by social support (Berry et al., 2002, p. 370) usually interact together and formulate a coupling structure. When the cultural gateway closes to female entrepreneurial leaders, these determinants will be challenges for them; when it opens to female entrepreneurial leaders, it will become a potential opportunity. In this situation as reported in Section 4.4, the psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders needs to match the cultural gateway. Then, the determinants will formulate real opportunities for female entrepreneurial leaders if both are matched. If both are mismatched, the determinants will challenge female entrepreneurial leaders.

Why introduce psychological adaptation in this model? This is because, as reported in Sections 4.2.3 and 4.3.1.2, female entrepreneurial leaders should contend with fierce competition and high risk compared to non-entrepreneurial people. This unique property of entrepreneurship implies that female entrepreneurial leaders suffer heavier psychological pressure than non-entrepreneurial people. In most situations as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.4, the external institutional uncertainty will lead to the problem of survival and resultant psychological insecurity sense of female entrepreneurial leaders. As a result, improving psychological adaptation (i.e., feelings of self-esteem and personal well-being (Berry et al., 2002, p. 475)) is required for female entrepreneurial

leaders to counter pressures. Particularly, the cultural gateway brings short-term or long-term challenges, threatening female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation. Consequently, this study applies psychological adaptation to assess how the challenges influence female entrepreneurial leaders.

#### 5.1.1.1 Open the Cultural Gateway

The model in Figure 5 essentially reflects how the external and internal determinants influence female entrepreneurial leadership and further formulate challenges or opportunities. According to Pearl and Mackenzie (2018, p. 244), why individuals comprehend each other in a community is attributed to the fact that individuals sense the same world by their shared mental model with the same causal structure. Consequently, based on findings in Section 4.3.3.4.1, this study infers that the different “cultural gateways” and levels of “psychological adaptation” (e.g., good mental health, a clear sense of personal identity, and the capability to achieve a sense of personal satisfaction in a sociocultural settlement (Berry et al., 1994, p. 247)) are reflected in the model in Figure 5. This study defines the cultural gateway, as reported in Section 4.4 (also see Figure 9 in Appendix A9, Table 34 in Appendix A14, Tables 35, 36, and 37 in Appendix A15, and Tabel 38 in Appendix A16), as the lowest extent of cultural defaults and differential treatment in the bidirectional interactional process between female entrepreneurial leaders and cultural context. Referencing the Cultural Cycle (see Figure 3 in Section 2.2.1.2.1), psychological adaptation is reflected at Individual level, and the status of the cultural gateway (i.e., open or occluded) is mainly reflected at the three levels: Interactions, Institutes, and Ideas.

The cultural gateway affects the psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders with two effects: complexity and period (see Table 5). Thus, this study from the

findings in Section 4.4, Table 4, Table 34 in Appendix 14, and Table 35, 36, and 37 in Appendix 15) implies that female entrepreneurial leaders need to maintain: i) low psychological adaptation if the cultural gateway is of short-period influence and simple to overcome; ii) medium psychological adaptation if the cultural gateway is of long-period influence and simple to overcome or of short-period influence but difficult to overcome; and iii) high psychological adaptation if the cultural gateway is of long-period influence and difficult to overcome. These implications are summarised and illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5 The Cultural Gateway's effects on psychological adaptation

Cultural Gateway		Period	
		Short	Long
Complexity	Easy	Low Psychological Adaptation	Medium Psychological Adaptation
	Difficult	Middle Psychological Adaptation	High Psychological Adaptation

The fundamentals of entrepreneurial type (as revealed in Table 1 and Table 13) can be ascribed to that psychological adaptation, as reported in Sections 4.2.1 and 4.4, reflects their mindset focusing on the broad context (Nisbett, 2003, p. XVI), and they can subsequently actively adjust their psychological adaptation to match the cultural gateway. For instance, as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.4, this study reveals that Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders are especially sensitive to the context in which they are involved. However, because influenced by the traditional culture, Chinese people tend to communicate implicitly and silently (Markus & Conner, 2014, pp. 24-25), and particularly Chinese women are attributed to this manner. Therefore, psychological adaptation and cultural gateway are reflected in the process that Chinese women engage in response to the cultural context; and subsequently, the cultural gateway exists at the previously discussed three levels of the Culture Cycle (i.e., Interactions, Institutes, and Ideas; also see Figure 3 in Section 2.2.1.2.1 and Table 3 in Section 4.3).

The status of the cultural gateway (i.e., opened or occluded), as reported in Sections 4.3 and 4.4, implies the opportunities or challenges of female entrepreneurial leadership. This study proposes that when female entrepreneurial leaders surpass the cultural gateway, their psychological adaptation needs to upgrade to a higher level as revealed in Table 5. During the bidirectional process between the cultural gateway and their psychological adaptation, Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders frequently identify which alternative should be accepted entirely or conditionally and which should be rejected. While these different alternatives reflect the extent of complexity and influence period of the cultural gateway, the status of the cultural gateway implies opportunities for social class mobility (Fiske & Markus, 2012, p. 64) by cultural looseness or challenges by cultural tightness. To an extent, social class as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.1 is an index of female entrepreneurial leadership (Bowen & Hisrich, 1986). To open the cultural gateway, female entrepreneurial leaders should find entrepreneurial opportunities in a field of cultural looseness and avoid entrepreneurial challenges in a place of cultural tightness.

#### 5.1.1.2 Cope with Gender Gateway

For female entrepreneurial leadership, the cultural gateway often manifests as a gender gateway as reported in Section 4.3.3.4.1. Thus, this study introduces gender gateway from the feminist perspective to interpret the challenges of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China. Gender gateway illustrates in the manner of a door closing to women but opening to men in a context (see Appendix A4). For example, the challenges of female entrepreneurial leaders are mainly the masculine default and differential treatment between men and women in the Western context (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1028). Specifically, the masculinity default makes women and men

face the different cultural gateways for access. Consequently, women would then encounter challenges, and men would encounter opportunities because of the different configuration of the environment layout and game rules for men and women (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1028). Therefore, the gender gateway impedes women and makes their success more difficult.

The above delineation indicates that gender gateway constructs challenges for female entrepreneurial leaders. Due to the gender gateway as reported in Section 4.3.3.4.1, female entrepreneurial leaders often need to behave conforming to a default masculine in their enterprise. The reason is the same in both Chinese and Western contexts. This is because women who perform stereotypical masculine defaults often have a higher probability of accessing and achieving success than those whose behaviour is incongruent with the requirements of masculine defaults (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1028). From the perspective of the Chinese traditional philosophy of Taiji as discussed in Section 2.2.1.2.3, two opposite things usually supplement each other to achieve unity. Analogous to this philosophy, men and women should be in a dynamic balance state of supporting each other. However, women who behave or characterise stereotypical masculine defaults may suffer gender backlash, for instance, the economic and social penalties, due to disobeying gender role regulated by social norms (Amanatullah & Tinsley, 2013; Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1026; Heilman et al., 2004; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Williams & Tiedens, 2016). Consequently, this study suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders should actively confront the challenges posed by the gender gateway.

In masculine-defaulted situations, the gender gateway often is opened to men but closed to women (see Appendix A4). For example, Western scholars argued that men in

majority-female occupations encounter less prejudice throughout the hiring process than women (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1032; Koch et al., 2015). However, a man who exhibits stereotypically feminine behaviour or performance (e.g., involved in the stereotypical feminine task: caretaking) can suffer less promotion or less respect (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1032; Heilman & Wallen, 2010; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman et al., 2013). These arguments are congruent with the reality in the Chinese context. The gender gateway often causes women's difficulty in accessing financial resources, human resources, and social capital. Subsequently, it inhibits women's success. Thus, women confront more difficulties when accessing and thriving in a mainstream social context (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1025). Therefore, these interpretations indicate why once men and women are involved in entrepreneurial activities, women often suffer more challenges and acquire fewer opportunities than men.

In contemporary Chinese context, however, the gender gateway is weakening because of the awakening of female self-awareness as reported in Section 4.3.3.4.2 and the fact that Chinese women have progressed in education, family roles, and careers during the last four decades of openness and reform as reported in Section 4.3.3.4.1. First, the growth in women's educational attainment and occupational qualifications is the necessary attribution toward gender equality (Charles, 2011, p. 355). China's economic development fosters educational attainment by creating favourable conditions. The Chinese government, for instance, mandates nine years of education. Additionally, rising middle-class families can afford to pay a premium for tertiary education both domestically and internationally. Finally, family education as reported in Section 4.3.1.2 can increase psychological adaptation with "felt accountability", which means

a subjective sense in evaluating behaviours (Gelfand et al., 2006) when uncertainty and risk are confronted.

Second, the one-child family-planning policy changes the structure of the family. The Chinese should accept that social reality does not support their traditional cultural concepts that it is preferable to have boys than girls because the one-child Family Planning Policy as reported in Sections 2.1.2.2., 4.3.3.2.3, and 4.3.3.4.2. only allowed one-child in one family. The finding that indicates a shift in women's focus, as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.2, demonstrates the high significance of reproductive issues in their propensity to be entrepreneurial leaders. (Morales et al., 2022; Zandberg et al., 2021). Third, modernisation as discussed in Section 2.1.2.1 weakens the gender gateways to entrepreneurial leadership. Thus, this study suggests that Chinese women are more capable than in previous decades of seizing entrepreneurial opportunities.

#### 5.1.1.3 Entrepreneurial Opportunity

Inferred from the findings as reported in Section 4.4 and Figure 5, this study argues that entrepreneur opportunities, including situations of opportunities and conditional opportunities, lie in: i) an open cultural gateway with cultural looseness or interdependent value orientation; and ii) psychological adaptation matching the cultural gateway. Thus, female entrepreneurial leaders can seize opportunities by following these three steps as follows:

1. Female entrepreneurial leaders should identify whether their engaged cultural context is loose or tight and its cultural value orientation is interdependent or independent. Essentially, their priority of different values, as reported in Section 4.1, reflects the cultural influences that boost social acceptance and permit entrepreneurial activities (Morales et al., 2022).

2. They should choose and find a context with cultural looseness and interdependent cultural value orientation. From a psychological perspective, women's self-schema tends to be "interdependent" or "connected" (Markus & Oyserman, 1989, p. 103). For example, as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.3, they can compare the cultural tightness and looseness between a rural area and an urban area. This comparison can show a reference point for their decision-making.
3. Their psychological adaptation, as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.4, needs to match the requirements of opening cultural gateways, such as being more optimistic, resilient, and passionate.

The cultural divide between traditional and modern culture, as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.1, in various regions allows Chinese women to open cultural gateways. In the case of female entrepreneurial leaders, cultural gateways are reflected by the entrepreneurial type as discussed in Section 2.1.1.1. The entrepreneurial type is divided into four categories: the personal-needs, entrepreneurial opportunities (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017; Coffman & Sunny, 2021), the resource advantage and the compound type. The findings of female entrepreneurial type as reported in Section 4.2.1 also reflect the cultural gateways. Specifically, according to the discussion in Section 2.1.2.4, traditional culture discourages female entrepreneurial leadership in society, whereas modern culture promotes it. In the traditional cultural context, women are positioned in a disadvantaged entrepreneurial environment that lacks social resources and entrepreneurial opportunities due to their socioeconomic status. Therefore, even if they have a business idea, they will likely have to abandon it or find male partners to support themselves. In contrast, the concepts of modernisation, acculturation, and achievement



motivation enable individuals to reasonably compete and, thereby, appropriately suited for innovation (Levin, 2017, p. 94). Thus, women in modern cultures with an open entrepreneurial environment can actively access social resources and identify business opportunities. This analysis implies that Chinese women face a cultural gateway between modern culture and traditional culture.

Traditional culture predominates in socioeconomically underdeveloped regions as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.3. This finding indicates that cultural inertia, as discussed in Section 2.1.2.4, in the underdeveloped regions still inhibits female entrepreneurial leadership. However, in the socioeconomically developed regions as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.3, modern culture is mainstream, and therefore, competition and innovation are primarily emerging through engagement in modern vocational structures (Inkeles, 1969; Levin, 2017, p. 94), such as evidenced by a development of female entrepreneurial leadership. This comparison suggests that the cultural gateway is weakened in socioeconomically developed regions and is strengthened in socioeconomically underdeveloped regions. For example, the modern cultural concept in south-eastern China facilitates local government issues with entrepreneurial-oriented policies as discussed in Section 2.1.2.2. Women, therefore, in these areas tend to utilise these policies to launch their enterprises. Thus, modern culture facilitates the formation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem in the southeast regions. This is why female entrepreneurial leadership develops more effectively and rapidly in south-eastern China than in other regions. The findings as reported in Section 4.2.1 indicates that a leader with the most foresight would contribute most to the future (Mosselmans, 2020). Therefore, this study implies that Chinese women should learn from and reference female

entrepreneurial leaders who have business foresights and are successful in the socioeconomically developed areas to realise their entrepreneurial visions.

The above analysis indicates that cultural looseness and inclusiveness, as reported in Sections 4.3.3.1.1 and 4.3.3.3, benefit female entrepreneurial leaders. For example, the “mass entrepreneurship and innovation” advocacy (Cooke & Xiao, 2021; Hou, 2017) has cultivated an entrepreneurial context in Chinese society and attracted Chinese women to launch their enterprises. To some extent, the entrepreneurial context as reported in Section 4.3.3.3 reflects cultural looseness and inclusiveness, which is about whether psychological adaptation matches the evolution of social norm strength (Berry, 1979; Gelfand et al., 2017, p. 802; Triandis & Vassiliou, 1972). Consequently, the findings of this study as reported in Sections 4.3.3.1.1 and 4.3.3.3, in turn, reveal that Chinese women’s psychological adaptation is improving to identify and seize entrepreneurial opportunities. This revelation indicates that cultural looseness, as discussed in Sections 2.2.1.2.1 and 2.2.1.2.2, and inclusiveness is necessary for female entrepreneurial leadership. Therefore, Chinese women who intend to be entrepreneurial leaders need to reference and learn from the successful female entrepreneurial leaders who are familiar with cultural looseness and inclusiveness.

From the model in Figure 5 and the findings in Section 4.4, this study indicates that female entrepreneurial leaders need to adjust their psychological adaptation to utilise entrepreneurial opportunities. A cultural gateway with tightness can entail a relatively more organized and ordered group, whereas that with looseness can lead to a comparatively more innovative and open group (Gelfand et al., 2017, p. 805). Thus, cultural gateways, either accessible or inaccessible to female entrepreneurial leaders, influence their psychological adaptation in a group. Contrarily, inferred from Section

4.4 and Table 4, Chinese women's psychological adaptation needs to match the cultural gateway when transforming an entrepreneurial opportunity into a start-up. However, Chinese women are treated differently, resulting in typically lower confidence levels to be female entrepreneurial leaders as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.3. This suggests that slowly improving psychological adaptation is required for Chinese and Western women to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities actively.

#### 5.1.1.4 The challenges of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership

The challenges, including situations of challenges and conditional challenges displayed in Figure 5, for female entrepreneurial leaders concentrate on items such as: i) enterprise mortality; ii) closed cultural gateway, gender gateway, and mental strain; iii) dark side of synchrony caused by cultural tightness; iv) sustainability and expansion; and v) institutional uncertainty. This study subsequently explains these challenges as follows.

The increasing density of entrepreneurs and the fierce competition present female entrepreneurial leaders with more tremendous obstacles than ever. The findings of this study as reported in Section 4.2.3 indicate that, in a real-world business context, the start-up mortality rate is higher and inevitable. The extant research refined the determinants, such as education and work experiences, facilitating start-ups' survival, as discussed in Section 2.2.2.1.1.3 (also see Table 8 in Appendix A1). However, the colossal impact of mortality diminishes female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation. Furthermore, prior research on the mortality of start-ups revealed that organisational forms and organisational diversity vary considerably over time and across societies (Hsu & Hannan, 2005, p. 474). This revelation indicates that female entrepreneurial leaders should improve their awareness of the influences of

organisational forms and organisational diversity to cope with competition and corporate mortality.

The preceding discussion on gender gateway in Section 5.1.1.2 illustrates the disparity of the cultural gateway faced by male and female entrepreneurial leaders. Specifically, the industry difference between male and female entrepreneurial leaders as reported in Section 4.2.3 is a significant indicator of cultural gateway. Additionally, the scale of enterprise as reported in Section 4.3.2.2 is another indicator of cultural gateway. Western research also suggest that because females' anticipations are distributed in lower-growth industries, the scale of female-owned enterprises is typically smaller than that of their male counterparts (Boden & Nucci, 2000). For instance, male business owners dominate the IT industry (Berg & Englund, 2015, p. 4; Flannery & Hankins, 2013). Previous Western research indicates that female entrepreneurial leaders face more challenges than their male counterparts when their businesses transition from one phase to the next (Berg & Englund, 2015, p. 4). This is because traditional cultural values and attitudes in their countries do not support female entrepreneurial leaders (Berg & Englund, 2015, p. 4; Kelley et al., 2013). Thus, female entrepreneurial leaders in both the Western and Chinese contexts should combat this challenge caused by the disparity of a cultural gateway.

Above discussion reveals that female entrepreneurial leaders face unique challenges compared with their male counterparts, mainly caused by gender gateway as reported in Section 4.3.3.4.1. The particular obstacles that female business leaders face include business-family conflict (Demartino & Barbato, 2003; Kelly et al., 2014, p. 485; Nomaguchi & Johnson, 2009; Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001; Williams, 2004) as reported in Section 4.3.1.1 and pregnancy (Xheneti et al., 2019). However, these

difficulties could be mitigated by employing the appropriate strategies or methods, such as self-employment (Cho et al., 2020) by enlisting the assistance of elderly family members (Peus et al., 2015, p. 62; Yang et al., 2000). Thus, based on the findings as reported in Section 4.3.1.2, this study suggests that the experience of Chinese multigenerational families is helpful for Western female entrepreneurial leaders to solve the business-family conflict, which is salient in Germany (Peus et al., 2015; Peus & Traut-Mattausch, 2008) and the US (Peus et al., 2015). This support, which typically includes spiritual encouragement, financial assistance, and childcare, and that reflects their family relationship, can impact the intentions and motivations of entrepreneurship (Bretones & Silva, 2009; Morales et al., 2022; Randerson et al., 2015), particularly among female entrepreneurial leaders. Consequently, this study suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders in the West and China can try to balance their business and family (Demartino & Barbato, 2003; Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001; Williams, 2004) by obtaining multigenerational family support.

Because of their different levels of social experience as reported in Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3, female entrepreneurial leaders experience more mental strain in overcoming obstacles than male entrepreneurial leaders. This comparison means their psychological adaptation to the cultural gateway is distinct from male counterparts. This interpretation is also supported by current research, which clearly reveals that men frequently exhibit higher levels of psychological adaptation than women do (Jang, 2022). Specifically, although female and male entrepreneurial leaders may share similar characteristics, such as motivation and entrepreneurial ideas as reported in Section 4.2.1, they frequently perceive and interpret these obstacles differently. Consequently, their responses to obstacles are distinct. For instance, the proverb “long hair and short wit”

(Zhou, 2022) exemplifies a traditional social norms that views women as inferior to men (Cho et al., 2020). This is partly due to social bias, and in part, it reflects the continued influence of gender gateway toward women. This suggests that Chinese women should struggle to overcome traditional cultural inertia to open the gender gateway and acquire the same opportunities as Chinese men.

The cultural gateway with tightness also poses a requirement for synchrony within the ingroup as reported in Sections 4.3.2.1 and 4.3.3.1.4. This, therefore, challenges the female entrepreneurial leader, which would be inferior to that of her male counterpart. Western research reveals that synchrony has a dark side, such as lower creativity, destructive obedience, and higher groupthink (Gelfand et al., 2020). This explains why female entrepreneurial leaders typically require more effort than their male counterparts in an organisation or society. Additionally, the social norms with a culture tightness, which can sometimes propel people to choose maladaptive behaviours (Pan et al., 2020), are anchored as a cultural gateway for female entrepreneurial leaders. However, Western scholars highlight the importance of implicit aptitude (i.e., the ability of pattern recognition) in dealing with interpersonal social norms (Savani et al., 2022). This means that although female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China are undervalued because of the cultural gateway, they can still reference the implicit aptitude to overcome the challenges caused by the cultural gateway.

What female entrepreneurial leaders could do to find skilled or entrepreneurial-spirited followers, as reported in Sections 4.3.2.2 and 4.3.2.3, challenges the sustainability and expansion of their enterprises. Western research also discusses this challenge. For example, scholars Berg and Englund (2015, p. 54) and Kitching and Jackson (2002), explained that 47 per cent of female entrepreneurial leaders respond to this challenge.

An interpretation is that it is likely difficult for the skilled followers of the outgroup to join the ingroup due to the cultural gateway caused by a family-oriented organisational culture as reported in Section 4.3.2.2. Generally, a reasonable interpretation to the challenges of female entrepreneurial leadership in Western and Chinese contexts can be attributed to the synchrony requirement of a tight corporate cultural gateway, which propels women to behave with higher groupthink, lower creativity, and destructive obedience (Gelfand et al., 2020) in an entrepreneurial field dominated by men. Consequently, this study suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders in Western and Chinese contexts should increase culture-looseness to reduce the requirement of synchrony.

However, how to cope with institutional uncertainty, as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.4, is often one of the riskiest challenges for female entrepreneurial leaders. This is because their strategy and the low resources levels, as discussed in the above paragraph, cannot catch up with the change of institutional uncertainty (Xheneti et al., 2019). For example, when the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the supply chain, production, and marketing as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.4, entrepreneurial activities were constrained by widespread panic and the government's quarantine policy. Thus, this institutional uncertainty implies a degree of contextual tightness for female entrepreneurial leaders. As a result, female entrepreneurial leaders' ultimate challenge, for instance, is implementing tactics (Kuratko, 2018) to convert contextual tightness to contextual looseness.

Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders should identify four essential items to treat the challenges. The first item is comprehending the innovation type; the second is coordinating leadership roles at various levels; the third is effectively managing the company's operations; and the fourth is follower training (Kuratko, 2018, p. 229).

Particularly, in terms of follower training as reported in Section 4.3.2.2, Western research also suggests that more women than men benefit from training as a result of career encouragement (Tharenou et al., 1994). Through these methods, their behaviour can generate resilience and, as a result, convert contextual tightness to looseness. Consequently, this study suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders need to adopt the above methods to cope with institutional uncertainty.

### 5.1.2 The Survival and Sustainability

The high mortality rate of women-owned businesses, as revealed by the findings of this study in Section 4.2.3, implies that the survival and sustainability of start-ups are the main challenges for female entrepreneurial leaders. Additionally, their psychological adaptation as reported in Sections 4.2.1 and 4.4 correspondingly affects how they choose solutions to utilise the opportunities and counter challenges. Therefore, this study recommends that they need to consider, find, and implement appropriate solutions. This section subsequently discusses these main challenges by analysing the transcendence and equilibration of female entrepreneurial leadership.

#### 5.1.2.1 The Transcendence and Survival

Regarding the cultural gateway playing a role in influencing the opportunities and challenges of female entrepreneurial leadership as reported in Section 4.4, this study argues that female entrepreneurial leaders need to achieve transcendence as a solution for survival. The cultural gateway in entrepreneurial enterprise mainly exists between female entrepreneurial leaders and their followers as reported in Section 4.3.2.2, because organizational cultures can comprehensively make individuals formulate their feelings, actions, and thoughts (Markus & Conner, 2014, p. 15). When female entrepreneurial leaders construct their leadership in an enterprise based on the



entrepreneurial conditions reported in Section 4.2.2, a mutual perception of trust, obligations, and rights interflows informally between themselves and their followers. Conversely, the interflow also formulates the mutual perception of ‘cognitive matching’ (Rousseau, 1995, p. 46) that could change along with the varied situations and resultantly upgrade into a psychological adaptation when they adapt to the cultural context. Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders need to fulfil the transcendence of both psychological adaptation and cultural gateway to realise the survival of their entrepreneurial enterprises.

The findings of this study as reported in Section 4.3.2.2 implies that female entrepreneurial leaders also need to achieve transcendence of family-oriented culture. For female entrepreneurial leaders who constructed family-oriented culture in their organisations, the cultural gateway can open when they strengthen their psychological adaptation in the condition of mutually encouraged with trust and the friendliness in the family-oriented atmosphere. When followers see the enterprises as a family, it can lead them to emphasise relationships (Rousseau, 1995, p. 50). However, the cultural gateway in the family-oriented entrepreneurial enterprise can prevent female entrepreneurial leaders from correcting mistakes. Because their mutual responsibilities and duties would be implicit, as reported in Section 4.3.2.2, this cultural gateway can become a shield of followers that prevents them from suffering punishment by the female entrepreneurial leaders. Consequently, the transcendence of the family-oriented culture becomes an essential requirement of female entrepreneurial leadership.

The transcendence of the family-oriented culture is necessary because this organisational culture also divides the staff into ingroups and outgroups as reported in Section 4.3.2.1. As a result, this situation makes female entrepreneurial leadership

influences within ingroup in most situations and seldom expands to outgroup if it is not necessary. According to ‘a multilevel theory of cultural tightness-looseness’ (Gelfand et al., 2006, p. 6), the findings in Section 4.1 inferred from a participant’s expression (iw-105) reflect that an organisational cultural looseness is needed to cultivate entrepreneurial spirit in the process of formulating female entrepreneurial leadership. Thus, this study implies that constructing an inclusive, effective, and equal organisation still requires how women understand the effects of ingroup and outgroup that differentiates themselves (Hamedani & Markus, 2019). In addition, the family-oriented culture could strengthen the normally opened status of the cultural gateway for the ingroup staff because their psychological adaptation in the organisation of family-oriented culture is probably more stable. Due to family-oriented culture as reported in Section 4.3.2.2, followers could have higher identification and generate a sense of belonging and loyalty in an organisation as revealed in Section 4.3.3.1.4. Therefore, family-oriented culture constructs a cultural gateway that makes followers hard to leave.

However, the cultural gateway distinguishes the outgroup followers from ingroup followers as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.4. This means the cultural gateway can lead to segregation with uneven distributions (Charles, 2011) of followers in an enterprise. From this point of view, the family-oriented culture could strengthen the normally closed status of the cultural gateway for outgroup followers. Thus, female entrepreneurial leaders need to transcend the ingroup and communicate with outgroup followers.

However, the status of the cultural gateway is not static. It will shift along with the contextual situation changes as reported in Section 4.3.3.3. When followers surpass the cultural gateway, they will become ingroup members and acquire new identification.

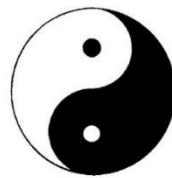
This change can strengthen their psychological adaptation when the female entrepreneurial leaders trust followers, and in turn as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.4, they increase loyalty to female entrepreneurial leaders and organisations. However, personal trust is usually based on kinship or ethnicity (Welsh et al., 2018; Welter & Smallbone, 2011) in an enterprise, particularly one that has a family-oriented culture. Consequently, female entrepreneurial leaders need to transcend family-oriented cultures by constructing their personal charisma and positively affect the followers' recognition and identification.

#### 5.1.2.2 Dynamic Equilibration and Sustainability

This study referring to the traditional Chinese philosophy, as discussed in Section 2.1.2.4, implies that female entrepreneurial leaders need to consider the dynamic equilibration as a solution to ensure the sustainability of enterprises. The findings of the operational style of female entrepreneurial leadership, as reported in Section 4.3.1.1, conform to the Chinese traditional cultural concept that 'one is many' or 'one is all' (Albrow, 2018, p. 108). This implication means that the process of female entrepreneurial leadership from the perspective of Chinese traditional Taoism philosophy (often called 'Dao', i.e., ultimate source, (Perkins, 2019), 道, in Chinese) of Taiji contains the Yin (in Chinese 阴) aspect and Yang (in Chinese 阳) aspect (See Figure 6) (Osno, 2018). Yin and Yang refer to the negative and positive sides of female entrepreneurial leadership, that is, the challenges and opportunities of female entrepreneurial leadership. The Yin and Yang are interacted and collaborated polar forces (Perkins, 2019) and generate equilibrium statuses, such as the Tian and Di, left and right. This philosophy of 'Taiji' further indicates that the two opposite things complement and transform each other to maintain sustainable development. This

indication means that the challenges can be transformed into opportunities for female entrepreneurial leaders. When Yin and Yang transform, a development or evolution process generates accordingly (Osno, 2018). This simulation indicates that the female entrepreneurial leaders need to consider the compromise between current interests and ultimate goal, psychological adaptation and cultural gateway, internal resilience and external uncertainty.

Figure 6 the Sign of Tao: Yin and Yang



The sign of the Tao.

Source: Nisbett (2003, p. 13)

Meanwhile, the transformation process from challenges to opportunities should meet three necessary conditions: Tianshi, Dili, and Renhe (Horváth, 2022) as revealed in Section 4.2.2, which indicate seizing the right opportunity and implementing a successful strategy through appropriately combining the various conditions (Chen, 2018, p. 111). Thus, this study suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders need to adopt sufficient flexible approaches to achieve at least the three conditions. When these conditions cannot be achieved, the reverse process of opportunities transforming into challenges will begin. This interpretation is supported by the present Western research, which shows that enterprise mortality rates increase with enterprise age (Hannan, 1998). Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders need to find an intersection of the three conditions to overcome the challenge of sustaining entrepreneurial enterprises.

### 5.1.3 Transformation and Competition

The above discussion of transformation implies that female entrepreneurial leaders need to make comprehensive change for competing in business. Referencing the framework of the Culture Cycle (Markus & Conner, 2014, p. 16) (see Figure 3) as discussed in Section 2.2.1.2.1, this study discusses the issue of transformation and competition at four levels: individuals, interactions, institutions, and ideas. This culture cycle simulates how a process from the individual to the interaction to the institution to the idea level shapes culture. Correspondingly, the reverse process reflects how culture influences individuals. This process of the culture cycle reflects the different levels of female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation as revealed in Section 4.4, which needs to transform when the female entrepreneurial leaders gradually exert their influences from the individual level to the idea level.

#### 5.1.3.1 Individual Level

At the individual level, the elements of culture that contain behaviours, biases, mindsets, feelings, thoughts, self-concepts, and identities (Hamedani & Markus, 2019) are the starting point for transformation. Through behaviour mechanisms generating and being from internal status to external action (Hechter & Horne, 2003, p. 17), the finding of this study as reported in Section 4.4 suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders can transform their entrepreneurial mindset to improve the sufficient flexibility of their entrepreneurial behaviours.

Because entrepreneurial behaviour is often situation-based, it can in turn affect the psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders. As female entrepreneurial leaders aim to make their innovative idea realised in the complex business context, their mindset and behaviour as reported in Section 4.3.1.4 usually change according to the

situation they face. Consequently, female entrepreneurial leadership typically involves the interactional process of entrepreneurial behaviour and mindset (Renko et al., 2015; Subramaniam & Shankar, 2020, p. 9). Past research often categorises entrepreneurial mindset into three sets: people-, purposed-, and learning- oriented (Subramaniam & Shankar, 2020) and divides entrepreneurial behaviour as advantage- and opportunity-seeking behaviours (Subramaniam & Shankar, 2020). In practice, the entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation as reported in Sections 4.3.2.2 and 4.4 often integrates their mindset and the effect of their potential behaviour. Thus, this study implies that female entrepreneurial leaders need to transform their mindset and predict their behaviour's effect on managing their followers and enterprises.

The female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation is not static but dynamic because, on one side, the institutional uncertainty as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.4 stimulates the female entrepreneurial leaders to learn the entrepreneurial experiences and form a shared cognition (Gelfand et al., 2006); on another side, female entrepreneurial leaders' self-growth as reported in Section 4.3.1.3 will facilitate their psychological adaptation to be dynamic with self-guides (Gelfand et al., 2006). When female entrepreneurial leaders cease the learning experiences or self-growth, they would lag behind the times and thus will not adapt to the fierce competition. However, the finding of self-cultivation to learn as reported in Section 4.3.1.3 indicates that female entrepreneurial leaders are good at improving themselves in terms of entrepreneurial experiences and psychological adaptation.

As a result, continuing learning and self-cultivation as reported in Section 4.3.1.3 are necessary for the sustainable development of their enterprise. The present Western research also demonstrates that female entrepreneurial leadership is characterised by

permanent learning (Gibbs, 1997; Zhang & Cone, 2018) or continuing learning, transitioning from 'economic woman' to 'social woman'. In addition, learning entrepreneurial thinking and acting skills is a crucial source of competitive advantage (Kuratko, 2018, p. 223). That is because their psychological adaptation needs to develop to a high level through a "reliable mental compass" (Gelfand et al., 2006, p. 5; Tetlock, 2002) when their business sustains for a long time. Conversely, without continuing learning, their enterprise cannot be sustained for a long time. The profound reason may be attributed to the fierce competition, as reported in Section 4.2.3, that would generate pressure on female entrepreneurial leaders. They subsequently have to keep their psychological adaptation resilient and dynamic, as reported in Sections 4.3.1.4 and 4.3.3.2.4, to overcome anxiety. These requirements imply that female entrepreneurial leaders should shift their learning ability to practical application and need to upgrade themselves from a traditional-working mindset to an entrepreneurial mindset.

A female entrepreneurial leader's mindset as reported in Section 4.3.1.4 would categorise different information inputs and subsequently adapt to the cultural tightness-looseness. These categorisations of information inputs are often affected by the recognition reference point of cultural defaults, such as interdependent versus independent, other-oriented value versus self-oriented value as reported in Table 4 and Section 4.3. Present research suggests that Western cultural defaults influence mindsets on elaborating the independent-self more than the interdependent-self (Stephens et al., 2014). However, the finding of this study as reported in Sections 4.3 and 4.4 implies that female entrepreneurial leaders should adjust their recognition reference point to make their psychological adaptation more interdependent than independent. When the

female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation could be agilely suited to cultural tightness-looseness, they would be resilient and flexible to face institutional uncertainty.

A female entrepreneurial leader's socioeconomic status as reported in Section 4.3.3.2 can influence their psychological adaptation. Previous studies found that in both Western and non-Western cultural contexts, individuals of high socioeconomic status illustrate a more self-oriented mindset than individuals of low socioeconomic status (Kohn & Schooler, 1982; Kraus et al., 2012; Miyamoto et al., 2018, p. 429; N. M. Stephens et al., 2014). The findings as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.4 show that female entrepreneurial leaders are seldom from low social class, which reflects their socioeconomic status. However, their mindset shows less self-oriented but is sensitive to adjusting the psychological adaptation to suit the environment as revealed in Section 4.3.3.2.1. This revelation conforms to past studies that observed they were steersmen whose mindset and behaviour are heuristics that simplify strategies and make judgements efficiently and quickly (Volery & Mueller, 2018, p. 146). Therefore, the finding of this study, as reported in Section 4.3.2.1, implies that female entrepreneurial leaders can maintain their other-oriented and interdependent values to adapt to contextual change.

#### 5.1.3.2 Interaction Level

Female entrepreneurial leaders often exert influence through interacting with their enterprise and society as reported in Section 4.1. Specifically, female entrepreneurial leaders continuously construct and enact social reality and national culture through delivering their mindsets and conducting behaviour as reported in Sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3. Meanwhile, the national culture contrarily moulds and shapes individuals'



mindsets and behaviour through pervasive and various social processes (Griffin et al., 2017, p. 3; Ingersoll & Adams, 1992, p. 497). However, they often encounter many situations where they need to obey seldom-spoken norms about the right behaviours (Hamedani & Markus, 2019). As a result, the finding of this study as reported in Sections 4.3.3.1.1 and 4.3.3.1.2 implies that female entrepreneurial leaders need to conform to social norms and as a result, expand influences.

In Chinese context, *guanxi* is a significant indicator of interaction in the culture cycle. *Guanxi* as reported in Section 4.2.2 is a cultural gateway that distinguishes people according to their social class and social group. This cultural gateway means female entrepreneurial leaders in high social class or ingroup can easily acquire strong *guanxi*, but those in low social class or outgroup would be difficult. Related research by Western scholars also supports this finding as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.2, because they argue that a higher socioeconomic class, implying more plentiful resources and freedom, often leads to other-oriented psychological attributes and socialisation values in a Confucian cultural context (Miyamoto et al., 2018). Thus, the other-oriented socialisation values and psychological attributes can, in turn, benefit their social networks.

*Guanxi* reflects female entrepreneurial leaders' interdependence and relatedness, which often parallels the "contextual" or "relational" construal (Hamaguchi, 1985, as cited in Markus & Oyserman, 1989, p. 103). Western research also supports that, for example, the relational skills are viewed as the characteristics of female gender roles, such as being agile or aware of other's responses, being cooperative or collaborative with others, negotiating with individuals and organising them together, being convictive or persuasive (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1037; Cortes et al., 2018; Deming, 2017).

These findings reflect their construal of self-concept that can be categorised into the construal of self as interdependent and the construal of self as independent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 224). This interpretation reveals the mutual relationship between the individual level and interaction level within the Culture Cycle as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1. Therefore, this study suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders can surpass the cultural gateway of guanxi by constructing the construal of self as interdependent.

The connectedness of female entrepreneurial leaders' social networks as reported in Sections 4.1 and 4.3.3.2.2 also reflects their selves and patterns of psychological adaptation (i.e., hard interdependence or expressive independence (Stephens et al., 2014)). When female entrepreneurial leaders have a psychological adaptation of expressive independence, as reported in Section 4.3, to the cultural gateway, their connectedness of social networks would be weak and less effective. Otherwise, when female entrepreneurial leaders have a psychological adaptation of hard interdependence, as reported in Section 4.3, to the cultural gateway, the connectedness to their surroundings would be more effective and powerful. Part of the reason is that their interpersonal warmth is generally recognised as a rewarded and valued stereotypical feminine characteristic (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1032; Fiske et al., 2002; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). This comparison implies that psychological adaptation of hard interdependence is necessary for female entrepreneurial leaders to interact with external contexts for developing business. Otherwise, they are less likely to interact for business development.

The fundamental reasons for the female entrepreneurial leader's psychological adaptation affecting connectedness are the sense of equality as reported in Section 4.3.3.4.2 and a relative psychological advantage. Firstly, the prerequisite for

connectedness is a sense of equality. A cultural gateway often mediates people's access to valuable achievements based on equality (Fiske & Markus, 2012, p. 145). Consequently, when female entrepreneurial leaders feel equal in social networks, the cultural gateway will not hamper their psychological adaptation to build and expand social networks. Otherwise, the cultural gateway will negatively affect their psychological adaptation for constructing and developing social networks. Secondly, when female entrepreneurial leaders feel lower in social networks, their psychological adaptation would generate a relative psychological disadvantage that can inhibit their passion as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.4 for establishing and expanding social networks; otherwise, it would result in a psychological advantage that would encourage them to build and enlarge social networks.

#### 5.1.3.3 Institution Level

At the institution level, female entrepreneurial leaders and other staff interact daily within their enterprise. In this way, female entrepreneurial leaders can formulate their organisational culture, such as the family-oriented culture as reported in Section 4.3.2.2, which facilitates enterprise members to feel, think, and act easier or better supported (e.g., Hamedani & Markus, 2019; Lamoreaux & Morling, 2012; Morling & Lamoreaux, 2008; Tsai, 2007). Through daily interaction in enterprise, female entrepreneurial leaders outline and formalise the norms and routines for all the members as reported in Sections 4.3.1.1 and 4.3.2.3. Frequently, they wield considerable power by creating incentives that foster some relationships, habits, and behaviours while restricting others (e.g., Hamedani & Markus, 2019; Hatzenbuehler, 2014; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010; Tankard & Paluck, 2017). Thus, this study implies that female entrepreneurial leaders should create an adapted organizational culture to maintain their business effectively.

The findings of family-oriented culture in this study as reported in Section 4.3.2.2 imply that female entrepreneurial leadership often tends to construct a feminine culture in an organisation. Due to the start-ups established by female entrepreneurial leaders, their organisational culture is defaulted as a feminine culture naturally. The fundamental reason is that the cultural defaults will expand and spread to the whole organisation and formulate the corporate culture. To an extent, feminist cultural defaults as reported in Section 4.3.2.2 in a start-up created by female entrepreneurial leaders is an innate organisational culture. This feminist culture default distinguishes from the inaugural culture of masculine defaults. When men possessed power, they would use it to construct corporate cultures reflecting men's values, perspectives, interests, and norms (Acker, 1990; Bem, 1993; Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1026; Cox, 1993; Gilligan, 1982; Ridgeway, 2011). Thus, men's organisational cultures are probably not suitable for women. However, women founders can transform their personalities, unique ideas, and cultural concepts into corporate culture that suits them.

The findings of this study as reported in Section 4.3.3.4.1 implicate that organisational culture of masculine defaults would formulate a cultural gateway which can inhibit women's involvement. Because individuals and their beliefs and behaviours constitute part of the corporate culture (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1031), two routes are available for female entrepreneurial leaders. One of the routes is to resist the masculine defaults culture, such as the corporate regulations, organisational ideas, and interaction patterns; the other route is to adapt to the defaults culture of masculine by involving their characteristics and behaviours in the organisational culture. Usually, the latter is more feasible for women to succeed (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1031). However, female entrepreneurial leaders, frequently find it difficult to adapt to masculine defaults

due to their self-awareness as reported in Section 4.1. Thus, this study suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders can actively create an organisational culture that suits them.

To an extent, organisational culture as reported in Sections 4.3.2.1 and 4.3.2.2 is the reflexivity of an entrepreneurial leader's personality and thought. If the entrepreneurial leader tends to be innovative, assertive, or conservative, then the organisational culture would formulate characteristics with innovation, assertiveness, or conservation. The present research argued that self-interested assertiveness is an impediment to women's advancement (Peus et al., 2015, p. 56; Peus & Traut-Mattausch, 2007). The organisational culture is often unseen due to the cultural features that may seem to be gender-neutral on the surface and not evidence of gender disparities (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1022). In addition, the effects of organisational culture are relatively permanent. This is because cultures, norms, masculine values, and practises are often institutionalised (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1026) and conceptualised in an individual's mindset. Thus, the finding of this study as reported in Sections 4.3.2.1 and 4.3.2.2 implies that female entrepreneurial leaders should transform organisational culture into a constant routine of both innovation and creativity.

#### 5.1.3.4 Idea Level

At the idea level, female entrepreneurial leaders are affected by ideologies, values, and beliefs as reported in Section 4.1. Usually, these are historically derived, invisible, and collectively held ideas, which have a transforming influence on institutions, then interactions, and finally individuals (e.g., Hamedani et al., 2013; Leavitt et al., 2015; as cited in Hamedani & Markus, 2019; Master et al., 2016). This section subsequently assesses five dialectical relations as reported in Section 4.3 and Table 4: innovation and

cultural inertia, individualism and collectivism, other-oriented and self-oriented values, interdependence and independence, and cultural diversity and consistency.

#### 5.1.3.4.1 Innovation and Cultural Inertia

Modern China has been in open and reform times, which formulates the cultural inertia of entrepreneurship as reported in Sections 4.3.3.2.3 and 4.3.3.3. However, this cultural inertia of entrepreneurship is affected by the traditional cultural inertia. For example, masculine default as reported in Section 4.3.3.4.1 is a prominent traditional cultural inertia that influences female entrepreneurial leadership. According to the Cultural Inertia Model (Armenta et al., 2022), which is analogous to Newton's law of motion in physics (National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2015, as cited in Armenta et al., 2022), cultural norms tend to remain in their original status unless they are influenced by an external determinant (Armenta et al., 2022). This traditional cultural inertia, as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.2, was formulated in an agricultural society and is still prevalent in modern China. Although China has been in transitional times as discussed in Section 2.1.2.3, the masculine default still influences women's careers. This circumstance is also similar to the situation in a Western context. According to scholars Cheryan and Markus (2020, p. 1022), the fundamental reason is that women in the Western context are prevented from fully engaging in a place that is built on the invisible but influential foundation of masculine values, ideas, policies, norms, interaction styles, practices, artefacts, and personal behaviours.

The illustration of masculine defaults as reported in Section 4.3.3.4.1 is mixed through the traditional masculinity of physical prowess and modern masculinity, such as the social awkwardness and technology-based fixation (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1024; Cheryan et al., 2009). However, no matter whether traditional masculinity or modern

masculinity, they are both conceptualised as masculine defaults in an individual's mindset. Furthermore, the conceptualised masculinity defaults on the basis of Confucian culture could be a reference point when an individual processes information in decision-making as reported in Section 4.1. This is because the masculine behaviours and characteristics are assumed to be prescriptively regular and valuable (Bellah et al., 2007; Markus, 2017, Markus & Kitayama, 1991, Van Berkel, as cited in Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1026; Van Berkel et al., 2017). Thus, this study suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders need to get rid of the masculine default and select the innovative culture.

#### 5.1.3.4.2 Individualism and Collectivism

The finding of this study as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.4 implies that female entrepreneurial leaders need to notice a shift from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism in contemporary China. This shift conforms to the present study, which revealed a change between collectivism and individualism in China (Ma et al., 2016) and worldwide (Santos et al., 2017). According to findings in Section 4.1, Chinese women's self-awareness has increased. The reason is partly attributed to the influence of Western culture, in which individualism is a central element (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Carrithers, Collins, & Lukes, 1987, as cited in Markus & Kitayama, 1998, p. 68; Triandis et al., 1988). This has resulted in their lives and careers becoming increasingly independent. Another reason is that the economic transition, as discussed in Sections 2.1.2.1 and 2.1.2.3, enables women to achieve independence through entrepreneurship. Thus, individualism has become a trend in the contemporary development of Chinese women. Nevertheless, this tendency is constrained by the traditional Chinese mainstream culture: collectivism. Therefore,

individualism in China has not been fully developed. This study subsequently suggests that Chinese women should balance both individualism and collectivism.

The above discussion reflects that Chinese sociocultural context is characterised by loose collectivism, as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.4. This loose collectivism allows individualism and female entrepreneurial leadership to legitimately develop in China. Individualism and collectivism, as discussed in Section 2.1.2.1, can be traced back to the social production style. In Western nations, industrialisation and market economies have developed. Therefore, modern business transforms private interdependence into public cooperation between individuals. This establishes social norms and social order based on rules. However, China's industrialisation and market economy are in the process of development. China should therefore continue to refine its rule-based social norms and social order. This explains why individuals in the Chinese context continue to experience interdependent relationships (Geertz, 1975; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Marsella, DeVos & Hsu, 1985, as cited in Markus & Kitayama, 1998; Miller, 1984). As a result, when Chinese women engage in an evolutionary process characterised by a shift from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism, Chinese female entrepreneurial leadership acquires conceptual legitimacy.

#### 5.1.3.4.3 Other-oriented Value and Self-oriented Value

Cultural value, as reported in Section 4.1, is different between the Western and China contexts because of their different sociocultural cores. In the Western context, the sociocultural core contains 'liberty', 'equality' and "fraternity" (Koolhaas, 2022), which encourage the cultural value of independence and self-oriented value. In the China context, the sociocultural core contains benevolence ('Ren', 仁 in Chinese) and



social norms ('Li', 礼 in Chinese) (Osno, 2018, p. 5), which demand harmonious relationships with connected individuals and keep social order according to the hierarchy of socioeconomic status. These two sociocultural cores: 'Ren' (仁) and 'Li' (礼 in Chinese) (Osno, 2018, p. 5) contribute to the characteristics of both self-oriented values and other-oriented values and further regulate their behaviours. Essentially, this cultural concept of 'Ren' (i.e., humanness or benevolence (Perkins, 2019)) internally requires concerning others with a fraternity and 'Li' externally requires self-discipline to obey the social order and social norms. In addition, Confucian culture also promotes self-orientation values such as achievement with perseverance and hard work (Bond & Hwang, 1986; Miyamoto et al., 2018, p. 434). This means other-oriented and self-oriented values are necessary for Chinese individuals.

Other-oriented values are reflected in the cultural concept of harmony as discussed in Section 2.2.1.2.1 and reported in Sections 4.2.2. and 4.3.2.3, which is a distinct characteristic of Chinese individuals. This is sourced from cultural conceptions of individuality that emphasise the fundamental individual's connectedness at a group level (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 224) and the Taiji concept which, as discussed in Section 2.2.1.2.3, means keeping equilibrium and inclusiveness between two opposite sides or statuses. This has affected the Chinese's ability to pursue collaboration and inclusiveness in teamwork. Whilst Chinese culture emphasises "Harmony in Diversity" or "Harmony but not Uniformity" (He Er Bu Tong, 和而不同, in Chinese) (Osno, 2018, p. 9), female entrepreneurial leaders with an inclusive attitude can consider or accept various ideas.

More importantly, female entrepreneurial leaders' cultural value orientation as reported in Sections 4.1, 4.3.2.1 and 4.3.2.2 would permeate the start-up and orientate the organisational culture. When a female entrepreneurial leader's cultural orientation is more other-oriented than self-oriented, the organisational culture will be inclusive, loose, and harmonious as discussed in Section 2.2.1.2.2. Thus, the follower could wholeheartedly be with the female entrepreneurial leader. The family-oriented culture as reported in Section 4.3.2.2 reflects the other-oriented cultural values of female entrepreneurial leadership in China. According to scholar Nisbett (2003, p. 6) the Chinese would not feel like pawns in the family. Because of the family-oriented culture, female entrepreneurial leaders tend to create a relative equality. This equality, as discussed in Section 2.1.1.3, makes followers treat each other with non-hierarchical attitudes. Contrarily, if the female entrepreneurial leader's cultural orientation is more self-oriented than other-oriented, the organisational culture would be inattentive, strained, and tight as discussed in Section 2.2.1.2.2. As a result, the followers in this situation may find it hard to work with the female entrepreneurial leaders for a long time.

#### 5.1.3.4.4 Interdependence and Independence

The finding of this study as reported in Sections 4.3.1.1, 4.3.1.2, 4.3.2, and 4.3.3.2.2 implies that female entrepreneurial leadership in the Chinese context reflects more interdependence than independence. This comparison between the interdependence and independence of Chinese female entrepreneurial leadership is reflected in the influences of Chinese culture. To some extent, the cultural influences are indicated by the female entrepreneurial leaders' socioeconomic status as reflected in Figure 5, Section 2.2.1.2.1 and reported in Section 4.3.3.2. Socioeconomic status, sometimes called social class, is

a kind of social hierarchy that pervades across fields of society and culture (Fiske, 1992; Miyamoto et al., 2018, p. 428; Rai & Fiske, 2011). Individuals from higher social classes tend to follow expressive independence social norms as reported in Table 3 and Section 4.3, whereas those from lower social classes tend to behave according to the hard interdependence social norms (Stephens et al., 2014). Different social classes imply that Chinese women who intend to launch enterprises need to adapt to the expressive independence social norm (Stephens et al., 2014), such as self-expression, influencing the situation and the hard interdependence social norm (Stephens et al., 2014), such as being tough, strong, and resilient.

Chinese traditional culture as reported in Sections 4.3.2.1, 4.3.3.1.1, and 4.3.3.1.2 influences the self-hood of female entrepreneurial leaders. Previous Western studies (Geertz, 1975; Harding, 1987; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Heelas, 1980, Masella, De Vos, & Hsu, 1985, Sheweder & Levin, 1984 as cited in Markus & Oyserman, 1989, p. 102) describe how various kinds of cultures or social environments will foster or develop divergent bedrock assumptions about the construal of self and others. This study also argued that, for example, the traditional concept that “a female is inferior to a male” (Cho et al., 2020) has underestimated Chinese females for centuries. This signifies those Chinese women are hard to acknowledge as independent in traditional culture. An individual is a combination of unique characteristics and societal responsibilities, achieved by the influence of one’s unique characteristics based on his or her social status and connections (Markus & Kitayama, 1998, p. 73). However, the conditioning of Chinese women is still unequal to men, as discussed in Section 2.2.1.1.2 and reported in Section 4.3.3.3. Hence, referencing the Cultural Cycle from the Idea level to the Individual level, as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.1, this study implies that Chinese women

or female entrepreneurial leaders often formulate their construal of self as interdependence.

#### 5.1.3.4.5 Cultural Diversity and Consistency

Cultural diversity as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.1 is at the core of modern Chinese society in the new century and often offers the feasibility of the cultural gateway that could open for Chinese women in the entrepreneurial field. For example, “Harmony in Diversity” or “Harmony but not Uniformity” (He Er Bu Tong, 和而不同 in Chinese) (Osno, 2018, p. 9) which is a Chinese traditional cultural idea sourced from The Analects of Confucius (Lun Yu, 论语, in Chinese) (Osno, 2018, p. 172) is recognised and obeyed by most Chinese. In general, cultural diversity permeates almost all areas of society and fosters cultural looseness in society. As reported in Section 4.3.3.1.1, this cultural diversity can boost the development of entrepreneurial spirit to a greater or less extent (Carbonara et al., 2018; as cited in Morales et al., 2022) in a Chinese context for female entrepreneurial leaders to acquire entrepreneurial opportunities. Consequently, this study’s findings on cultural diversity indicate that female entrepreneurial leader can find cultural reasonability in their activities and promote their social identification as female leaders.

However, due to the mainstream of Socialism, as reported in Section 2.1.2.4.5, unity and centrality are required to follow in modern China. This reveals that the officials require cultural consistency. Thus, cultural diversity is restrained by cultural consistency. This is guided by the traditional cultural concept ‘the unifications of humans and nature’ (‘天人合一’, Tian Ren He Yi, in Chinese) (Osno, 2018, p. 154) as discussed in Section 2.2.1.2.2. In addition, the ancient Chinese social norms (Li ‘礼’,

in Chinese) (Osno, 2018, p. 5) emphasise a social order with hierarchy. This consistency is also reflected in “harmony in diversity”(Wu, 2020), meaning a flexible process to realise divergence in the first and convergence in the second. Thus, the findings of this study as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.1 indicates that female entrepreneurial leaders need to allow sufficient discussion when formulating a resolution. If there is no sufficient discussion, there is no common sense, and thereby the resolution cannot be formulated and implemented.

Cultural consistency requires Chinese individuals to behave convergently within ingroups, centred on the Chinese core value as discussed in Section 2.2.1.2.1. This is because, within an ingroup, they can build trust among each other by following their shared values as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.4. The findings of family-oriented culture in this study, as reported in Section 4.3.2.2, conform to this cultural consistency. However, the present empirical research based on 367 Chinese family firms evidences the existence of goal inconsistency (Dou et al., 2020, p. 2). This comparison suggests that cultural consistency and goal inconsistency coexist, which could cause diversity and involution within the ingroup. Diversity in an organization can often bring team dynamics (J. Wu et al., 2022). Thus, lacking diversity makes the individuals within the ingroup have limited dynamics. Consequently, this study implicates that those female entrepreneurial leaders should break out of the traditional mindset and create a culture diversity in their enterprises.

## 5.2 Practical Recommendations

From the aforementioned practical implications, this study, in subsequent sections, provides recommendations to policymakers, female entrepreneurial leaders, and non-entrepreneurial women in China and the West from a cultural psychology perspective.

### 5.2.1 To Policymakers

Policymakers take responsibility for maintaining an ecosystem of entrepreneurial enterprises. Given the importance of cultural tightness-looseness in an entrepreneurial ecosystem, this study suggests that policymakers can create a cultural looseness context while alleviating a cultural tightness context.

#### 5.2.1.1 Creating Cultural Looseness

In contemporary China, the emergence of female entrepreneurial leadership requires cultural looseness as revealed in Section 4.3. Thus, Chinese policymakers can issue policies with cultural looseness, such as ensuring multiple paths to flourishing entrepreneurial enterprises (Armanios et al., 2017a) owned by women and allowing the unrestricted growth of feminism. Particularly, individualism and collectivism as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.4 are intertwined forces in contemporary China that serve as the basis of Chinese feminism. Without individualism, women's self-awareness would be hard to emerge; without collectivism, the dispersed self-awareness cannot coalesce into a feminism-based group consciousness. In turn, feminism increases the self-awareness of Chinese women as revealed in Sections 4.1 and 4.3.3.4.2. This consequently helps Chinese women increase their confidence and social acceptance to a certain extent when launching a business. In addition, female entrepreneurial leaders' confidence reflects their psychological adaptation, as revealed in Section 4.4. The extant research also evidences that women frequently lack confidence, which stifles their progress (Peus et al., 2015, p. 56; Peus & Traut-Mattausch, 2007). Therefore, feminist development enables the cultural gateway to open for Chinese women and encourages them to be entrepreneurially confident.

However, feminism in China as reported in Section 4.3.3.4 challenges social norms that are, to some extent, perceived as obstacles for Chinese women. Chinese feminism is one of the embellishments of contemporary Chinese culture. In previous decades, although modernisation facilitates Chinese women as discussed in Section 2.1.2.1, it did not fully advance Chinese modernity. Modernisation, for instance, focused primarily on industrialisation and social management while ignoring the mindset of industrialisation introspection. However, cultural diversity as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.1 often leads to the notion and discourse of multiple modernity (Englund & Leach, 2000); this modernity can, in turn, promote a sense of the self-awareness of female entrepreneurial leaders. As a result, the persistence of equality between men and women in industrial societies is explained as the ground of free choices in a manner that is formally equal but innately distinguished (Charles, 2011). Thus, a lacking modernity of mind impeded the development of feminism within the context of China.

Due to the reality that China and the West have vastly different living conditions and social welfare, pragmatism permeated from the West to China and has become the predominant ideology among Chinese people (Davis, 2011). However, for the Chinese, although the modernity of the mind as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.1 increases, it is still less significant and essential than the modernity of natural science and technology. For example, Deng Xiaoping explained China's open and reform policy by saying that, whether white or black (Ke-Schutte, 2019), a good cat can catch a mouse and let some people in priority get rich (Li, 1999, p. 91). Currently, pragmatism culturally expands in China and formulates a cultural pragmatism, as discussed by Phua (2022). To some extent, cultural pragmatism in China shows cultural looseness, which is a facilitator for female entrepreneurial leadership. Therefore, this study recommends that Chinese

policymakers need to concern whether the current policy conforms to the development of cultural pragmatism.

Although feminism is not illegal in China, it has not been supported by the country's official ideology as reported in Section 4.3.3.4.2. Instead, on most occasions, Chinese culture introduces feminism as a by-product of liberalism (Liu et al., 2013). Thus, the Chinese do not have a well-developed modern mindset on feminism. As a result, the Chinese official leadership disregards and marginalises feminism as a facet of modernity. In addition, radical feminism as reported in Section 4.3.3.4.2 has the potential to incite conflict and polarise social groups, which contradicts the Chinese tradition of unity and centrality. In the Chinese context, therefore, feminism has stirred up controversy.

Meanwhile, Chinese women disregard feminism as reported in Section 4.3.3.4. This is because, on the one hand, living is more important and meaningful than feminism; on the other hand, feminism is not pervasive among Chinese women. As a result, they have limited will and opportunities to learn about feminism. The evolution of feminism indicates that Chinese women favour liberal feminism over radical feminism as reported in Section 4.3.3.4.2. Liberal feminism views women and men as equal, as having equal rights in social, economic, and political life, which can be secured by the legal and political system (Pollard, 2009). However, radical feminism argues that the inequalities between female and male are rooted in patriarchy which is the male-privileged system (Pollard, 2009). Therefore, this study recommends that Chinese policymakers can issue a policy with cultural looseness, which allows the development of liberal feminism.



From the Taiji philosophy that the concept of Yin (feminine and passive) and the concept of Yang (masculine and active) (Nisbett, 2003, p. 14), the power of Yin can counteract the power of Yang through the ‘power of passive virtue’ (ruo de zhi li 弱德之力, in Chinese; adapted from (Wang & Zhong, 2004)): struggle through soft power and flexibility. The findings as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.2 also support a suggestion, proposed by the present research, that leaders using soft power can inspire optimal motivation in followers (Kelly, 2021). This suggestion reflects the influences of soft power of female entrepreneurial leaders within their enterprises. Similarly, the soft power of female entrepreneurial leaders can expand the influences of soft power to external context. This implies that Chinese policymakers need to respect female entrepreneurial leaders and can issue a policy with cultural looseness to allow them to utilise their power of passive virtue to open cultural gateways.

Additionally, Chinese cultural inertia, as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.2, does not absolutely hinder the growth of feminism. Over three thousand years, the traditional Chinese culture has evolved and profoundly influenced the Chinese mentality. For example, the concept of Confucianism such as the ‘benevolence’ (仁, ren in Chinese) (chinesethought.cn, 2021b; Osnos, 2018, p. 5), ‘conscience’ (义, yi in Chinese) (chinesethought.cn, 2021a; Osnos, 2018, p. 90), ‘social norms’ (礼, li in Chinese) (Osnos, 2018, p. 5), ‘intelligence’ (智, zhi in Chinese) (Osnos, 2018, p. 105), and ‘good faith’ (信, xin in Chinese) (Osnos, 2018, p. 90) become the standard reference point of Chinese mindset and behaviour. To some extent, the cultural inertia of these Confucianist concepts is accepted by Chinese women. For example, as reported in Section 4.3.2.2, Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders emphasise the influence of

conscience in their enterprises. In addition, as reported in Sections 4.1, 4.3.3.1.1, and 4.3.3.1.4, female entrepreneurial leaders recognise faith as a good quality of behaviour. The present research also supports this point and argues that faith in Western cultures is recognised as synonymous with trust (Bishop & McKaughan, 2022). Although the findings in Section 4.3.3.1.2 reveal that the cultural inertia is weakened by the permeation of Western culture, female entrepreneurial leadership still lacks reasonability in modern China. Therefore, this study recommends that Chinese policymakers need to issue female-friendly policies to increase the reasonability of female entrepreneurial leadership.

#### 5.2.1.2 Alleviating Cultural Tightness

Due to the centralised administrative system in China, cultural tightness is reflected in government policies, as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.3, which can heavily inhibit the development of female entrepreneurial leadership. The present research finds that government policy often affects educational attainment symbolising modernity and catalysing human rights, economic prosperity, and development (Charles, 2011; Frank & Meyer, 2007; Schultz, 1961). Furthermore, other research suggests that women tend to benefit more than men from entrepreneurial education (Sullivan & Meek, 2012; Wilson et al., 2007). As discussed in Section 2.1.1.3.2.1, educational background implies an entrepreneurial opportunity for female entrepreneurial leaders. Therefore, this study recommends that policymakers can issue a women-friendly educational policy to alleviate cultural tightness.

The findings as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.1 indicate that an increasing modernity in modern China reflects an alleviation of cultural tightness. As discussed in Section 2.1.2.1, traditional Chinese culture is weakened by modernisation. To some extent,

modernisation means the permeation of Western culture, which further leads to cultural diversity in a Chinese context. Cultural diversity, as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.1, reversely increases Chinese modernity. Modernity is categorised into developing and developed societies (Buzan & Lawson, 2020). Chinese modernity, as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.1, is subsequently regarded as a developing society. Modernity in China is thus distinct from modernity in the West. Furthermore, modernity is primarily associated with feminism among Chinese women. Thus, Chinese feminism differs from Western feminism in this regard.

Chinese modernity as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.1 is also influenced by traditional culture and its inertia, which frequently obstructs as a cultural gateway for Chinese women to launch a business. Modern China's default cultural values, such as collectivism and harmonious interpersonal relationships, respectively, discussed in Sections 2.1.2.1 and 2.2.1.2.2, affect this cultural gateway. Western scholars also find that innovation can be active when harmonious relationships prevail (Kostis, 2021). Specifically, this harmonious relationship causes Chinese individuals to view one another as part of a complex, complete, and benign social system in which mutual obligations should be met as a prerequisite for ethical behaviour (Nisbett, 2003, p. 6). Unfortunately, traditional Chinese cultures such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism as discussed in Section 2.1.2.4.5 have formed masculine cultural norms and a differential treatment of Chinese women. This frequently creates a cultural gateway and thus challenges the entrepreneurial leadership of women. Considering the discussion in the above paragraph, this study indicates that Chinese policymakers can issue policies to lessen the impact of cultural gateways and promote female

entrepreneurial leadership by referencing Western culture and creating harmonious relationships in society.

The interaction between modernity and traditional culture as revealed in Section 4.3.3.1.1 affects the entrepreneurial leadership of Chinese women. Their effects on men and women, however, are distinct. Modernity enables women in China to participate in social activities with the same social identity as men. However, Western research indicates that cultural modernity, encompassing gender-progressive policies, social practices, and attitudes, is correlated with increased gender segregation (Charles, 1992, 2011; Gaston & Blackburn, 2000; Jacobs & Lim, 1992; Roos, 1985). Consequently, this study infers that cultural modernity implies cultural looseness in the Chinese context but reflects cultural tightness in the Western context. By contrast, traditional Chinese culture requires women to continue their traditional roles within the family and does not encourage women to engage in social activities as men do. The present Western research also suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders endure various duties and roles, such as business and family, resulting in heavier life stress than male entrepreneurs (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001; Ufuk & Özgen, 2001). Therefore, the findings in Section 4.3.3.1.1 indicate that modernity encourages Chinese women to pursue entrepreneurial endeavours as a career path. To some extent, the contrasting values of modernity and traditional culture generate two types of opposing power to open or close the cultural gateway. This study suggests that Chinese policymakers need to alleviate cultural tightness by creating an entrepreneurial context with less tradition but more modernity.

## 5.2.2 To Female Entrepreneurial Leaders

This study in this section mainly affords three recommendations to female entrepreneurial leaders: adjusting risk aversion for survival, improving the ability of resilience, and selecting cultural looseness.

#### 5.2.2.1 Adjusting Risk Aversion for Survival

Female entrepreneurial leadership requires women leaders to have both abilities of entrepreneurship and leadership as discussed in Section 2.1.1.3.1. For entrepreneurship, it means the threshold of risk aversion. The higher threshold of risk aversion indicated the higher level of psychological adaptation of resilience as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.4. For leadership, it means the ability to lead followers to achieve organisational goals. Therefore, entrepreneurial leadership requires the ability to combine of both risk-taking and leading followers (Kuratko, 2018, p. 219). Risk aversion is a personal characteristic of being situational-oriented. In a real business context, entrepreneurial mindsets are complex and integrate the three types of entrepreneurial mindset (Subramaniam & Shankar, 2020) as mentioned in Section 5.1.3.1. The point here is which type is the main weight over the integrated entrepreneurial mindsets. Thus, this study recommends that female entrepreneurial leaders need to trade off risk and profit when assessing the opportunities and challenges aroused by institutional uncertainty.

Female entrepreneurial leaders' risk aversion and response to risk, as discussed in Section 2.1.1.2.2, are different from their male counterparts. The profound reason lies in the distinguished risk thresholds between female and male entrepreneurial leaders. This study interprets the difference by utilising Markus (1977); Markus et al. (1982) and her colleague's studies on self and personality through cognitive approaches (Markus & Oyserman, 1989, p. 102). Their research suggests that the self-structure

nature determines the information processing pattern of self and others' cognitive conception. Specifically, the cognition of self-structure is an individual's self-schemata that could detect which information is of priority or insensitive. Therefore, the self-schemata references between women and men distinguish them from each other. For example, women are more sensitive to contextual change as reported in Section 4.3.1.4. Hence, women and men have different psychological adaptation to one thing. Western research suggests that higher levels of optimism indicate higher psychological adaptations (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992; Perera & McIlveen, 2014), further implying cognitive-evaluative and affective-emotional well-being (Lent, 2004, as cited in Perera & McIlveen, 2014). Thus, this study recommends that optimism is one necessary self-schemata for female entrepreneurial leaders to counter risk.

A feasible method for increasing optimism is to repurpose psychological reactance. Berger (2020) argued that respecting the needs for freedom and autonomy can repurpose reactance. In addition, respecting autonomy is truly significant for feminism (Nie et al., 2023). To some extent, female entrepreneurial leaders' risk aversion and autonomy reflect their reactance. Thus, this study suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders can emphasise and retrospect their needs for freedom and autonomy in a context with cultural looseness to adjust their risk aversion.

#### 5.2.2.2 Improving Ability of Resilience

Institutional uncertainty cannot be avoided, but female entrepreneurial leaders can face it with resiliency as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.4. To some extent, institutional uncertainty means the unpredictability that imposes constraints on female entrepreneurial leaders. However, in the interpretivist view, institutional uncertainty is attributed to the bounded rationality of individuals and their insufficient social

experience (Packard, 2017, p. 542). Therefore, as discussed in Section 2.1.1.1, this study recommends that female entrepreneurial leaders should have an entrepreneurial spirit and be resilient sufficiently to deal with uncertainty and constraints.

As discussed in Section 2.1.1.1, the institutional uncertainty propels female entrepreneurial leaders to take risks in a diversified space. However, in most instances, diversified space, as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.1, means a coexistence of cultural tightness and looseness, which entails the female entrepreneurial leader's creativity in solving conflicts resulting from uncertainty. This explanation implies skills adequacy, which refers to the sufficient extent that entrepreneurial leaders' capabilities match current tasks (Armanios et al., 2017a) in countering institutional uncertainty. As a result, this study suggests that adequate skills are essential for female entrepreneurial leaders to improve their resilience.

Because perseverance (i.e., resilience) and passion, as reported in Section 4.3.2.2, are the two new reference points for the entrepreneurial orientation scale at an individual level (Santos et al., 2020), female entrepreneurial leaders can often keep calm and retain a stable status. On the one hand, perseverance is associated with the insistence on pursuing goals in adversity (Santos et al., 2020; Van Gelderen, 2012); on the other hand, as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.4, passion is at the core of entrepreneurial leadership (Cardon et al., 2005; Santos et al., 2020). Female entrepreneurial leaders should have a mix of perseverance and passion for managing trial and error.

Female entrepreneurial behaviour is doing-led. In detail, entrepreneurial behaviour, as discussed in Section 2.2.2.1.2 and reported in Section 4.3.1.4, refers to the specific execution of a personal assignment or activity required to launch, expand, and transform an entrepreneurial enterprise (Bird and Schjoedt, 2009, p.328, as cited in

Volery & Mueller, 2018, p. 134). Compared with traditional-working women, a female entrepreneurial leader has a higher ability to practice and realise innovative ideas. Hence, the present study proposes that entrepreneurial leadership means the ability to inspire entrepreneurial action (Kuratko, 2018, p. 219; McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). At this point, female entrepreneur leaders are often sensitive to responding to institutional uncertainty and its related scenarios as revealed in Section 4.3.3.2.4. However, the data in section 4.3.3.2.2 reveals that female entrepreneurial leaders are good at using soft power, which is a kind of influence where leaders use equivocal or autonomy-supportive tactics to achieve goals (Bélanger et al., 2015). Thus, this study recommends that female entrepreneurial leaders need to use soft power practically to improve resilient skills.

#### 5.2.2.3 Creating Organisational Cultural Looseness

This study recommends that female entrepreneurial leaders can create organisational cultural looseness, as reported in Section 4.4, to develop their enterprises. This is because those female entrepreneurial leaders and their followers often face cultural tightness in modern China. This cultural tightness, as discussed in Sections 2.1.1.3.1 and 2.2.1.2.1, means they often need to obey social norms and avoid punishment from public opinion. The present research compared Chinese participants with American participants and found that a Chinese individual appointed to a top position in an organisation would probably punish others who behaved with uncooperative tendencies (Kuwabara et al., 2016; Miyamoto et al., 2018, p. 440). This comparison finding may illustrate that Chinese individuals with higher socioeconomic status tend to create cultural tightness in their enterprises. Although Chinese individuals of higher socioeconomic status often have a prosocial personality (Henrich et al., 2006;



Miyamoto et al., 2018) and emphasise social responsibility (Miyamoto et al., 2018), the profound reason of the above comparison findings lies in the cultural tightness, as discussed in Section 2.1.1.3.1, that requires organisation members to obey the rule and discipline to maintain the organisational interests.

The behaviours of female entrepreneurial leaders are tremendously affected by the cultural tightness-looseness as discussed in Section 2.2.1.2. For entrepreneurial leaders, there are four identified behaviours: appropriating enough time for exploration activities, empowering organisation change, activating others to join in, and focusing on the market and human resources (Volery & Mueller, 2018). The previous study across cultural contexts found that individuals of higher social hierarchy (e.g. higher educational attainment, higher socioeconomic status) in Chinese culture tend to have more dominant behaviour than in American culture (Kuwabara et al., 2016; Park et al., 2013, as cited in Miyamoto et al., 2018, p. 440). Furthermore, Western scholars argue that the prevalence of hierarchy can inhibit innovation (Kostis, 2021). This is because the prevalence of hierarchy implies cultural tightness, which constrains innovation, as discussed in Section 5.1.1.4. Similarly, the findings as reported in Section 4.3.3.3 reveal that sociocultural gradients connect with innovation and development levels. This means that the cultural looseness can benefit the innovation and development. On account of this point, the findings in Section 4.3.3.2.2 imply that soft power as a reflection of cultural looseness can facilitate innovation and development in an entrepreneurial enterprise. The extant research also supports this idea with a discovery that soft power can inspire followers' satisfied motivation to a higher level (Kelly, 2021). Thus, this study suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders in China need to create

cultural looseness in their enterprises by using soft power through the four identified behaviours to release their potential capacity.

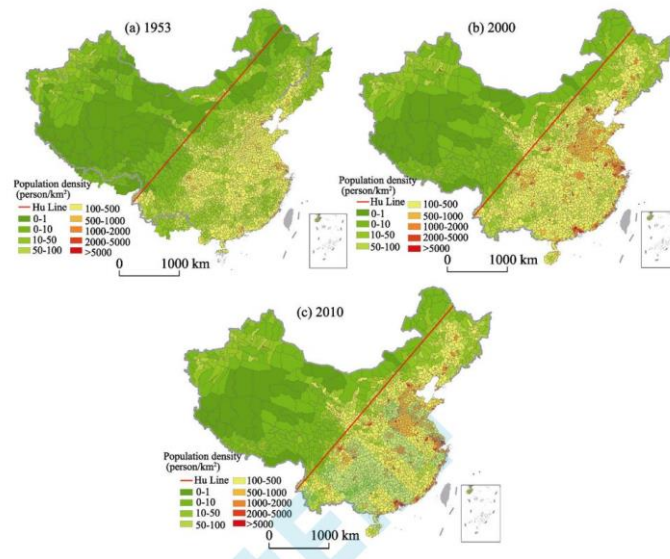
### 5.2.3 To Chinese Non-Entrepreneurial Women

In this section, this study recommends that non-entrepreneurial women in the Chinese context can reference the model proposed in Section 5.1.1 to identify cultural gateways and consider what they can do to surpass the cultural gateways.

#### 5.2.3.1 Identifying Cultural Gateways

This study suggests that Chinese non-entrepreneurial women should concern the geographic cultures, as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.3, between the left and the right of the ‘Hu Huanyong line’ (see Figure 7) when pursuing their entrepreneurial goals. This geographical separation is represented by the ‘Hu Huanyong Line’, which refers to a virtual line starting from Hei Longjiang province to Yunnan province, with a reflection of China’s population-geographical boundary that the demographic distribution varies between the two sides of the virtual line (Chen et al., 2016, p. 1599). On the right, which corresponds to eastern and southern China, the demographics make up the most significant proportion of the population. On the left, which corresponds to northern and western China, demographics account for a small proportion of the population. The extant research also finds that a 2017 Chinese Women Entrepreneurs Survey illustrated that 66% of female entrepreneurial leaders established their enterprises in the regions of eastern China (Cooke & Xiao, 2021; Li et al., 2017). Therefore, the findings of geographic culture, as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.3, coincide with the “Huanyong Line”.

Figure 7 The Hu Huanyong Line



Source: Chen et al. (2016, p. 1599)

Even on the Hu Huanyong Line's right area, there are cultural differences between urban and rural regions. This is because rural Chinese women frequently face issues of physiological necessity (water and food) and safety needs (basic financial and security). This finding reported in Section 4.3.1.2 is consistent with the extant research on what Coffman and Sunny (2021) clarified about needs-based entrepreneurship. The findings of this study as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.3 indicate that girls in cities tend to have an entrepreneurial mindset, whereas girls in villages tend to have a traditional working mindset. Therefore, the cultural difference between urban and rural regions often forms a cultural gateway, which affects whether Chinese women have an entrepreneurial mindset.

To an extent, entrepreneurial opportunity often largely emerges in urban areas and further formulates a region-entrepreneurial ecosystem, which can drive local women to have an entrepreneurial mindset. The difference discussed above supports the extant

research that shows an entrepreneurial mindset is reflected in their entrepreneurial spirit, which depends on the national cultures (Boissin et al., 2009; Morales et al., 2022). The extant research views entrepreneurial mindset as the essence of entrepreneurial leadership (Kuratko, 2018, p. 223). A possible interpretation is that people in rural areas are influenced more by traditional cultural inertia, as discussed in Section 2.1.2.4, whereas people in urban areas are influenced more by capitalist culture (Zhang et al., 2012). This interpretation indicates that urban areas are more conducive to Chinese non-entrepreneurial women starting businesses than rural areas. Thus, Chinese non-entrepreneurial women who aspire to become entrepreneurial leaders should identify the cultural gateways formulated by the geographic cultures.

The findings of geographical cultures as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.3 also subsequently imply the contextual relevance to female entrepreneurial leaders. Context relevance is defined by the extant research as meaning whether their acquired abilities match the context in which they engaged (Armanios et al., 2017b). This point of view shows evidence to the cultural gateway, as reported in Sections 4.3 and 4.4, that influences Chinese women. However, the match extent is affected by government policies in different regions. For example, the open and reform policy, as discussed in Section 2.1.2.1, was implemented in China's coastal cities as a pilot study. Especially, the free market policy, which is one element of the open and reform policy, stimulates non-entrepreneurial women because it has brought entrepreneurial opportunities (Zapalska, 1997). This policy has profoundly affected Chinese non-entrepreneurial women to acquire entrepreneurial abilities in these coastal cities, distinguishing them from non-entrepreneurial women in other areas where the open and reform policy does not apply.

This difference of contextual relevance can be ascribed to geographical culture influencing the formation of people's distinct psychological adaptation in these regions of China. Consequently, as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.3, this geographic-cultural influence can directly affect whether non-entrepreneurial women engage in entrepreneurial enterprises and their related economic development (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2017; Morales et al., 2022). People in southeastern China, for instance, generate an entrepreneurial mindset because of a culture of liberalism, whereas those in the remaining regions of China generate a traditional working mindset because of a culture of conservatism. However, as reported in Section 4.3, their mindsets and behaviours that are beyond the reality of gender (Huseyinzadegan et al., 2020; Namaste, 1996) will let them face the challenges. This analysis suggests that Chinese women who aspire to be entrepreneurial leaders should consider the impact of their geographic culture on their mindset. The findings of the sociocultural gradients as reported in Section 4.3.3.3 also support this suggestion. Similarly, the extant research shows that geographic position shapes cultural boundaries, in which their lifestyle is involved (Lamont et al., 1996). Thus, this study recommends that Chinese women need to identify cultural gateways by finding a suitable environment with an entrepreneurial atmosphere that makes it viable for them to be female entrepreneurial leaders.

In various regions of China, the geographic culture reflects a cultural tightness-looseness, as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.3, that influences female entrepreneurial leadership differently. Geographic culture with cultural looseness facilitates the possibility of a cultural gateway opening for Chinese women in the field of entrepreneurship. For example, this study's finding of 'Dili' as reported in Section 4.2.2 (Horváth, 2022) indicates that in the coastal region of southeastern China, the liberal

culture fosters the growth of entrepreneurial leadership. Remarkably, the liberal culture has no restrictions on women. Therefore, female entrepreneurial leadership can flourish in an inclusive environment. This differs from the female entrepreneurial leadership in Hu Huanyong Line's left-side regions, as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.3, because the conservative culture with cultural tightness still permeates the left side. Western scholars also support this point of view that men and women in some conservative cultural contexts are often accustomed to separate spheres, with each having scoped responsibilities, roles, and expectations, whereas they are not separated in liberal cultural contexts (Markus, 2021). Consequently, this study suggests that Chinese women who desire to be female entrepreneurial leaders need to identify conservative and liberal areas.

#### 5.2.3.2 Surpassing Cultural Gateway

Due to the far-ranging cultural tightness, as discussed in Section 2.1.1.3.1, this study recommends that women can empower themselves to surpass the cultural gateway. The cultural gateways created in various geographic areas impact women with various oriented cultural values. In the traditional cultural context, women are often positioned as the affiliate socioeconomic status, as discussed in Section 2.1.2.4, while men are positioned as the dominant socioeconomic status. This difference creates a cultural gateway that often becomes a reference point for people's judgement on inequality (Fiske & Markus, 2012, p. 132). Consequently, the cultural gateway is frequently closed to women but open to men, which, as a result, indicates that women need to empower themselves to surpass the cultural gateway.

However, in modern China, the cultural gateway has gradually collapsed due to women and men being positioned at equal socioeconomic status, as reported in Sections

4.3.3.4.1 and 4.3.3.4.2. This situation is congruent with the extant Western findings that living in prosperous countries makes women more able to afford the material expenses to pursue their occupational goals (Charles, 2011). The collapsing cultural gateway reversely shows an interpretation to the question as reported in Section 2.2.1.2.3: why has the equality thought of Taiji not been implemented in socioeconomic practice? This is because the cultural gateway in Chinese ancient times with a low socioeconomic level is stronger than that in modern times with a high socioeconomic level. The relationship between cultural gateway and socioeconomic level reveals that Chinese non-entrepreneurial women could also surpass cultural gateway.

Although modern and traditional cultures, as reported in Section 2.1.2.4, coexist in both the undeveloped socioeconomic region and the socioeconomically developed region, the difference between them lies in which cultural gateway is dominant and the mainstream. For example, this study's findings on geographic culture as reported in Section 4.3.3.1.3 support the point that female entrepreneurial leaders in the socioeconomically underdeveloped regions (e.g., the north-west region in China) tend to have more other-oriented cultural values than self-oriented cultural values. The extant research discovered that other-oriented values tend to conform to the interdependent views of the self (Miyamoto et al., 2018).

Female entrepreneurial leaders in the socioeconomically developed areas (e.g., the east region, particularly the south-east coastal region in China) tend to be more self-oriented in their cultural values than other-oriented. Western research also reveals that contextual responsiveness could shape patterns of self (i.e., independent-self, interdependent-self), which means the constantly evolving sense of self (i.e., psychological adaptation) in the essential position of personal experiences (Markus & Oyserman, 1989; Markus &

Conner, 2013; Markus & Kitayama, 2010a; Stephens et al., 2014, p. 612). Consequently, this study suggests that Chinese women could actively surpass the cultural gateway by concerning the contextual responsiveness to their patterns of self (Stephens et al., 2014) and having more other-oriented cultural values than self-oriented ones.

#### 5.2.4 To the West

From the cross-cultural perspective that Western and Chinese cultures mutually communicate, this study can further recommend a point of convergence between the two cultures to Westerners. Consequently, the following suggestions are made in this section:

##### 5.2.4.1 Adapting Collectivism Based on Individualism.

The essential point of both collectivism and individualism as discussed in Sections 2.2.2.1.1.1 and reported in Section 4.3.3.1.4 is how one's value and personal benefit position in a group, which distinguishes Western and Chinese people's preference for individualism or collectivism. For example, a people-centred vision of Chinese traditional culture: 'Tian Xia Wei Gong', which means that 'the world for the public' emphasises collectivism in society (Yun & Zhao, 2022). Another people-centred vision of Chinese traditional culture: 'Dao Ji Tian Xia', which means that 'serve all people by following truth and justice' (Sun, 2022) calls for a leader to serve all people. Collectivism in China can often generate a cultural gateway in an enterprise that binds up staff's mindsets and behaviours. When one staff member's mindset or behaviour is incongruent with the leader's order, the cultural gateway would be occluded or closed to the staff. Therefore, they have to always agree with their leaders to improve their group efficacy, which is an indicator of their collective behaviour (Becker et al., 2017).



Thus, this study suggests that the concentration of leaders' authority based on collectivism can create a dynamic for an enterprise.

However, the cultural gateway caused by collectivism as reported in Section 4.4 makes it challenging to have innovative activities in an enterprise. This can then make female entrepreneurial leaders difficult to seek innovative ideas from outgroup followers who are outside the cultural gateway, as reported in Sections 4.3.2.1 and 4.3.3.1.4. Contrarily, the Western idea of individualism is the basis of modern egalitarian norms (Charles, 2011, p. 356), which further benefits innovative action. However, there is a trend that collectivism decreases and individualism increases in modern China, as discussed in Section 2.1.2.1 and reported in Section 4.3.3.1.4. Individualism consequently often leads to decentration in group activities. Although this decentration enables individuals to exert their innovative mindset and behaviour, it also leads to low group efficacy. Thus, this study suggests that Western female entrepreneurial leaders can accept collectivism based on individualism to cope with the optimisation between group efficacy and innovative activities in the enterprise.

The finding of this study as reported in Section 4.3 implies that collectivism and individualism formulate different cultural gateways for Western and Chinese women, which reflects the distinct order of their concerns: reason, affection, and law. The law as the social machinery and the mainstream of American culture (Fiske & Markus, 2012, p. 87) is the highest priority for Westerners, followed by reason and affection. However, affection is typically the highest priority for Chinese people, followed by logic and the law. Westerners emphasise a teamwork spirit based on rules, whereas Chinese people emphasise a teamwork spirit based on affection. Based on the discussions of collectivism and individualism in Sections 2.1.2.1 and 2.1.2.2, this study recommends

that Western people can adjust the proportion of collectivism and individualism in an organisation to ensure the cultural gateway is opened to members in teamwork.

The findings in Section 4.3.2.3 support the extant research showing that women leaders converge in stressing the significance of team cultivation (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). As a finding of collectivism in the Chinese context reported in Section 4.3.2.2, female entrepreneurial leadership formulates the family-oriented culture. This culture objectively generates a centripetal force among followers. However, individualism produces centrifugal force. Thus, a spirit of teamwork based on meticulous communication skills and affinity for all team members, as reported in Section 4.3.3.2.2, is required to resist centrifugal force. The extant research also suggests that when other approaches are ineffective, leaders should notice the effect of soft power (Kelly, 2021). Consequently, this study recommends that Western women adjust their order of concerns, as discussed in the above paragraph, in different situations and use their soft power to adapt collectivism based on individualism.

#### 5.2.4.2 Clan-supported Self-development

The self-development of female entrepreneurial leaders in China is a common goal for themselves and the whole family or clan, as reported in Section 4.3.1.2. However, when exploring the relationship between family and business in Section 4.3.1.1, this study finds that the extant research concludes that Western culture often categorises women in business as irrelevant and independent from their families (Blackburn & Kovalainen, 2009; Kovalainen, 2004; Sharma, 2004). Family in a Western context is valued and rewarded with stereotypically feminine characteristics (e.g., a caretaker for foster children) (Croft, Schmader, & Block, 2015, Wood & Eagly, 2012, as cited in Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1032).

The reason for Chinese women is often ascribed to the point, as discussed in Section 2.2.1.2.2, that the Confucian culture emphasises other-oriented cultures in family or clan (Jiazu, 家族, in Chinese) and society. For example, Confucian culture advocates ‘honouring other people’s parents as we do our own; caring for other people’s children as they were our own’ (Lao Wu Lao, Yi Ji Ren Zhi Lao, You Wu You, Yi Ji Ren Zhi You, 老吾老以及人之老, 幼吾幼以及人之幼, in Chinese) (Xiao & Chong, 2023); this classic saying reflects that Chinese individuals with higher capacities usually adhere to the belief of serving and supporting clans and society. This saying also reflects their ability and responsibility in family and society, as reported in Section 4.3.1.2. Additionally, due to the traditional complicated and intertwined structure inside the Chinese clan, being interdependent to deal with relationships with other family members is a necessary option.

Western scholars also recognise the significance of family and its support in the feasibility of being entrepreneurial leaders (Lingas, 2013, as cited in Choudhury & Mandal, 2021; Morales et al., 2022), especially during the prelaunch and launch phases (Morales et al., 2022). Each Chinese individual in the family or clan needs to take care of others to acquire self-development space. In particular, the findings of family-oriented culture reported in Section 4.3.2.2 support the extant research, which argues that when the Chinese deal with issues, the concept of collective, such as clan, village, and especially family (Nisbett, 2003, p. 5), plays an important role. Specifically, Chinese individuals are concerned with their family members or relatives. Conversely, female entrepreneurial leaders can get support from their families or clans. Therefore, this study recommends that clan-supported self-development can be referenced by Western people.

#### 5.2.4.3 Bridging the West and China

The finding of this study, as reported in Section 4.1, implies that the shared common value of female entrepreneurial leadership can bridge the cultural divide between the West and China. Though not without boundaries, the Western and Chinese cultures with different values and emphases have transcended their differences in global times (Albrow, 2018). Specifically, the value of being a female entrepreneurial leader first lies in its influence on the career selection of Chinese and Western women. To some extent, female entrepreneurial leaders could serve as a reference point for women to assess the advantages and disadvantages (Kahneman, 1992, p. 298) and further identify the challenges and opportunities of being entrepreneurs. Western scholars find that entrepreneurial enterprises owned by Asian women often have a lower failure rate than those owned by men (Kitching & Jackson, 2002). This comparison shows women's advantage in operating enterprises, which is probably ascribed to the Asian women's culture with characteristics of being prudent and resilient, as reported in Sections 4.2.3 and 4.3.3.2.2. However, due to the high risk and mortality of start-ups, as discussed in Section 2.1.1.3.2 and reported in Section 4.2.3, a minority of women dare to engage in entrepreneurial activities in a China context.

The fundamental reason that women concern themselves with being entrepreneurial leaders lies in their socioeconomic status as reported in Section 4.3.3.2. This means they require a socioeconomic underpinning and a guardrail from family (Hemmert et al., 2021b) for their career decision. As reported in Section 1.4, Western scholars argue that an entrepreneurial leader is highly likely to have entrepreneurial parents (Malach-Pines & Schwartz, 2008). Similarly, the findings in Section 4.3.1.2 also reveal the importance of family support and background. However, as reported in Section

4.3.3.2.3, when having a baby, the majority of women are reluctant to engage in entrepreneurial activities because maintaining their family's stability are their priorities. Consequently, the successful female entrepreneurial leaders can set an example for Chinese non-entrepreneurial women: there is another alternative to realise their career goal or the ideal of life.

The family-oriented organisational culture as reported in Section 4.3.2.2, which reflects a harmonious culture in China, can be a reference to the daily operation of a Western enterprise. The family-oriented organisational culture as a contextual responsiveness affects an individual's psychological self (Stephens et al., 2014) and behavioural orientations. According to the extant study by Miyamoto et al. (2018, p. p.339), modern China is a historically accumulated cultural meaning system that advocates the interdependent relationships and self-improvement in all aspects of life and contributes to society.

This Confucian cultural meaning system is shown in Figure 4 as reported in Section 3.2.4. This system signifies that both other-oriented values and self-oriented values have been virtue doctrines in China contexts. Due to this traditional culture inertia, as discussed in Section 2.1.2.4, female entrepreneurial leaders still need to behave to conform to other-oriented and self-oriented values. However, the Figure 4, reported in Section 3.2.4, reveals that the level of socioeconomic status can influence Chinese people's proactiveness in balancing other-oriented value and self-oriented value. This means that the level of socioeconomic status in fact formulates a cultural gateway to those Chinese women who are in low socioeconomic status in entrepreneurial activities.

From the perspective of cultural psychology discussed in Section 2.2.1.2, the above discussion is supported by Western research, which demonstrates that Confucian ideas,

characterised by an interdependent view of the self, have historically been influential in Eastern cultural contexts, whereas individuals in Frontier or American cultural contexts often have an independent view of the self (Miyamoto et al., 2018). However, the findings of family-oriented culture reported in Section 4.3.2.2 show a reference to Western women in formulating value orientation. Consequently, this study recommends that both Chinese and Western women need to notice the different value orientations to reduce the influences of a cultural gateway formulated by the levels of socioeconomic status.

### 5.3 Summarises of the Discussions.

#### 5.3.1 The external and internal determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership

This study clusters the determinants of success in entrepreneurship and then divides them into the categories of external and internal determinants. The external determinants of success in entrepreneurship that influence female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China are classified into three levels, such as the micro-level, meso-level, and macro-level. Specifically, the external determinants at micro-level includes business-family balance and work, family support and work, and self-cultivation to learn; the external determinants at meso-level includes other-oriented culture and self-oriented culture, family-oriented culture, and teamwork and team cultivation; the external determinants at the macro-level includes four aspects of determinants, such as sociocultural determinants (e.g., cultural diversity, social inertia and culture inertia, geographic culture and cultural divides, and a shift from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism), socioeconomic determinants (e.g., social class, social networks, government policy, and institutional

uncertainty), entrepreneurial context, and feminist determinants (e.g., feminist status quo and feminist influences).

The external determinants of inherent cultural tightness or looseness often formulate cultural gateways towards female entrepreneurial leaders. When an external determinant of inherent cultural tightness plays a main role in embarking on enterprises, the cultural gateways are closed to female entrepreneurial leaders. In contrast, when an external determinant of inherent cultural looseness plays a central role in embarking on enterprises, the cultural gateways are open to female entrepreneurial leaders. As a result, the external determinants influence female entrepreneurial leaders through the formulated cultural gateways with the status of being open or closed. This interpretation provides an answer to the 1.1 sub-question, as proposed in Section 1.2.

The internal determinants of success in entrepreneurship only have two determinants: the mindsets and confidence of female entrepreneurial leaders in modern China. The internal determinants often reflect female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation. When female entrepreneurial leaders are full of entrepreneurial mindsets rather than traditional working mindsets and are full of confidence in entrepreneurial activities, their psychological adaptation accordingly is high, and they are thereby capable of dealing with external influences. In contrast, when female entrepreneurial leaders are short on entrepreneurial mindsets rather than traditional working mindsets and are short on confidence in entrepreneurial activities, their psychological adaptation accordingly is low, and they thereby are less capable of dealing with external influences. This interpretation provides an answer to the 1.2 sub-question, as proposed in Section 1.2.

From the above interpretations, this study argues that the determinants influence female entrepreneurial leaders by internally formulating psychological adaptation and externally formulating cultural gateways. Especially, the external influences depend on the cultural gateways at different levels. From the interactional level to the institutional level and then to the idea level, the strengths of the cultural gateways increase accordingly. As a result, the influential extent of these external determinants increases along with the increasing levels of cultural gateways.

### 5.3.2 The interaction between the external and internal determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership

This study investigates the interaction mechanism between the external and internal determinants of success in entrepreneurship and configures the model of female entrepreneurial leadership to identify the opportunities and challenges. Specifically, the external and internal determinants interact through the mutual relationship between cultural gateways and female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation. This study subsequently interprets whether the psychological adaptation and cultural gateways match or mismatch will lead to opportunities or challenges that influence female entrepreneurial leaders. This interpretation provides an answer to the 2<sup>nd</sup> sub-question.

Considering there are two statuses of cultural gateways (i.e., the closed and open statuses) and two levels of female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation (i.e., the high and low levels), this study thereby investigates that the configuration of the cultural gateways and psychological adaptations is involved in four kinds of situations, such as the situation of challenges, the situation of conditional challenges, the situation



of conditional opportunities, and the situation of opportunities. These four kinds of situations are displayed as a matrix in Table 38 (see Appendix A16). This study thereby classifies the match or mismatch between psychological adaptation and cultural gateways into four kinds of situations, showing as follows:

- i) when the high psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders confronts the open cultural gateways, the external and internal determinants will formulate a situation of opportunities for female entrepreneurial leaders.
- ii) when the low psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders confronts the open cultural gateways, the external and internal determinants will formulate a situation of conditional opportunities for female entrepreneurial leaders.

The above interpretation of the two situations (i.e., i and ii) provides an answer to 2.1 sub-question.

- iii) when the high psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders confronts the closed cultural gateways, the external and internal determinants will formulate a situation of conditional opportunities for female entrepreneurial leaders.
- iv) when the low psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders confronts the closed cultural gateways, the external and internal determinants will formulate a situation of challenges for female entrepreneurial leaders.

The above interpretation of the two situations (i.e., iii and iv) provides an answer to 2.2 sub-question.

Based on the above analysis and discussions, this study provides a model (see Figure 5) for female entrepreneurial leaders for identifying and seizing opportunities and

challenges. That is, when the external determinants inherent looseness formulate an open cultural gateway, female entrepreneurial leaders can identify opportunities based on their high psychological adaptation or conditional opportunities based on their low psychological adaptation; when the external determinants inherent tightness formulate a closed cultural gateway, female entrepreneurial leaders can identify challenges based on their low psychological adaptation or conditional challenges based on their high psychological adaptation. This interpretation of the model (see Figure 5) provides an answer to the Research Question reported in Section 1.2.

### 5.3.3 Family-oriented Culture

A key finding of this study is the identification of a family-oriented culture, which has not been found in Western research. Family-oriented culture reflects female entrepreneurial leaders' familial concepts that expand from family to organisational situations and be transformed into the other-oriented culture. Referencing the cultural meaning system (see Figure 4), family-oriented culture is the cultural consistency of Confucian culture, which embodies the other-oriented value in both psychological processes and sociocultural practices.

Family-oriented culture reflects loose collectivism with a cultural looseness. However, a family-oriented culture objectively divides followers into ingroup followers and outgroup followers. This dividing of followers is attributed to the limited kinship and close friendship of female entrepreneurial leaders connecting with their followers. As a result, family-oriented culture forms an open cultural gateway to ingroup followers and a closed gateway to outgroup followers. However, female entrepreneurial leaders do not intend to divide followers into ingroups and outgroups. Because of the influence of

loose collectivism, female entrepreneurial leaders create a family-oriented culture to realise collective transcendence at the institutional level.

#### 5.3.4 Self-Transcendence and Psychological Adaptation

Female entrepreneurial leaders' self-transcendence means their psychological improvement at the individual level within the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3). On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders' self-transcendence is the external result of their psychological adaptation. Self-awareness is the starting point of self-transcendence; self-realisation is the process of self-transcendence; and the self-value is the achievement of self-transcendence. From the perspective of cultural psychology, the aims of female entrepreneurial leaders' self-transcendence are to surpass the cultural gateways at different levels, such as the interactional level, the institutional level, and the idea level within the Culture Cycle. However, because of the influences of the internalisation of the Culture Cycle, female entrepreneurial leaders' self-transcendence is inhibited by the three levels of the cultural gateways. Consequently, female entrepreneurial leaders' self-transcendence is the compromised result of the mutual influences of their psychological adaptation and cultural gateways.

#### 5.3.5 Collective Transcendence of Cultural Gateways

Due to the influences of loose collectivism, female entrepreneurial leaders endeavour to surpass the cultural gateways at the interactional level, the institutional level, and the idea level within their followers. On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders endeavour not only to realise self-transcendence but also to realise collective transcendence of the cultural gateways at different levels. Specifically, female entrepreneurial leaders' collective transcendence at the interactional level means they

surpass the cultural gateways at the interactional level; female entrepreneurial leaders' collective transcendence at the institutional level means they surpass the cultural gateways at the institutional level; and female entrepreneurial leaders' collective transcendence at the idea level means they surpass the cultural gateways at the idea level.

#### 5.3.6 Collective Transcendence of Gender Gateways

Due to the influences of loose collectivism, female entrepreneurial leaders endeavour to surpass the gender gateways at the interactional level, institutional level, and idea level within their followers. On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders endeavour not only to realize self-transcendence but also to realize collective transcendence of the gender gateways at different levels. Specifically, female entrepreneurial leaders' collective transcendence at the interactional level means they surpass the gender gateways at the interactional level; female entrepreneurial leaders' collective transcendence at the institutional level means they surpass the gender gateways at the institutional level; and female entrepreneurial leaders' collective transcendence at the idea level means they surpass the gender gateways at the idea level.

#### 5.3.7 Cultural Consistency and Psychological Consistency

Cultural consistency and psychological consistency are the preconditions for female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation to match the cultural gateway, as reported in Section 4.3.2.3. Cultural consistency means that female entrepreneurial leaders' collective transcendence of the cultural gateways at different levels needs to conform to the sociocultural norms of Confucian culture. For example, the family-oriented culture provides an example of loose collectivism that conforms to the other-oriented cultural value of the Confucian cultural meaning system. As a result, family-

oriented culture is the result of the cultural consistency of loose collectivism with which female entrepreneurial leaders endeavour to realise collective transcendence at the institutional level. Culture consistency, in its expansive scope, is evident in the assimilation of Western feminism. For example, Western feminism is assimilated and thereby transformed into Chinese feminism, which accepts liberal feminism but rejects radical feminism. This example shows cultural consistency at the idea level within the Culture Cycle. In contrast, radical feminism shows cultural inconsistency at the idea level within the Culture Cycle. On account of this point, cultural consistency is necessary for female entrepreneurial leaders to realise the collective transcendence of cultural gateways at different levels.

Psychological consistency means that female entrepreneurial leaders' self-transcendence needs their adhered value in psychological processes that conforms to the cultural values of the sociocultural norms of Confucian culture. The family-oriented culture provides an example of female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological consistency from the family to the organisational situation. On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation is a result of their psychological consistency across different situations. Without psychological consistency, female entrepreneurial leaders cannot psychologically adapt to the situations they are involved in. As a result, female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological consistency is a necessary condition for female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation. From the perspective of cultural psychology, psychological consistency and cultural consistency formulate a mutual relationship that is reflected in the cultural meaning system (see Figure 4) in both the Confucian culture and the Frontier culture.

This chapter mainly discusses the theoretical implications from the perspective of cultural psychology and proposes practical recommendations to policymakers, female entrepreneurial leaders, non-entrepreneurial women, and Westerners. On the aspect of theoretical implications, firstly, this chapter proposes a model for female entrepreneurial leaders to identify the opportunities and challenges. Specifically, the external and internal determinants often interact mutually, and that further influences how female entrepreneurial leaders identify opportunities and challenges. In most circumstances, the external determinants usually formulate a cultural gateway, which is normally opened or closed. The opened cultural gateway can be displayed as an opportunity, and the closed cultural gateway can be displayed as a challenge to female entrepreneurial leaders. Therefore, as discussed in Section 5.2.2, female entrepreneurial leaders need to adjust risk aversion and improve ability of resilience in order to make their psychological adaptation match the opened cultural gateway for identifying opportunities. Otherwise, the opened cultural gateway can still be a challenge for them.

Secondly, this chapter discusses the approaches for solving the challenges of female entrepreneurial leadership, such as achieving transcendence for survival and maintaining dynamic equilibration for sustainability. Thirdly, this chapter references the ‘Culture Cycle’, as discussed in Section 2.2.1.2.1, to elaborate on how female entrepreneurial leaders transform and compete in business activities at four levels. Based on these discussions, this study proposes that female entrepreneurial leadership is a transcendence of self (i.e., psychological adaptation) and a cultural gateway. This transcendence shows a feasible way for Chinese women to fulfil their self-development sustainably. This is why a Chinese woman should transcend self and cultural gateway to be an entrepreneurial leader by establishing a startup.

On the aspect of practical recommendations, firstly, this chapter affords two approaches to policymakers, such as creating cultural looseness and alleviating cultural tightness; Secondly, this chapter affords three approaches to female entrepreneurial leaders, such as adjusting risk aversion for survival, improving ability of resilience, and creating organisational cultural looseness; Thirdly, this chapter affords approaches to general Chinese women, such as identifying cultural gateways with a reference to the model proposed in Section 5.1.1, and surpassing the cultural gateways by empowering themselves and having more other-oriented value; Fourthly, this chapter proposes approaches for Westerners, such as accepting collectivism based on individualism, trying clan-supported self-development, and bringing the West and China together from a cross-cultural perspective.

## **Chapter VI Conclusion**

This chapter intends to systematically summarise and review the main findings and discussions of this study. The main findings and discussions focus on several key points: the family-oriented culture, the loose collectivism, the cultural gateway, the gender gateway, the psychological adaptation, the model that is based on a coupling structure between cultural gateway and psychological adaptation, self-transcendence and collective transcendence, and the geographic culture. These key points are recognised as a contribution to academic literature. Specifically, this study identifies that the opportunities and challenges of female entrepreneurial leaders are conceived in the mutual relationship between their psychological adaptation and cultural gateways. By improving their psychological adaption level and surpassing the cultural gateways at different levels, female entrepreneurial leaders realise self-transcendence and collective

transcendence, which contributes to the value of female entrepreneurial leadership. In addition, this chapter delineates the research contributions to policy and managerial practices and points out the research limitations required to be noted in future research. In general, the research issues, including the basic outcomes, research summaries, research contribution, theory limitations and future directions of female entrepreneurial leadership, are synthesised.

### 6.1 The Basic Outcomes

The basic outcomes are extracted from Chapters IV and V to answer the research question as proposed in Section 1.2. Firstly, this study explored the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership and classified them into the categories of external and internal determinants (see Table 34 in Appendix A14 and Tables 35, 36, and 37 in Appendix A15). The external determinants often play a facilitated or constrained role in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership. These two opposite roles mean cultural looseness and tightness, which can formulate a cultural gateway with an open or closed status. The cultural gateway can subsequently become opportunities or challenges for female entrepreneurial leaders. The internal determinants (i.e., mindsets and confidence) can affect the psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders. Consequently, these outcomes (see also Section 5.3.1) show an answer to Research Question 1, including the sub-questions 1.1 and 1.2.

Secondly, this study inferred that the external and internal determinants interact through a coupling structure between cultural gateway and psychological adaptation. This interaction means that when a cultural gateway is opened, if the psychological adaptation matches the opened cultural gateway, female entrepreneurial leaders can identify the real opportunities; if the psychological adaptation mismatches the opened



cultural gateway, female entrepreneurial leaders will find it hard to identify the opportunities. In this situation, the opportunities will become challenges for female entrepreneurial leaders. Therefore, these outcomes (see also Section 5.3.2) become an answer to Research Question 2, including sub-questions 2.1 and 2.2.

The above outcomes are reflected in the model of female entrepreneurial leadership, as reported in Figure 5, Section 5.1. This model comprehensively shows a structure as a response to the research question as proposed in Section 1.2. Based on these outcomes with a reference to the theoretical frameworks of the Cultural Cycle (see Figure 3), this study implies that female entrepreneurial leaders need self-transcendence and collective transcendence of cultural gateways at different levels to survive. Referencing Taoism (see Figure 6), this study infers that female entrepreneurial leaders need to maintain a dynamic equilibrium between psychological adaptation and cultural gateways for sustainability. Furthermore, this study, with a reference to the theoretical frameworks of Cultural Cycle (see Figure 3) and Cultural Meaning System (see Figure 4) discussed in Section 2.2.1.2.1, categorises these two theoretical frameworks, respectively, into the categories of cultural gateways and psychological adaptations. These two categorisations provide a deeper understanding of the two theoretical frameworks of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 19 in Appendix A17) and Cultural Meaning System (see Figure 20 in Appendix A18) and thereby show the generality of the model of female entrepreneurial leadership (see Figure 5).

## 6.2 Research Summaries

This study provides a fundamental interpretation of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context through interpretivist epistemology and an interpretive approach that is complex and vast, encompassing and highlighting a diversity of meaningful

activity (Bevir & Rhodes, 2012). Firstly, this study collects primary data by focusing on the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership across the individual, group, institutional, and societal levels (see Appendix A7). In addition, a thematical analysis approach is used to find the determinants and the differences and similarities between different themes. Finally, when the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership are collected and refined, this study references the Cultural Cycle (Markus & Conner, 2014, p. 16) to disclose the facilitators and constraints of female entrepreneurial leadership in the Chinese context at three levels.

At the micro-level (i.e., the individual level and interaction level in the Culture Cycle), female entrepreneurial leaders often lack confidence and need to balance family and business, which is one of their challenges. They, therefore, tend to reduce potential risk and increase their resilience by attempting to overcome vulnerability and transform themselves into productive neoliberal subjects (James et al., 2015; McAfee & Howard, 2022). This would subsequently influence their psychological adaptation. Due to the gender gateway, female entrepreneurial leaders suffer disadvantages when they expand social networks or acquire resources. This, in turn, can constrain female entrepreneurial leadership.

At the meso-level (i.e., the Institutional level in the culture cycle), female entrepreneurial leadership tends to create a family-oriented culture in their enterprises. This reveals the other-oriented value (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Miyamoto et al., 2018; Triandis, 1995) and its interdependent self-view (i.e., feeling that relationships with others are more significant than personal accomplishment (Singelis et al., 1995) of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China. This analysis result seems to contradict the effect of the macro-contextual trend, which tends towards individualism

and a focus on self-oriented values. Therefore, a reasonable interpretation is that the traditional cultural inertia still affected Chinese women's mindsets and exceeded the influence of the macro-contextual trend of individualism. However, the other-oriented value is constrained within the ingroup because of the cultural gateway formulated by the family-oriented culture reported in Section 4.3.2.2. This presents challenges for female entrepreneurial leaders regarding how to scale their businesses, while outgroup followers find it difficult to cross the cultural gateway.

At a macro level (i.e., the Idea level in the culture cycle), feminist development is less recognised by Chinese female entrepreneurial leaders. This may be attributed to the fact that Chinese feminists in tradition are nationalist (Barlow, 2004, p. 361), which means they are led and controlled by the Chinese government (Song, 2023), and, subsequently, their impact is weak on Chinese women's work and lives. When discussing their inclination towards feminism, they prefer liberal feminism to radical feminism. However, the entrepreneurial context has been formulated since the open and reform policy was released. This provided opportunities for Chinese women to start businesses. In addition, cultural diversity also facilitates organisational innovation and creativity because of its looseness (Gelfand et al., 2006) and inclusiveness for female entrepreneurial leaders.

However, when cultural diversity is mixed with geographic culture, female entrepreneurial leaders are promoted in the south-eastern areas and inhibited in the northern and western areas. This comparison reveals a cultural gateway caused by sociocultural gradient due to socioeconomic status. However, the fundamental reason is cultural inertia, which generally becomes a challenge for female entrepreneurial leaders. However, although cultural inertia implies that merely highlighting the need

for change would heighten threat and general unease, even intergroup hostility (Armenta et al., 2022), this dark side is weakened in the south-eastern area and strengthened in the northern and western areas. As a result, involuntary collectivism is weakened and turned into individualism in the south-eastern area. Meanwhile, individualism has already increased in northern and western areas.

### 6.3 Research Contribution

The research contribution of this study is based on the conceptualization and categorization of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) and cultural meaning system (see Figure 4). Through exploring the fundamentals of female entrepreneurial leadership, this study analyses the main facilitators and constraints, which are affected by both Chinese and Western sociocultural contexts (Welsh et al., 2018). In this section, the research contributions to academic literature, policy, and managerial practices are sorted out as follows:

#### 6.3.1 Research contribution to Academic Literature

This study contributes to the academic literature in five aspects, including family-oriented culture, cultural gateway, gender gateway, the model of female entrepreneurial leadership, and geographic culture. Each contribution provides a new interpretation of female entrepreneurial leadership and deepens understanding of cultural psychology when applied to analysing female entrepreneurial leadership. To comprehensively understand the five contributions, this study clarifies the advantages and disadvantages of each contribution in the subsequent dedicated subsections.

### 6.3.1.1 Family-Oriented Culture

Family-oriented culture is a new concept in the fields of organisational behaviour and entrepreneurial leadership compared with the existing literature. On account of this point, the innovation of this study lies in the findings on family-oriented culture, which is recognised as a special attribute of female entrepreneurial leadership. From the perspective of cultural psychology, this concept of family-oriented culture contributes to the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) at the institutional level. The basis of this concept is attributed to the findings of this study, as reported in Section 4.3.2.2, revealing that female entrepreneurial leaders often treat their followers as family members and thereby create a familiar atmosphere in their enterprises. As a result, this study proposes the concept of family-oriented culture to portray the unique organisational culture, which is also identified as a particular characteristic of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context.

Family-oriented culture in this study provides the latest cutting-edge knowledge in interpreting female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China. This means understanding female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China needs to notice the family-oriented culture as a breakthrough point. Family-oriented culture reflects the other-oriented cultural values of female entrepreneurial leaders in a Chinese context. The findings of family-oriented culture that other-oriented cultural values are inherent, as reported in Section 4.3.2.2, conform to the Confucian cultural meaning system (see Figure 4). On account of this point, family-oriented culture provides an example that reinforces the mutual relationship between the other-oriented psychological process and the other-oriented sociocultural practices. Referencing the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3), this study argues that the family-oriented culture embodies the bidirectional process between the individual level and the institutional level and formulates a circular path

within the Culture Cycle. Particularly, the family-oriented culture becomes a mark of female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context, creating a unique organisational culture that has no comparable findings in the Western context.

Family-oriented culture embodies the collective transcendence of both female entrepreneurial leaders and their followers. This analysis of family-oriented culture and female entrepreneurial leadership reinforces the argument that leadership is the interaction of comprehension and accountability instead of the traditional integration of position and authority (Drucker, as cited in Day, 2000). For example, the other-oriented cultural values inherent in family-oriented culture make female entrepreneurial leaders and their followers become an integrated team, as reported in Section 4.3.2.2. Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders create a shared community of spirit and material wealth. Through this approach, female entrepreneurial leaders and their followers realise collective transcendence in seizing the opportunities and overcoming the challenges that they encounter.

However, the concept of a family-oriented culture has its disadvantages. Firstly, the conceptual scope of family-oriented culture is still implicit. Female entrepreneurial leadership objectively divides followers into ingroups and outgroups because of the female entrepreneurial leaders' limited kinship and close friendship with only part of their followers. As a result, the family-oriented culture becomes a cultural gateway for outgroup followers. On account of this point, female entrepreneurial leaders only realise a collective transcendence that covers themselves and their ingroup followers. Consequently, the shortage of family-oriented culture creates challenges for their outgroup followers. Secondly, although the findings of family-oriented culture contribute to a new understanding of female entrepreneurial leadership in forming

organisational culture in a Chinese sociocultural context, this study only explores the particularity of family-oriented culture in a Chinese sociocultural context. Whether the family-oriented culture is adapted to the Western sociocultural context has not been explored.

#### 6.3.1.2 Cultural Gateway

This study proposes the concept of a cultural gateway to disclose the mechanism by which female entrepreneurial leaders identify opportunities and challenges in a Chinese context. The basis of this concept of cultural gateway is the cultural properties, such as cultural looseness and tightness, inherent in sociocultural norms. The findings of this study, as reported in Section 4.3, suggest that determinants play facilitative or constrained roles in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. The different roles of these determinants reflect cultural looseness or tightness, which conforms to the extant research conducted by Gelfand et al. (2021). Therefore, the concept of ‘cultural gateway’ is proposed to systematically interpret how the opportunities and challenges formulate.

The concept of cultural gateway is proposed in this study to uncover the dynamic change in cultural tightness and looseness inherent in the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership. This means that the facilitative or constrained roles of the determinants can change in different situations. For example, business-family balance, as reported in Section 4.3.1.1, is identified as a constrained determinant in influencing female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context. This situation is similar for female entrepreneurial leaders in a Western context. However, when female entrepreneurial leaders get family support, as reported in Section 4.3.1.2, the constrained roles of business-family balance will be detracted or even eliminated. As a

result, the cultural tightness caused by the traditional familial roles of women does not affect female entrepreneurial leaders. Contrarily, family support embodying cultural looseness can facilitate female entrepreneurial leaders in identifying and seizing opportunities. Therefore, the open or closed status of cultural gateways can precisely describe these changing situations of cultural tightness and looseness for female entrepreneurial leaders.

The concept of a cultural gateway is proposed in this study to disclose the probability that female entrepreneurial leaders can succeed in their entrepreneurial activities. Although female entrepreneurial leaders cannot avoid the influences of constrained determinants with cultural tightness, they can sufficiently use the facilitative determinants with cultural looseness to realise self-transcendence and collective transcendence within the Culture Cycle (see Figure) to pursue their entrepreneurial or career goals. The relative change in cultural tightness and looseness inherent in the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership shows a probability that they can succeed. Especially, the self-transcendence at the individual level of the Culture Cycle provides a chance for them to realise transcendence at the interactional level, the institutional level, and the idea level.

However, the concept of cultural gateway has its advantages when applied to interpreting the opportunities and challenges of female entrepreneurial leaders. Firstly, the strength of cultural gateway inherent in a certain determinant is a subjective assessment of female entrepreneurial leaders and is responded in their psychological adaptation. Therefore, the concept of the cultural gateway cannot precisely portray the culturally loose or tight influences of the facilitative or constrained determinants on female entrepreneurial leaders. Secondly, although cultural psychology is less applied to interpreting female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context, it has limitations



for transcultural application by directly transplanting related concepts such as cultural tightness and looseness into the Chinese context. Therefore, the basis of the concept of cultural gateway needs to be assessed when applied to female entrepreneurial leadership in a Chinese context.

#### 6.3.1.3 Gender Gateway

The concept of gender gateway is derived from the concept of cultural gateway. This study proposes the concept of gender gateway to describe the cultural tightness or looseness that female entrepreneurial leaders face in entrepreneurial activities. The gender gateway is mainly reflected in the traditional familial roles of women in the Chinese context when they embark on entrepreneurial enterprises. This study therefore finds a breakthrough point from the perspective of cultural psychology by reviewing and inferring from the research of Cheryan and Markus (2020, p. 1036). This means that masculine cultural defaults exist in the field of entrepreneurial leadership. Therefore, based on the findings of this study as reported in Section 4.3.3.4.1 and discussed in Sections 5.1.1.2 and 5.1.1.4, this study introduces the ‘cultural gateway’ to cover this research gap. In comparison to the Western context, there are similar cultural phenomena, such as differential treatment and masculine defaults (see also Figure 9, Appendix A4), in entrepreneurial fields.

As a sub-concept of the concept of ‘cultural gateway’, the concept of ‘gender gateway’ is proposed to interpret gender inequality, which can contribute to understand Chinese feminism. On the one hand, the concept of gender gateway reveals the difficulty of female entrepreneurial leaders in embarking on entrepreneurial activities. This is because contextual gateways (Stephens et al., 2014) often coincide with gender discrimination and feminism, which formulate a gender gateway for female

entrepreneurial leaders. Regarding male groups dominating socioeconomic status and mainstream cultural values, the gender gateway is typically closed or occluded to Chinese women. Given that gender inequality exists in social practices (Hay, 2011), the gender gateway is an analytical concept that is useful in interpreting female entrepreneurial leadership. As a result, the concept ‘gender gateway’ proposed in this study does not only interpret Chinese feminism but also assists with interpreting challenges to gender inequalities (Griffin et al., 2017, p. 2). On the other hand, the concept of gender gateway uncovers the probability of female entrepreneurial leaders in their self-transcendence and the collective transcendence with their followers. That is, the gender gateway can change with the evolution or progress of the sociocultural context and thereby tend to be open towards women in that context. Therefore, Chinese feminism can be recognised as a transcendence of ‘gender gateway’ at the idea level.

However, this study also needs to clarify the disadvantages of the concept of gender gateway. Firstly, the conceptual scope of gender gateway is too narrow to precisely depict the gender inequality that male groups confront in modern China. Regarding the gender gateway proposed on the basis of the gender inequality that females confront in modern China, the conceptual scope of the concept of gender gateway is constrained within the female group. However, as the findings in Sections 4.3.3.4.1 and 4.3.3.4.2 reported, Chinese male groups default on providing heavy assets such as houses and cars for their families. This gender inequality towards male groups is not covered by the concept of gender gateway. Secondly, although the phenomenon of gender gateways is found in Western contexts, the categories of gender gateways in Chinese and Western contexts have not been explored explicitly. Therefore, the difference in gender gateways in both the Chinese and Western contexts needs to be explored and clarified.

#### 6.3.1.4 The Model of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership

On the basis of the previous analysis in Sections 4.3 and 4.4 and the discussions in Section 5.1, this study constructs a model of female entrepreneurial leadership for identifying challenges and opportunities. This model of female entrepreneurial leadership is constructed as a contribution to cultural psychology. Specifically, this model of female entrepreneurial leadership discloses the mutual influences between female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation and cultural gateways. At the beginning, the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership are classified into three levels: the micro-level, the meso-level, and the macro-level. Then, according to their properties, this study divides the determinants into two categories, such as the category of cultural gateway and the category of psychological adaptations. As a result, the interrelationship among the determinants of female entrepreneurial leadership is transformed into a binary relationship between psychological adaptations and cultural gateways. Inspired by this analysis, this study categorises the four levels of Culture Cycle (i.e., Individuals, Interactions, Institutes, and Ideas) into the relationship between psychological adaptation (at the Individuals level) and cultural gateway (at the levels of Interactions, Institutes, and Ideas). As a result, the prominent and mainstream theory of cultural psychology (e.g., Culture Cycle) constructed within a Western context has laid a foundation in the research field of entrepreneurial leadership.

Referencing the categorisation of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) and the categorisation the cultural meaning system (see Figure 4), this study infers that the opportunities or challenges of female entrepreneurial leaders are attributed to the mutual relationship between their psychological adaptation and the cultural gateways.

This mutual relationship can further be specified into four situations (see Figure 5): i) the opportunities, when female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation is high and the cultural gateways are open; ii) the conditional opportunities, when female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation is high and the cultural gateways are open; iii) the conditional challenges, when female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation is high and the cultural gateways are closed; iv) the opportunities, when female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation is high and the cultural gateways are open.

The model of female entrepreneurial leadership has its expansive meaning in other circumstances. Because cultural tightness and looseness are expansively present in various sociocultural norms in both Chinese and Western contexts, the cultural gateways formulated by cultural tightness and looseness are thereby generally present in various circumstances. For example, each of the three levels (the interactional level, the institutional level, and the idea level) of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) is affected by the cultural tightness or looseness and thereby formulates the cultural gateways at three levels. The individual level of the Cultural Cycle (see Figure 3) reflects psychological adaptation. Therefore, the categorisation of the Culture Cycle (see Figure 19) uncovers the generality of this model of female entrepreneurial leadership. Additionally, the cultural meaning system (see Figure 4) conducted by the scholar Miyamoto et al. (2018) in a categorical way (see Figure 20) reflects the mutual relationship between psychological adaptation and cultural gateways. Consequently, the categorisation of the cultural meaning system in both Confucian and Frontier cultural contexts reinforces the generality of the model of female entrepreneurial leadership.

However, this study notices the disadvantages of this model of female entrepreneurial leadership. Although based on the Western theoretical foundation of Culture Cycle (see Figure 3) and cultural meaning system (see Figure 4) and the analysis in Sections 4.3, 4.4, and 5.1.1, the model of female entrepreneurial leadership (see Figure 5) has not been tested in Western empirical situations. Therefore, the research criteria such as actionability, scope, curiosity, significance, and novelty (Bansal & Corley, 2012) of this model in the Western context need to be assessed for exploring its generality.

#### 6.3.1.5 Geographic Culture

This study explores the opportunities and challenges of female entrepreneurial leadership in different regions of modern China from the perspective of cultural psychology. Geographic culture shows cultural tightness in the socioeconomically undeveloped regions and cultural looseness in the socioeconomically developed regions. On account of this point, this study infers that the geographic culture displays a cultural gradient from cultural tightness to cultural looseness across regions from the socioeconomically undeveloped regions (i.e., northwestern China) to the socioeconomically developing regions (i.e., central China) and then to the socioeconomically developed regions (i.e., southeastern China). As a result, geographic culture shows cultural gateways across the different socioeconomic development regions. This cultural gradient conforms to the Hu Huanyong Line (see Figure 7 in Section 5.2.3.1), which divided China into the socioeconomically undeveloped and developed regions according to the geographic conditions on mainland China. These findings of geographic culture are also reflected in the distribution of entrepreneurial leaders in the statistical data (see Table 2). Therefore, by discovering the cultural looseness and tightness of geographic cultures, this study recognises that surpassing the

cultural gateway generated by the geographic cultures is a practical path for women to choose life and realise emancipation (St-Arnaud & Giguère, 2018) in terms of self-transcendence and collective transcendence.

However, this study also notices the disadvantages of the findings about geographic culture. Because mainland China displays socioeconomic gradients from northwestern China to southeastern China, shown as the Hu Huanyong Line in Figure 7, the sociocultural distribution of cultural tightness and looseness is accordingly illustrated as a cultural gradient in mainland China. However, the findings of geographic culture may not exist in Western countries. As a result, although the particularity of the geographic culture in mainland China is investigated, the generality of geographic culture in Western and other contexts has not been explored.

### 6.3.2 Research Contribution to Policy

This study affords a new perspective on cultural psychology to understand current policies in terms of Chinese women and female entrepreneurial leaders. This means that Chinese policymakers need to evaluate the contextual tightness and looseness inherent in the geographic culture when making policies. The current policies, such as the family planning policy, the residency permit policy ('Hukou' in Chinese), and the childcare policy, are required to be classified according to the differences in geographic culture. For example, firstly, although the new family-planning policy has allowed the second child in a family, this policy brings cultural tightness to Chinese entrepreneurial or working-class women who live in urban areas when they face the dilemma between a competitive working environment and having a baby. If they plan to have a baby, they will face the risk of losing career development opportunities. However, this policy

generates cultural looseness for Chinese rural women or those who can acquire family support (see also Section 4.3.1.2). The cultural inertia of traditional familial concepts makes these women welcome this new family-planning policy. As a result, this policy needs to be adjusted to generate cultural looseness for Chinese entrepreneurial or working-class women who live in urban areas, such as by increasing the family allowance in the government budget for these women.

Secondly, the current residency permit policy constrains most Chinese people from moving from one place to another or from rural areas to urban areas. This policy generates cultural tightness with different strengths in rural areas and urban areas because it only allows those individuals who have a higher educational degree or have sufficient financial ability to buy a house in urban areas to move freely. As a result, this policy generates an open cultural gateway for those who live in urban areas or are in non-low social classes and a closed cultural gateway for those who live in rural areas and are in low social classes. For example, rural individuals can only live temporarily in urban areas and must apply for a Temporary Residence Permit from the local urban government. A serious situation for those who are temporary residents is that their children cannot access local primary schools, and they cannot enjoy the same medical insurance as local citizens. As a result, this current residency permit policy needs to be amended according to the cultural tightness and looseness inherent in the geographic culture.

Thirdly, the current childcare policy still lacks sufficient support for Chinese women, both financially and legally. When Chinese women struggle to develop their careers or operate their enterprises, they must face the business-family balance (see also Section 4.3.1.1). Therefore, Chinese working-class women or female entrepreneurial leaders

need to face the situations of whether they can acquire family support (see also Section 4.3.1.2). When they cannot acquire family support, the current childcare policy thereby needs to supply sufficient financial and legal support for them, such as reducing their personal income tax and increasing their statutory holiday. When they can acquire family support, the current childcare policy thereby needs to supply sufficient legal support for them, such as encouraging their family support in childcare. All these situations evidence that Chinese women and female entrepreneurial leaders often face contextual tightness. Therefore, Chinese policies need to be changed to create contextual looseness that benefits Chinese women and female entrepreneurial leaders.

This research can benefit Chinese policymakers by deepening their understanding of female entrepreneurial leadership through the application of the model in Figure 5. Chinese policymakers need to understand the difference in cultural gateways that are influenced by geographic cultures and the psychological adaptation of female entrepreneurial leaders who belong to different social classes. Additionally, policymakers need to know that one policy can play a nudging (Halpern, 2015) or catalyst (Berger, 2020) roles in influencing local socioeconomic and sociocultural development. The nudge means to increase push force, and the catalyst means to reduce resistance. Referencing the four situations displayed in Figure 5 and Table 38 (see Appendix A16), policymakers need to assess the role of policy in influencing female entrepreneurial leaders in different situations.

- i) The situation of challenges. Female entrepreneurial leaders who belong to the low social class and live in socioeconomically underdeveloped regions often face challenges. This is the weakest situation in comparison to the other three situations displayed in Figure 5. Policymakers facing this situation need to



release policies with both a nudge and a catalyst role in influencing female entrepreneurial leaders to overcome the challenges.

- ii) The situation of conditional challenges. Female entrepreneurial leaders who belong to the non-low social class and live in socioeconomically underdeveloped regions often face conditional challenges. This is the weaker situation in comparison to the other three situations displayed in Figure 5. Therefore, policymakers need to release female-friendly policies with a nudge role in the socioeconomically underdeveloped regions to facilitate female entrepreneurial leaders opening the cultural gateway.
- iii) The situation of conditional opportunities. Female entrepreneurial leaders who belong to the low social class and live in socioeconomically developed regions often face the situation of conditional opportunities. This is the better situation in comparison to the other three situations displayed in Figure 5. As a result, policymakers also need to release female-friendly policies with a catalyst role in the socioeconomically developed regions to facilitate female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation to match the open cultural gateway.
- iv) The situation of opportunities. Female entrepreneurial leaders who belong to the non-low social class and live in socioeconomically developed regions often face the situation of opportunities. This is the best situation in comparison to the other three situations displayed in Figure 5. As a result, policymakers also need to assess the current policies to prevent them from hindering female entrepreneurial leaders' psychological adaptation and the open cultural gateway.

Realistically speaking, the research contribution to policies is that this study can serve policymakers and women in both Eastern and Western contexts to better recognise the cultural tightness and looseness generated by policies, which can influence women to realise self-transcendence and collective transcendence at different levels. This recognition of cultural tightness and looseness derives from my professional social experiences. From 2014 to 2016, I was assigned to a petrochemical project in Saudi Arabia. In that cultural context, women are not permitted to leave the house without a male companion, much less start their businesses. When I returned to Suzhou city, China, I discovered that female entrepreneurial leaders have become notable in the Suzhou Industrial Park, which is an industrial zone (Xiao et al., 2022) and a Chinese-Singaporean joint venture. When I visited Silicon Valley and San Francisco, I realised that the entrepreneurial environment provides platforms to foster the development of entrepreneurial enterprises. In this context, gender is not a barrier to establishing entrepreneurial ventures.

The above three classical cultures of the Middle East, China, and the United States show a sociocultural gradient from tightness to looseness and imply a dramatic gender gap in women's development. This sociocultural gradient and gender gap reflect the geographic culture worldwide, which can be explained by the concepts 'cultural gateway' and 'gender gateway'. Therefore, this study contributes knowledge to policymakers and women to deepen their understanding of why female entrepreneurial leadership can develop in a loose sociocultural context. Although the findings of this study extending into an Eastern context are insufficient (Sidani et al., 2015), this study can supplement the knowledge of both Eastern and Western policymakers from a gender perspective (Eagly, 2005; Peus et al., 2015, p. 57). To some extent, this kind of

study in a Chinese context can support Chinese and Western policymakers in acquiring theoretical endorsements when they plan to issue female-friendly policies.

### 6.3.3 Research Contribution to Managerial Practice

This study can contribute to female entrepreneurial leaders' understanding of their leadership and value. Female entrepreneurial leaders are a particular group in China's context. Compared with female non-entrepreneurial leaders, female entrepreneurial leaders are full of personal ideals and self-actualisation. Specifically, the female entrepreneurial leader's ideal gives them a highly individual benefit of self-actualisation (Hitt et al., 2011). Contrarily, self-actualisation makes female entrepreneurial leaders insist on their ideal. Therefore, this study proposes that female entrepreneurial leaders can probably realise a greater self-transcendence and collective transcendence of cultural gateway at different levels than non-entrepreneurial women. Referencing the model of female entrepreneurial leadership displayed in Figure 5, this study suggests that female entrepreneurial leaders can select different strategies or tactics when confronting the four kinds of situations.

- i) The situation of challenges. When female entrepreneurial leaders who belong to the low social class and live in socioeconomically underdeveloped regions often face challenges. This is the weakest situation for female entrepreneurial leaders in comparison to the other three situations displayed in Figure 5. Female entrepreneurial leaders facing this situation can move to a place with cultural looseness and improve their psychological adaptations to overcome the challenges.

- ii) The situation of conditional challenges. Female entrepreneurial leaders who belong to the non-low social class and live in socioeconomically underdeveloped regions often face conditional challenges. This is the weaker situation for female entrepreneurial leaders in comparison to the other three situations displayed in Figure 5. Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders need to move to the socioeconomically underdeveloped regions for finding the open cultural gateway.
- iii) The situation of conditional opportunities. Female entrepreneurial leaders who belong to the low social class and live in socioeconomically developed regions often face the situation of conditional opportunities. This is the better situation in comparison to the other three situations displayed in Figure 5. As a result, female entrepreneurial leaders improve their psychological adaptation to match the open cultural gateway.
- iv) The situation of opportunities. Female entrepreneurial leaders who belong to the non-low social class and live in socioeconomically developed regions often face the situation of opportunities. This is the best situation in comparison to the other three situations displayed in Figure 5. As a result, female entrepreneurial leaders need to assess the current situations and utilise the opportunities.

Compared with male entrepreneurial leaders, female entrepreneurial leaders usually need to consider their gender role in the Chinese culture of masculine default. This is because masculine defaults in business and living fields are preferred and viewed as social defaults across various occupations and domains, although huge changes have been generated in workplace and demographics during the past century in the Western context (Acker, 1990; Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1027; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Thus,

female entrepreneurial leaders spend more time and resources to achieve equal achievement as male entrepreneurial leaders. Consequently, female entrepreneurial leaders are valued and differentiated from non-entrepreneurial people.

Female entrepreneurial leaders also display more intensively other-oriented values than non-entrepreneurial women. This study can also contribute to female entrepreneurial leaders' efforts to reform organisational culture in their enterprises. As reported in Section 4.3.2.2, female entrepreneurial leaders tend to create a family-oriented culture in their enterprises. However, this kind of organisational culture can divide followers into ingroups and outgroups and objectively formulate an organizational cultural gateway in the organisation. Female entrepreneurial leaders via family-organisational culture can inspire ingroup followers' innovative activities and increase their trust and loyalty; however, as discussed in Section 5.1.1.4, this family-oriented culture can make outgroup followers often keep distance with female entrepreneurial leaders because of the organisational cultural gateway. Therefore, female entrepreneurial leaders need to notice the effect of family-oriented culture on outgroup followers and reform the organizational culture to break through the organisational cultural gateway. By taking this approach, female entrepreneurial leaders can inspire almost all their followers' innovative activities, trust, and loyalty.

#### 6.4 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations, which should be recognised and acknowledged. Firstly, the primary data is collected by interview, probably subject to response biases (Miyamoto et al., 2018, p. 441). Due to participants' needs to recall their entrepreneurial activities that happened years ago, the details or logic of entrepreneurial activities and

the entrepreneurial mindset would be ambiguous and implicit. Secondly, the boundary between idea (e.g., social values, entrepreneurial mindset) and actual (e.g., personality and entrepreneurial behaviours) is not distinguished (Miyamoto et al., 2018, p. 441). To some extent, the participants may conceal the details of the entrepreneurial activities because of their reluctant emotions or the business confidentiality agreement.

Thirdly, some findings are based on participants' perceptions and understanding rather than their lived experience, which is a limitation of the study. For example, in relation to the different antecedents of female entrepreneurship identified for rural versus urban areas, or north versus south, or developed coastal provinces versus less developed western regions of China, all these findings cannot avoid the subjective bias, as reported in Section 3.2.5. This limitation influences the research quality to some extent, as reported in Section 3.4.

Finally, this study directly applies Western research methodology in a Chinese context, which would raise the adaptation issue for this study. Because of the enormous cultural gap between the Chinese and Western contexts (Li et al., 2020), Chinese participants' responses to Western cultural concepts and categorisations differ significantly from those of Westerners. Meanwhile, the equivalent expression or term in Western culture for the Chinese cultural concept and categorisation is challenging to find (Li, 2003). Thus, although applying Western research methodologies to this study is efficient, it is not as effective in the Chinese context as in the Western context.

## 6.5 Future Directions

This study shows four directions for future research. Firstly, the findings on family-oriented culture are only explored in a Chinese context. Whether these findings adapt

to the Western context has not been researched. Therefore, future research can explore the family-oriented culture and the sociocultural gradients of cultural looseness and tightness worldwide and test its generality. Secondly, the proposed concept ‘cultural gateway’ and the coupling structure between cultural gateway and psychological adaptation are only applied in interpreting the opportunities and challenges of female entrepreneurial leadership in modern China. These can be expanded to interpret the career development of female leaders in future research.

Thirdly, the influences of geographic culture on female entrepreneurial leaders are only explored and compared with the Hu Huanyong’s Line. However, why both are concordant with each other is still implicit. Therefore, future research can focus on this point and find out the reasons. Fourthly, for international scholars, this research emerges in the initial stage (De Bruin et al., 2006). Therefore, scholars can engage more in this research (Sullivan & Meek, 2012) at the proper time, as Zhang (2018) argues. Consequently, future research on female entrepreneurial leadership should find proper cultural concepts and categorisations intersecting in Chinese and Western contexts to apply cultural psychology and feminism.

## Appendix

### A1 Determinants of Female Entrepreneurial leadership

Table 6 Determinants of Female Entrepreneurial leadership (Macro-Level)

Determinants of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership and Assessment (Macro-Level)			
Determinants	Relationship	Sources	Assessment
National Culture	The topic of how the national culture empowers female entrepreneurs and how this empowerment facilitates them to control resources should be explored.	(Kantor, 2002)	Neutral
	When entrepreneurial information is associated with feminine stereotypes, gender inequalities in opportunity evaluation would be reduced.	(Gupta et al., 2014)	Facilitators
	When entrepreneurship is connected to masculine stereotypes, gender inequality in opportunity evaluation would be exacerbated.	(Gupta et al., 2014)	Constraints
	Gender stereotypes are the most significant impediment to women achieving leadership positions.	(Heilman, 2012; Peus et al., 2015, p. 56)	Constraints
Social Norms	The conflict between women's gender roles and leadership roles is explicit.	(Heilman, 2012; Peus et al., 2015, p. 56)	Neutral
	The conflict between women's gender roles and entrepreneur roles influences their career decisions.	(Stroh, Varma, & Valy-Durbin, 2008, as cited in Peus et al., 2015, p. 56)	Neutral
Social Norms	Gender has indirect and moderating effects on company performance. However, when additional determinants are present, the effect of gender on intrapreneurship is less robust.	(Diaz-García & Brush, 2012)	Neutral
	To fulfil their gender responsibilities, women leaders need to display kindness, warmth, and sensitivity.	(Johnson et al., 2008; Peus et al., 2015, p. 56)	Neutral
	Societal norms supporting entrepreneurship tend to associate female entrepreneurship at a higher level.	(Baughn et al., 2006; Sullivan & Meek, 2012)	Facilitators
	The caring role of a female is not congruent with her leadership role, which requires her to work long hours with higher work requirements.	(Byron, 2005; Peus et al., 2015, p. 56)	Constraints
	Females are particularly vulnerable to discriminatory treatment during the job-seeking process.	(Peus et al., 2015, p. 56; Peus & Traut-Mattausch, 2007)	Constraints
	The conflict between the women's gender role and the entrepreneurial role leads to negative performance expectations and evaluations, and unequal job opportunities.	(Heilman & Haynes, 2008; Peus et al., 2015, p. 56)	Constraints
Policy	Free-market policy incentivises female entrepreneurial leadership because of the available opportunity	(Zapalska, 1997)	Facilitators
	Gender equality is promoted in China to facilitate females' being more liberal in balancing roles between family and business.	(Peus et al., 2015, p. 57; Shu & Zhu, 2012, p. 1103)	Facilitators



Table 7 Determinants of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership (Meso-Level)

Determinants of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership and its Assessment (Meso-Level)			
Determinants	Relationship	Sources	Assessment
Business-family relationship	Female entrepreneurs can benefit from business family enrichment.	(Powell & Eddleston, 2013)	Facilitators
	The intention of a woman to strike a balance between family and business can positively impact a company's sales growth and income.	Collins-Dodd et al., 2004; Sullivan & Meek, 2012)	Facilitators
	Effective management strategies for balancing business-family relationships can alleviate female role conflict and, as a result, can promote firm growth.	(Jennings & McDougald, 2007; Shelton, 2006)	Facilitators
	Asian females particularly have to deal with conflict between family and business.	(Lyness & Judiesch, 2008; Peus et al., 2015, p. 56)	Facilitators
	In order to reconcile work and family obligations, women tend to establish home-based enterprises.	(Fasci & Valdez, 1998)	Neutral
Characteristics of the institutional context	In the US context, the second-order gender effect exists in borrowing costs among small businesses.	(Wu & Chua, 2012, p. 444)	Constraints
	The decision of a woman to start an enterprise is influenced by the gender wage gap and the expense of public child-care, moderated by her perceptions.	(Elam & Terjesen, 2010)	Constraints
Resource access and costs	Access to financial, human, material and informational resources is the subject of the current cutting-edge of research. The networks are significant for women wanting to be entrepreneurs.	(Sullivan & Meek, 2012)	Neutral
	Male entrepreneurs' greater access to capital can result in quicker firm growth than their female counterparts.	(Alsos et al., 2006)	Neutral
	For women to obtain financial loans, the significance of a college degree is more crucial than for men.	(Fay & Williams, 1993)	Facilitators
Resource access and costs	The financial resources of a female entrepreneur facilitate the enterprise's profitability and sales volume.	(Lerner & Almor, 2002; Watson, 2002)	Facilitators
	The marketing resources of a female entrepreneur contribute to the enterprise's profitability and sales volume.	(Cron et al., 2009; Sullivan & Meek, 2012)	Facilitators
	Female entrepreneurs are typically more marketing-focused than their male counterparts.	(Cron et al., 2009; Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Slater & Narver, 1999)	Facilitators
	Female entrepreneurs typically have a greater inclination towards fostering and prioritising interpersonal connections compared to their male counterparts.	(Cron et al., 2009)	Facilitators
	Within the founding team, female entrepreneurs are more likely to raise the venture's attractiveness, diversify their networks, and gain access to material and financial resources and novel information.	(Godwin et al., 2006)	Facilitators
	If a family member is an entrepreneur, females are more likely to gain access to information for starting a business.	(Greve & Salaff, 2003)	Facilitators

Determinants of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership and its Assessment (Meso-Level)			
Determinants	Relationship	Sources	Assessment
	Although within weak-tie networks, women can acquire accountant information via face-to-face meetings.	(Jones & Tullous, 2002)	Facilitators
Resource access and costs	Females tend to be able to use relational management styles in internal organisations and improve relationships with external resource providers to acquire access to resources.	(Buttner, 2001; Sullivan & Meek, 2012)	Facilitators
	The financial resources of a female found company tend to source from their personal savings.	(Chaganti et al., 1996)	Facilitators
	Females' networking activity is an essential determinant in acquiring financial resources. Women, unlike men, rely primarily on family members or friends with whom they have strong ties.	(Carter et al., 2007; Haynes & Haynes, 1999; Orhan, 2001; Singh & Lucas, 2005)	Facilitators
	Females tend to be less able than males to incentivize or attract a diverse workforce.	(Gudmundson & Hartenian, 2000)	Constraints
	The industry in which a female works and the type of firm she works for influence her access to debt financing.	(Coleman, 2000; Fay & Williams, 1993)	Constraints
	In contrast to men, women typically receive less funding from financial institutions since the industries they engage in are typically less capital intensive or have a lower rate of capital growth.	(Alsos et al., 2006; Coleman, 2000; Fabowale et al., 1995; Fay & Williams, 1993; Orhan, 2001; Singh & Lucas, 2005)	Constraints
	The fewer resources available to female entrepreneurs result in the poorer financial performance of their enterprises.	(Bates, 2002; Watson, 2002)	Constraints
	Women need to pay loftier interest rates and deliver more collateral than men to obtain financial loans.	(Coleman, 2000)	Constraints

Table 8 Determinants of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership (Micro-Level)

Determinants of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership and Assessment (Micro-Level)			
Determinants	Relationship	Sources	Assessment
Persistence for achievement	There is no difference between female entrepreneurial leadership and male entrepreneurial leadership.	(Demartino et al., 2006)	Facilitators
	Female entrepreneurial leadership pursues internal attributes, while male entrepreneurial leadership emphasises external attributes.	(Gatewood et al., 1995)	Facilitators
	Women leaders' accomplishments signify their success.	(Peus et al., 2015, p. 60)	Facilitators
	The progress of women leaders is predicated on their tenacity for achievement.	(Marongiu & Ekehammar, 1999; Peus et al., 2015, p. 60)	Facilitators

Determinants of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership and Assessment (Micro-Level)			
Determinants	Relationship	Sources	Assessment
Entrepreneurial motivations	An entrepreneur's internal and external motivations predict whether she will launch a successful business. The internal motivation means a desire for self-employment; the external motivation means identifying market demands.	(Gatewood et al., 1995; Sullivan & Meek, 2012; Tharenou, 2001)	Neutral
	Expectations of entrepreneurial benefits are more multifaceted for women than for men.	(Sullivan & Meek, 2012)	Neutral
	Females tend to allocate their expectations to lower-growth industries with a likelihood of triumph, which is different from males.	(Alsos et al., 2006; Orser et al., 2006; Sullivan & Meek, 2012)	Neutral
	Expectancies of entrepreneurial performance are lower among females than among males, despite receiving feedback or return.	(Gatewood et al., 2002)	Neutral
	Females have lower levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intention compared to males.	(Wilson et al., 2007)	Neutral
Entrepreneurial motivations	Female entrepreneurs who pursue independence and success positively impact their companies' sales growth and revenue.	(Lerner et al., 1997; Sullivan & Meek, 2012)	Facilitators
	The pursuit of female independence contributes positively to the expansion of a business.	(Wiklund et al., 2003)	Facilitators
	The entrepreneurial orientation of a woman correlates positively with her firm's sales growth and revenue.	(Sullivan & Meek, 2012; Tan, 2008)	Facilitators
	The growth intention of female entrepreneurs positively correlates with firm expansion.	(Cliff, 1998)	Facilitators
	A male tends to be more satisfied with cooperative performance than a female because of the way he orients strategic decision-making.	(Sonfield et al., 2001)	Facilitators
Entrepreneurial motivations	The likelihood of a female launching entrepreneurial activities is positively related to self-confidence, defined as believing in one's abilities and producing successful results.	(Langowitz & Minniti, 2007)	Facilitators
	The perception of entrepreneurial leadership positively correlates with the likelihood of female entrepreneurs launching entrepreneurial activities.	(Langowitz & Minniti, 2007)	Facilitators
	Female entrepreneurs tend to advance their career opportunities or reduce career restraints.	(Buttner & Moore, 1997)	Facilitators
	Female entrepreneurs emphasise alleviating the consequences of situational challenges.	(Baughn et al., 2006; Zapalska, 1997)	Facilitators
	Financial independence is one of the goals of women who start businesses.	(Carter et al., 2003)	Facilitators

Determinants of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership and Assessment (Micro-Level)			
Determinants	Relationship	Sources	Assessment
Entrepreneurial motivations	Female entrepreneurs are typically concerned with balancing business and family or decreasing restrictions.	(Demartino & Barbato, 2003; Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001; Williams, 2004)	Constraints
	Self-interested assertiveness is an impediment to women's advancement.	(Peus et al., 2015, p. 56; Peus & Traut-Mattausch, 2007)	Constraints
	Because females' anticipations are distributed in lower-growth industries, the scale of female-owned enterprises is typically smaller than that of male counterparts.	(Boden & Nucci, 2000)	Constraints
	Females frequently lack confidence, which stifles their progress.	(Peus et al., 2015, p. 56; Peus & Traut-Mattausch, 2007)	Constraints
	Female entrepreneurs endure various duties and roles, such as business and family, resulting in heavier life stress than male entrepreneurs.	(Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001; Ufuk & Özgen, 2001)	Constraints
Entrepreneurial Career	More women than men benefit from training as a result of career encouragement.	(Tharenou et al., 1994)	Facilitators
	Career encouragement indicates that women are promoted more to higher managerial positions.	(Tharenou, 2001)	Facilitators
	When women face a "ceiling effect", they are more likely to start businesses.	(Tan, 2008)	Constraints
Entrepreneurial education	Women tend to benefit more than men from entrepreneurial education in practice.	(Sullivan & Meek, 2012; Wilson et al., 2007)	Facilitators
	Receiving tertiary education facilitates the growth of women-owned firms but not the female owner herself.	(Manolova et al., 2007)	Facilitators
	Receiving higher education facilitates the survival of female-owned firms.	(Boden & Nucci, 2000)	Facilitators
	Female leaders' success can be gauged by their learning orientation.	(Peus et al., 2015, p. 60)	Facilitators
Entrepreneurial skills	Corporate management practices and skills of female entrepreneurs facilitate the profitability and sales amount of an enterprise.	(Lerner & Almor, 2002; Lerner et al., 1997; Sullivan & Meek, 2012)	Facilitators
	Women entrepreneurs tend to use a collaborative management style, which could alleviate role conflict and facilitate corporate expansion.	(Gundry & Welsch, 2001; Sorenson et al., 2008)	Facilitators
	Entrepreneurial capabilities are recognized, including creativity, foresight, agility, and ingenuity.	(Alvarez and Barney, 2002, as cited in Covin & Slevin, 2002, p. 312)	Neutral

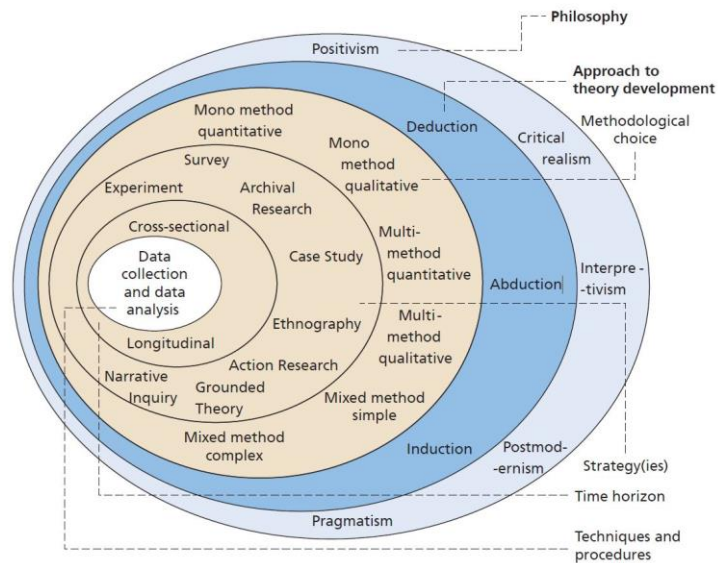
Determinants of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership and Assessment (Micro-Level)			
Determinants	Relationship	Sources	Assessment
Female's experiences of life and work	Females' work and life experience facilitate their recognition of entrepreneurial opportunity and its genre.	(Detienne & Chandler, 2007; Sullivan & Meek, 2012)	Facilitators
	A women entrepreneur's work and life experiences promote firm growth. This relationship is not evidenced for males.	(Manolova et al., 2007)	Facilitators
	A women entrepreneur's work and life experiences facilitate firm survival.	(Boden & Nucci, 2000)	Facilitators
Risk Taking	In the US context, risk-taking links with individualism at a higher level; it is a success determiniant for advancing female leaders.	(Peus et al., 2015) (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004; Peus et al., 2015, p. 61)	Facilitators
	Personal characteristics influence risk preference.	(Finkelstein et al., 1996; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Jensen & Zajac, 2004; Miller & Toulouse, 1986; Opper et al., 2017, p. 1505; Wiersema & Bantel, 1992)	Facilitators
Gender gap	There is no relationship between the success of a firm and the gender of its leader. However, the index of firm size, employee numbers, and revenues are correlated with the leader's gender. In particular, a gender gap exists in technology firms.	(Dautzenberg, 2012)	Constraints
Entrepreneurial strategy	Female entrepreneurs emphasise strategic entrepreneurial competencies more than their male counterparts.	(Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013)	Facilitators
Female's social networks	Their social networks influence whether women identify business opportunities.	(Greve & Salaff, 2003; Harrison & Mason, 2007; Sullivan & Meek, 2012)	Neutral
	Typically, women spend less time expanding their social networks with financial organisations.	(Fabowale et al., 1995; Orser et al., 2006)	Constraints
	Females lack channels to access strong social networks, which inhibits their progress.	(Peus et al., 2015, p. 56; Peus & Traut-Mattausch, 2007)	Constraints
Role models	A role model is an essential determinant in female leadership.	(Peus et al., 2015)	Neutral
	The role model requires consent from the male family patriarch. However, it is not respected as a critical figure in cooperation.	(SHABBIR & GREGORIO, 1996)	Constraints
Family background and support	Women's entrepreneurial interests are more transient than that of men.	(Matthews & Moser, 1996)	Constraints
	Men and women are frequently inspired to become entrepreneurs by their parent entrepreneurs.	(Matthews & Moser, 1996)	Facilitators
	There is a substantial likelihood that women entrepreneurs' mothers are also entrepreneurs.	(Malach-Pines & Schwartz, 2008)	Facilitators
	Self-employed husbands have an impact on women who aspire to be entrepreneurs.	(Caputo & Dolinsky, 1998)	Facilitators

## A2 Analysing Procedure

1, 1. Acquiring a thorough understanding of your data ; 2, data coding; 3, identifying themes and discerning connections between themes; 4, extracting themes and verifying propositions (Saunders et al., 2019a)

## A3 Research Onion Model

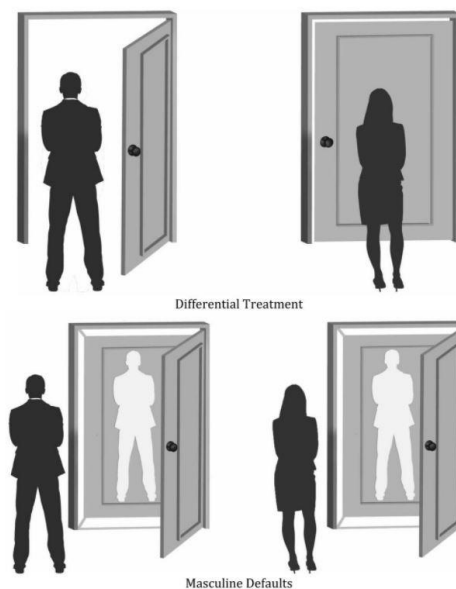
Figure 8 Research Onion Model



sources: (Saunders et al. (2019b)

## A4 Cultural Gateway (Gender Gateway)

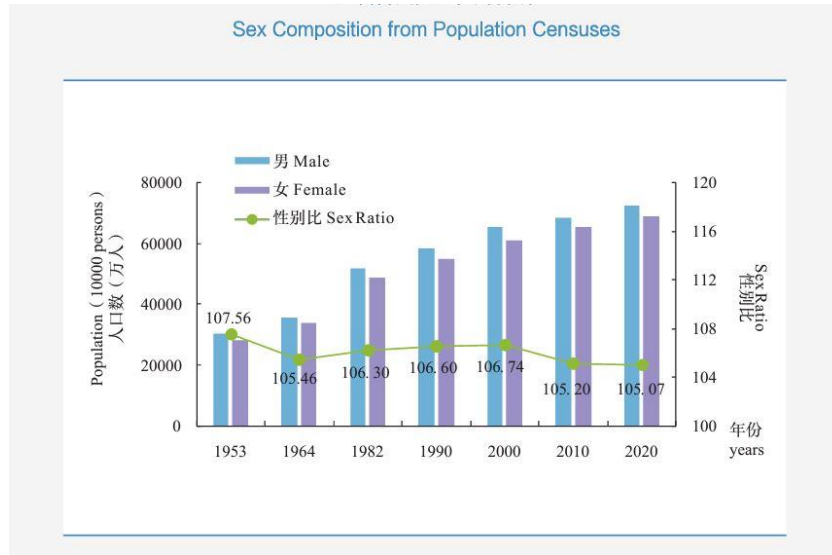
Figure 9 Cultural Gateway (Gender Gateway)



Source: Cheryan and Markus (2020, p. 1029)

## A5 China population composition

Figure 10 China Population Composition



Source: gov.cn (2021)

## A6 Ethical Approval

Figure 11 Ethical Approval

Delete Archive Report Reply Reply all Forward Read / Unread Categorise Flag / Unflag Assign policy

**Ethical Approval: DUBS-2020-12-21T18:26:15-khgv38**

**Ethics** <no-reply@sharepointonline.com>  
To: DU, JINGWEI  
Tue 05/01/2021 22:51

Start reply with: [Schedule a meeting](#)

**[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Do not open links or attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe. Otherwise, use the Report Message button or report to [phishing@durham.ac.uk](mailto:phishing@durham.ac.uk).**

Please do not reply to this email.

Dear Jingwei,

Your supervisor has reviewed your ethical review **form**, and confirmed ethical approval for the following project:

Title: Durham DBA at Fudan  
Supervisor: GRIFFIN, MARTYN A.  
Start Date: 22 December 2020  
End Date: 31 December 2021  
Application Reference: DUBS-2020-12-21T18:26:15-khgv38

Please be aware that if you make any significant changes to your project which mean that ethical approval may be required, you should complete and submit a revised ethical review **form**.

-----

If you have any queries relating to the ethical review process or requirements for review, please contact your supervisor in the first instance. If you have any queries relating to the online system, please contact [research.policy@durham.ac.uk](mailto:research.policy@durham.ac.uk).

Reply Forward

## A7 Interview Questions List

Table 9 Questions List for Research

<b>Questions List for Research</b>		
Interview No.	Interview Location	Date
Name	Company	Age
Email address	Mobile	Gender
<b>Part 1 Determinants of Female Entrepreneurial leadership in China context</b>		
<b>Section 1 Individual Level</b>		
<b>1</b>	What is the most concern of yourself?	
<b>2</b>	How do you think about influences of <b>female entrepreneurial leader's experiences of life and work</b> ?	
<b>3</b>	How do you think about the <b>risk-taking</b> of female entrepreneurial leader?	
<b>4</b>	How do you think about the <b>entrepreneurial career</b> of Female Entrepreneurial Leaders?	
<b>5</b>	How do you think about the <b>skills</b> of female entrepreneurial leaders?	
<b>6</b>	How do you think about the <b>entrepreneurial education</b> ? And how is its influences to you?	
<b>7</b>	How do you think about the <b>gender gap</b> between female entrepreneurial leaders and male entrepreneurial leaders?	
<b>8</b>	How do you assess female entrepreneurial leader's <b>satisfaction</b> ?	
<b>9</b>	How do you think about the female entrepreneurial leader's <b>strategy</b> ?	
<b>10</b>	How do you think about the female entrepreneurial leader's <b>motivations</b> ?	
<b>11</b>	How do you think about the female entrepreneurial leader's <b>judgement</b> ?	
<b>12</b>	How do you think about the female entrepreneurial leader's <b>achievement</b> ?	
<b>Section 2 Group Level</b>		
<b>13</b>	What is the most concern in group level?	
<b>14</b>	How do you think about the <b>gender gap</b> in group level?	
<b>15</b>	How do you think about influences of <b>family background and support</b> to female entrepreneurial leaders?	



Questions List for Research		
Interview No.	Interview Location	Date
Name	Company	Age
Email address	Mobile	Gender
16	How do you assess the <b>role</b> of Female Entrepreneurial Leader in group level? In terms of Effectiveness, Efficiency, Core Competitiveness, External Context...	
<b>Section 3 Institutional Level</b>		
17	What is the most concern in institutional level?	
18	How do you think about the <b>Business-Family relationship</b> ? And how about the work-family conflict?	
19	How do you think about the <b>gender gap</b> in institutional level? such as the <b>diversity</b> .	
20	How do you think about the <b>characteristics of institutional context</b> ?	
21	How do you think about the influences of <b>advanced technology</b> which played in the female entrepreneur's career development?	
22	How do you think about the <b>innovation of product or process</b> ?	
23	How do you think about the relationship between <b>organizational culture</b> and female entrepreneurial leadership? And how about the <b>organisational inertia</b> ?	
<b>Section 4 Society Level</b>		
24	What is the most concern in social level?	
25	How do you think about the <b>entrepreneurial environment or context</b> ?	
26	How do you think about the <b>entrepreneurial opportunity</b> ?	
27	How do you think about the female's <b>social networks</b> ?	
28	How do you think about the <b>gender gap</b> in society level?	
29	How do you think about the <b>gender stereotype</b> ? And <b>social biases</b> to female entrepreneurial leadership?	
30	How do you think about the influence of <b>government policy</b> to female entrepreneurial activities? Such as the open and reform policy?	
31	How do you assess the influence of <b>social inertia</b> to female entrepreneurial leadership?	
32	How do you think about the <b>national culture</b> to female entrepreneurial leadership?	

<b>Questions List for Research</b>		
Interview No.	Interview Location	Date
Name	Company	Age
Email address	Mobile	Gender
<b>33</b>	How do you think about the <b>resources access and cost</b> for female entrepreneurial leaders?	
<b>Part 2 Mechanism of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership in China context</b>		
<b>34</b>	How do you think about the <b>female entrepreneurial process in terms of prelaunch phase, launch phase, and postlaunch phase?</b> In terms of mind change, behaviour change in this process.	
<b>35</b>	What is your <b>entrepreneurial type? Opportunity-based or needs based?</b>	
<b>36</b>	What are the <b>dynamics</b> of female entrepreneurs promoting themselves in business activities?	
<b>37</b>	What are the <b>barriers</b> of female entrepreneurs promoting themselves in business activities?	
<b>38</b>	How do you think <b>performance</b> of female entrepreneurial leader?	
<b>39</b>	How do you think <b>the value</b> of being female entrepreneurial leader?	

## A8 Interview Preamble

### Interview Preamble

#### 采访说明

My name is Jingwei Du (Steve) and I am a candidate of Durham University Doctoral Business Administration at Fudan. My research focuses on examining the opportunities and challenges of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership in China. Currently, I am employed as an international business development professional at the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone in Cambodia. I will ask you a series of detailed questions to understand your logical understanding and personal experience on the research issue. I will conduct interviews to gather anecdotes and insights about your experiences as entrepreneurs and your perspectives on female leadership.

I am mostly interested in studying the perceptions and experiences of female entrepreneurial leaders. The questions and answers will be made accessible. The entirety of the information will be handled in an anonymous and confidential manner. Confidential information will not be disclosed to the public. The record will be transcribed at a later time. No one will have access to the transcripts or recordings without my explicit consent.

I sincerely express my gratitude for your assistance.

Contact: Wechat: dooo369; Email: dujingwei369@126.com

Jingwei Du

我是杜经纬，复旦-杜伦工商管理学在读博士，主要研究女性企业家领导力在中国发展的机遇与挑战。同时，我在柬埔寨西哈努克港经济特区做国际招商工作。我将要向你咨询关于你对这方面的理性看法和经验的一些比较有深度的问题。我也将向你咨询一些关于企业家生涯和女性领导力的故事。

我的学术兴趣主要集中于您关于女性企业家领导力的见解和经验。问题和回答将是开放的。所有的信息将被匿名化和机密处理。没有机密性的信息会被公开使用。这个录音以后会被编译成手稿。没有我的允许，没有人会阅读手稿或者听取录音。

真诚地感谢您的支持。

联系方式：

微信：dooo369; 邮箱：[dujingwei369@126.com](mailto:dujingwei369@126.com)



## A9 Consent Form

### Consent Form

**Project title:** Female Entrepreneurial Leadership in China

**Supervisor:** Martyn Griffin

**Researcher(s):** Steve Du

**Department:** Durham University Business School

**Contact details:** [Jingwei.Du@durham.ac.uk](mailto:Jingwei.Du@durham.ac.uk)

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the project, what is involved and that you are happy to take part. Please initial each box to indicate your agreement:

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated [ ] and the privacy notice for the above project.	
I have had sufficient time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.	
I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	
I agree for this interview to be tape-recorded. I understand that the audio recording made of this interview will be used only for analysis and that extracts from the interview, from which I would not be personally identified, may be used in any conference presentation, report or journal article developed as a result of the research. I understand that no other use will be made of the recording without my written permission, and that no one outside the research team will be allowed access to the original recording.	
I agree to take part in the above project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	



Item	Gender	Industry that Company belongs to	Age Range	Identity/Position	Home Location in China	Remark
iw-005	F	Service	35-40	Entrepreneur	Shanghai City	Move from Anhui Province
im-006	M	Service	60-65	Follower	Tianjin City	
iw-007	F	Manufacture	51-55	Entrepreneur	Zhejiang Province	Move from Sichuan Province
iw-008	F	Service	30-35	Entrepreneur	Jiangxi Province	
im-009	M	Service	25-30	Entrepreneur	Henan Province	
iw-010	F	Manufacture	35-40	Entrepreneur	Gansu Province	Cooperate with Partners in Shenzhen city
im-011	M	Service	50-55	Manager	Jiangsu Province	
iw-012	F	Manufacture	55-60	Entrepreneur	Jiangsu Province	
iw-013	F	Manufacture	35-40	Manager	Jiangsu Province	
iw-014	F	Service	40-45	Entrepreneur	Beijing City	
im-015	M	Service	55-60	Entrepreneur	Beijing City	
iw-016	F	Service	60-65	Entrepreneur	Shenzhen City	
iw-017	F	Service	60-65	Follower	Guangzhou City	
iw-018	F	Manufacture	40-45	Manager	Shandong Province	Move from Hunan Province
iw-019	F	Service	40-45	Entrepreneur	Beijing City	
im-020	M	Service	35-40	Entrepreneur	Guangzhou City	Move from Chongqing City
im-021	M	Manufacture	45-50	Manager	Henan Province	
im-022	M	Manufacture	50-55	Manager	Henan Province	
im-023	M	Manufacture	45-50	Entrepreneur	Zhejiang Province	
iw-024	F	Manufacture	45-50	Entrepreneur	Jiangsu Province	
iw-025	F	Service	35-40	Entrepreneur	Shenzhen City	
iw-026	F	Service	50-55	Entrepreneur	Shanghai City	
im-027	M	Manufacture	35-40	Entrepreneur	Shanghai City	Move from Anhui Province
im-028	M	Manufacture	40-45	Manager	Zhejiang Province	Move from Sichuan Province
im-029	M	Manufacture	50-55	Manager	Zhejiang Province	
im-030	M	Manufacture	55-60	Manager	Jiangsu Province	Move from Hei Longjiang Province
iw-031	F	Manufacture	55-60	Entrepreneur	Jiangsu Province	Move from Hei Longjiang Province
im-032	M	Manufacture	50-55	Entrepreneur	Jiangxi Province	

Item	Gender	Industry that Company belongs to	Age Range	Identity/Position	Home Location in China	Remark
im-033	M	Manufacture	40-45	Entrepreneur	Shanghai City	Move from Yunnan Province
iw-034	F	Service	30-35	Manager	Jiangsu Province	Move from Liaoning Province
im-035	M	Service	30-35	Entrepreneur	Jiangsu Province	Move from the UK
iw-036	F	Manufacture	40-45	Manager	Gansu Province	
im-037	M	Manufacture	40-45	Manager	Guangzhou City	
im-038	M	Manufacture	50-55	Manager	Shenzhen City	
im-039	M	Manufacture	40-45	Manager	Shenzhen City	
iw-040	F	Service	30-35	Entrepreneur	Beijing City	
im-041	M	Manufacture	30-35	Manager	Jiangxi Province	
iw-042	F	Service	20-25	Manager	Hunan Province	
im-043	M	Manufacture	30-35	Manager	Shandong Province	
im-044	M	Service	30-35	Manager	Xinjiang Province	
im-045	M	Manufacture	50-55	Entrepreneur	Shandong Province	
iw-046	F	Service	40-45	Entrepreneur	Jiangsu Province	
iw-047	F	Service	40-45	Entrepreneur	Shanxi Province	
iw-048	F	Service	40-45	Entrepreneur	Jiangsu Province	
iw-049	F	Service	30-35	Entrepreneur	Shanxi Province	
im-050	M	Manufacture	40-45	Manager	Guangzhou City	
im-051	M	Manufacture	45-50	Manager	Zhejiang Province	Move from Sichuan Province
iw-052	F	Service	25-30	Manager	Jiangsu Province	
iw-053	F	Service	20-25	Doctoral student	Jiangsu Province	
iw-054	F	Manufacture	55-60	Entrepreneur	Jiangsu Province	Move from Nei Menggu Autonomous Region
iw-055	F	Service	50-55	Entrepreneur	Shanghai City	
iw-056	F	Manufacture	30-35	Entrepreneur	Shanghai City	
im-057	M	Manufacture	40-45	Manager	Zhejiang Province	
im-058	M	Manufacture	50-55	Manager	Shenzhen City	
im-059	M	Service	45-50	Manager	Hong Kong	
iw-060	F	Service	55-60	Entrepreneur	Jiangsu Province	
iw-061	F	Service	30-35	Entrepreneur	Shanghai City	
iw-062	F	Service	30-35	Entrepreneur	Hubei Province	
im-063	M	Service	40-45	Entrepreneur	Beijing City	
iw-064	F	Manufacture	45-50	Entrepreneur	Beijing City	

Item	Gender	Industry that Company belongs to	Age Range	Identity/Position	Home Location in China	Remark
iw-065	F	Service	25-30	Doctoral student	Hubei Province	
iw-066	F	Manufacture	20-25	Follower	Fujian Province	
im-067	M	Manufacture	50-55	Manager	Zhejiang Province	
im-068	M	Manufacture	40-45	Manager	An'hui Province	
iw-069	F	Service	40-45	Entrepreneur	Shanghai	
iw-070	F	Service	30-35	Doctoral student	An'hui Province	Move to Jiangsu Province
im-071	M	Service	40-45	Manager	Zhejiang Province	
iw-072	F	Manufacture	40-45	Entrepreneur	Liaoning Province	
im-073	M	Manufacture	50-55	Entrepreneur	Liaoning Province	
iw-074	F	Service	20-25	Follower	Shanghai City	Move From Shandong Province
iw-075	F	Service	40-45	Entrepreneur	Zhejiang Province	
im-076	M	Service	50-55	Professor	Beijing City	Move from Hubei Province
iw-077	F	Service	30-35	Doctoral student	Shandong Province	
iw-078	F	Service	30-35	Lecturer	Jiangsu Province	
iw-079	F	Service	30-35	Manager	Beijing City	
iw-080	F	Service	30-35	Manager	Hubei Province	
im-081	M	Manufacture	50-55	Entrepreneur	Jiangsu Province	
im-082	M	Service	30-35	Manager	Fujian Province	
im-083	M	Service	40-45	Manager	Hong Kong	
iw-084	F	Service	50-55	Entrepreneur	Zhejiang Province	
iw-085	F	Service	20-25	Entrepreneur	Hebei Province	
iw-086	F	Service	40-45	Entrepreneur	Jiangsu Province	
iw-087	F	Manufacture	40-45	Entrepreneur	Shenzhen City	
iw-088	F	Manufacture	30-35	Entrepreneur	Henan Province	
im-089	M	Service	40-45	Entrepreneur	Taiwan	
iw-090	F	Manufacture	50-55	Entrepreneur	Zhejiang Province	
iw-091	F	Service	20-25	Follower	Jiangsu Province	
iw-092	F	Service	30-35	Entrepreneur	Beijing City	
iw-093	F	Service	20-25	Entrepreneur	Beijing City	
iw-094	F	Manufacture	40-45	Follower	Guangdong Province	Move from Jiangxi Province
iw-095	F	Manufacture	40-45	Follower	Guangdong Province	Move from Jiangxi Province
iw-096	F	Service	50-55	Entrepreneur	Zhejiang Province	

Item	Gender	Industry that Company belongs to	Age Range	Identity/Position	Home Location in China	Remark
iw-097	F	Manufacture	50-55	Entrepreneur	Zhejiang Province	
iw-098	F	Manufacture	40-45	Entrepreneur	Shanghai City	
iw-099	F	Manufacture	50-55	Entrepreneur	Liaoning Province	
im-100	M	Service	50-55	Professor	Jiangsu Province	
iw-101	F	Manufacture	40-45	Entrepreneur	Fujian Province	
iw-102	F	Service	30-35	Entrepreneur	Beijing City	
iw-103	F	Service	30-35	Entrepreneur	Shenzhen City	Move from Hunan Province
iw-104	F	Manufacture	35-40	Entrepreneur	Guangxi Province	
iw-105	F	Service	55-60	Follower	Shanghai City	

## A11 Participants' Demographic Statistics

Table 11 Participants' Demographic Statistics

Gender	Industry		Range Age				Identity/Position				Location in China				
	Manufacture	Service	21-30	31-40	41-50	>50	Entrepreneur	Manager	Follower	Scholars	Eastern China	Southern China	Central China	Northern China	Western China
Male	24	16	1	6	19	14	14	23	1	2	23	8	3	5	1
Female	24	41	9	20	20	16	44	9	7	5	36	12	1	12	4



# A12 Coding in Nvivo

Figure 12 Coding I in Nvivo

The screenshot shows the Nvivo software interface with a project named 'Code of Q...p (Saved)'. The 'Coding' section is active, displaying a hierarchical tree of codes. The main area contains a table with the following data:

Name	Files	References
○ The value of female entrepreneurial leadership	0	0
○ Value exceeds money and contribute to family and society	1	2
○ The importance of Entrepreneurial Spirit	1	2
○ Self-value realization, Self-awareness, practice, progress, and share	1	2
○ Contribute to business partners for establish trus	1	1
○ Belief to survive with long term objectives (vision)	1	2
○ Female Entrepreneurial Leadership from Organizational and Strategical Perspective	0	0
○ Entrepreneurial Type	0	0
○ Opportunity Based Type	1	2
○ Needs-Based Type	1	1
○ Compound Type (Needs-Based and Opportunity-based)	1	4
○ Entrepreneurial Mortality	0	0
○ The importance of industry selection	1	1
○ Learning to avoid mortality	1	1
○ High rate of mortality	1	3
○ Entrepreneurial Conditions	0	0
○ Time allocation, lack of social recognition and support, and family	1	2
○ Tianshi, Dili, and Renhe	1	3
○ Psychological adaptation	1	1
○ How to survive and sustain	1	1

Figure 13 Coding II in Nvivo

Name	Files	References
Determinants	0	0
Micro Determinants	0	0
Work and Business-Family Balance	0	0
Psychological Adaptation	0	0
The feeling between women and men	1	1
Judgement	1	1
Family's influences on operating enterprises	1	1
Environmental and Sociocultural influences(tightness and looseness)	0	0
Social and career experiences between women and men	1	1
Restrict of Business Environment	1	1
Balance between family and business	1	1
Self-cultivation to learn (contributes to psychological adaptation and that affe	0	0
Self-cultivation to learn.	1	2
Self-cultivation affected by cultural norms	1	1
Continuous learning contributes to psychological adaptation	1	1
Mindset of female entrepreneurial leaders	0	0
Psychological adaptation matches Cultural looseness.	0	0
Psychological adaptation in Cultural looseness	1	1
Cultural looseness affects the psychological adaptation	1	1
Psychological adaptation	0	0
Improvement of Psychological adaptation	1	1
Different mindset on treating work and career	1	1
Cultural tightness and looseness	0	0
Tradition Chinese cultural concept(tightness)	1	1
Cultural tightness shifts to cultural looseness towards Chinese wom	1	2

Figure 14 Coding III in Nvivo

The screenshot displays the Nvivo software interface with the 'Codes' section active. The interface is organized into several sections:

- Top Navigation:** File, Home, Import, Create, Explore, Share, Modules.
- Left Sidebar (Navigation):**
  - Quick Access
  - IMPORT
    - Data
      - Files
      - File Classifications
      - Externals
  - ORGANIZE
    - Coding
      - Codes
      - Sentiment
      - Relationships
      - Relationship Types
    - Cases
    - Notes
    - Sets
  - EXPLORE
    - Queries
    - Visualizations
    - Reports
- Main Content Area (Codes):** A hierarchical tree view showing the following structure:
  - Continuous learning contributes to psychological adaptation (1 file, 1 reference)
  - Mindset of female entrepreneurial leaders (0 files, 0 references)
    - Psychological adaptation matches Cultural looseness. (0 files, 0 references)
      - Psychological adaptation in Cultural looseness (1 file, 1 reference)
      - Cultural looseness affects the psychological adaptation (1 file, 1 reference)
    - Psychological adaptation (0 files, 0 references)
      - Improvement of Psychological adaptation (1 file, 1 reference)
      - Different mindset on treating work and career (1 file, 1 reference)
    - Cultural tightness and looseness (0 files, 0 references)
      - Tradition Chinese cultural concept(tightness) (1 file, 1 reference)
      - Cultural tightness shifts to cultural looseness towards Chinese wom (1 file, 2 references)
      - Cultural looseness towards gender (1 file, 2 references)
    - Family support and background (Cultural tightness and psychological adaptati (1 file, 4 references)
      - The difference of family support (1 file, 1 reference)
      - Gender role in family and cultural tightness (1 file, 1 reference)
      - Female entrepreneurial leader's concern in family and career (1 file, 1 reference)
      - Family support to improve psychological adaptation (1 file, 1 reference)
  - Meso determinants (0 files, 0 references)
    - Other-oriented culture and Self-oriented culture (Cultural value orientation ) (0 files, 0 references)
      - Other-oriented culture(cultural looseness towards others) (1 file, 2 references)
      - Being both other-oriented culture and Self-oriented culture (1 file, 1 reference)
    - Family-oriented culture (0 files, 0 references)
      - Treat employees sincerely and equally in family-oriented culture (1 file, 2 references)
      - Tend to create family-oriented culture (1 file, 2 references)
      - Sufficient trust and empower for development in family-oriented culture (1 file, 5 references)

Figure 15 Coding IV in Nvivo

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface. On the left is a dark blue sidebar with navigation options: 'Code of Q...', 'Quick Access', 'IMPORT' (Data, Files, File Classifications, Externals), 'ORGANIZE' (Coding, Sentiment, Relationships, Relationship Types), 'Cases', 'Notes', 'Sets', 'EXPLORE' (Queries, Visualizations, Reports). The top menu bar includes 'File', 'Home', 'Import', 'Create', 'Explore', 'Share', and 'Modules'. Below the menu is a toolbar with icons for Clipboard, Item, Organize, Query, Visualize, Code, Autocode, Range Code, Uncode Code, Case Classification, and File Classification. The main area is titled 'Codes' and contains a tree view of codes. The tree is expanded to show a list of codes with their respective file and reference counts.

Name	Files	Refs
Family-oriented culture	0	0
○ Treat employees sincerely and equally in family-oriented culture	1	2
○ Tend to create family-oriented culture	1	2
○ Sufficient trust and empower for development in family-oriented culture	1	5
○ Private relation among enterprise members formulates family-oriented c	1	1
○ Positive feedback from employees in family-oriented culture	1	1
○ Less rules and regulations in family-oriented culture	1	3
○ Full empathy of female entrepreneurial leadership	1	1
○ Female affinity contributes to family-oriented culture	1	1
○ Being softer, more flexible, and less authoritative in enterprise	1	1
Teamwork and Team Cultivation	0	0
○ The importance of rules and regulations in teamwork	1	1
○ Team cultivation in a dynamic and friendship-oriented manner	1	1
○ Continuous development of team members	1	1
Macro determinants	0	0
○ The socioeconomic status quo of China context	0	0
○ Social networks	0	0
○ Women have affinity that contributed to their social networks	1	2
○ Women have advantage in managing social networks	1	2
○ Women are good at treating risks to maintain social networks	1	1
○ The difference of social networks between women and men	1	1
○ Social networks are resources and relationships, but they are irrelev	1	3
○ Social class reflects social networks, which further influences entrepr	1	1
○ Females have advantages in communication and affinity to contribu	1	2

Figure 16 Coding V in Nvivo

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface with the 'Codes' view selected. The left sidebar shows navigation options like 'Data', 'Coding', 'Cases', 'Notes', 'Sets', 'Queries', 'Visualizations', and 'Reports'. The main area shows a hierarchical tree of codes with columns for 'Name', 'Case Classification', and 'File Classification'.

Name	Case Classification	File Classification
Social class	0	0
Women's position rises in urban areas but not in rural areas	1	1
Social network connects with social class	1	1
Entrepreneurship is hard to improve social class	1	1
The gap of social class becomes a resistant force	1	1
Government policy	0	0
Contextual tightness of government policy	0	0
Family planning policy and ageing society will make more entr	1	2
Contextual tightness and looseness of government policy affects fe	1	2
The Open and Reform policy brings entrepreneurial opportunit	1	3
Government policy's sustainability influences entrepreneurship	1	1
Government policy are more concerned by women from femal	1	1
Contextual looseness of Government policy	0	0
The Open and Reform policy creates market economy and brin	1	1
Contextual influences on psychological adaptation	0	0
Government policy connects with women's confidence and the	1	1
Contextual Uncertainty	0	0
The relationship between the tightness of contextual uncertainty an	0	0
Tightness of Contextual Uncertainty influences on psychologic	1	3
Tightness of Contextual Uncertainty	1	2
The Sociocultural status quo of China context	0	0
Social inertia and Cultural Inertia	0	0
The complex of Cultural Inertia	1	1
Social inertia becomes weaken	1	2
Comparison between Eastern and Western Cultural Inertia	1	1

Figure 17 Coding VI in Nvivo

The screenshot displays the Nvivo software interface. On the left is a dark blue sidebar with navigation options: Code of Q..., Quick Access, IMPORT (Data, Files, File Classifications, Externals), ORGANIZE (Coding, Cases, Notes, Sets), and EXPLORE (Queries, Visualizations, Reports). The main window shows a 'Codes' tree view. A table below the tree lists the codes and their associated counts for 'Files' and 'Cases'.

Name	Files	Cases
○ Tightness of Contextual Uncertainty influences on psycholog	1	3
○ Tightness of Contextual Uncertainty	1	2
○ The Sociocultural status quo of China context	0	0
○ Social inertia and Cultural Inertia	0	0
○ The complex of Cultural Inertia	1	1
○ Social inertia becomes weaken	1	2
○ Comparison between Eastern and Western Cultural Inertia	1	1
○ Geographic culture	0	0
○ The degree difference of independence between Southern and Nort	1	1
○ The cultural comparison between urban and rural areas	1	2
○ The cultural comparison between Southern and Northern China	1	1
○ Geographic difference towards women between Northern and Sout	1	1
○ Geographic concerning in career selection	1	1
○ Cultural Diversity	0	0
○ Western culture influences Chinese women	1	4
○ Respect different Cultures	1	1
○ Cultural Diversity is beneficial for women	1	1
○ Cultural Diversity increases fault tolerance	1	1
○ Cultural Diversity generates alternatives	1	1
○ Cultural Diversify for unity in decision-making	1	1
○ comparison between Eastern and Western cultures	1	1
○ A shift from collectivism to the individualism	0	0
○ Trust is the foundation of entrepreneurship in times of individualism	1	1
○ Times of individualism generates problem of trust and integrity	1	2
○ Times change toward individualism	1	1
○ Balance between collectivism and individualism	1	1

Figure 18 Coding VII in Nvivo

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface. On the left is a dark blue sidebar with navigation options: NVIVO, Code of Q..., Quick Access, IMPORT (Data, Files, File Classifications, Externals), ORGANIZE (Coding, Sentiment, Relationships, Relationship Types), Cases, Notes, Sets, and EXPLORE (Queries, Visualizations, Reports). The main window shows a 'Codes' view with a hierarchical tree structure. The tree is organized into three main categories: 'The development of feminism in modern China', 'The Feminism Influences on Female Entrepreneurial Leadership', and 'Entrepreneurial context'. Each category contains several sub-codes with associated file counts and response counts.

Name	Files	Re
○ The development of feminism in modern China	0	0
○ The feminism status quo to female entrepreneurial leaders	0	0
○ Women's career is influenced by her role in taking care of family an	1	1
○ Women's advantages in Chinese social norms	1	1
○ Women's advantage in appearance	1	1
○ High gender ratio in female entrepreneurial leaders' enterprise	1	2
○ The Feminism Influences on Female Entrepreneurial Leadership	0	0
○ The self-awareness of Chinese women	1	2
○ The radical feminism is not accepted in China	1	1
○ The feminism is criticized by Chinese women	1	1
○ The Feminism Influences on Female Entrepreneurial Leadership	1	1
○ The difference of Feminism in China and West	1	1
○ The development of Chinese women	1	1
○ Chinese women are not concerned about Feminism	1	2
○ Chinese society is progressing in protecting women, but still has ge	1	1
○ Chinese government support women development	1	1
○ Entrepreneurial context	0	0
○ Tightness of Entrepreneurial context	1	1
○ Looseness of Entrepreneurial environment	1	1
○ Entrepreneurship development connects with the entrepreneurial contex	1	1
○ Entrepreneurial context towards women in different areas	1	1
○ Entrepreneurial context is irrelevant with gender	1	1
○ Contextual tightness is harmful to entrepreneurship	1	1
○ Conditions of Entrepreneurial context	1	1
○ Active selection of Entrepreneurial environment	1	1



Table 12 The value of female entrepreneurial leadership

Coding Extract (example/ proof quotes)	Codes	Categories
<p>‘As my family is launching entrepreneurial enterprises abroad, first of all, we mean that our business has been operated well; and secondly, I think I have to take responsibility for society. It not only means that I now feel satisfied with my earned money.’ (iw-008)</p>	<p>Value exceeds money and contribute to family and society</p>	<p>The value of female entrepreneurial leadership</p>
<p>‘In terms of personal value, it may be to improve one’s status in this industry, that is, to be recognized by more people. A family value is to... fulfil your responsibilities and look after your family. We still hope to make some contributions to this industry. For example, some public welfare undertakings are still being done now. Every year, we will go to Hope Primary School to donate some materials, and then we will present some things that the elderly needs in the nursing home. We should be contributing some charitable stuff.’ (iw-014).</p>		
<p>‘If I look at female entrepreneurs in this era and the past, many female entrepreneurs may be more concerned about their self-value realization. In fact, from so many women starting a business, I see a concept that everyone has mentioned behind it: women’s self-awareness is awakening. It is more about being a better me than being an excellent wife to who I am.’ (iw-092).</p>	<p>Self-value realization: Self-awareness, practice, progress, and share</p>	
<p>‘I think the personal value of starting a business is a practice. In the process of doing this, you should have some things you want to do, including some details you want to complete. Then for the family, it is the knowledge and experience brought by your business that you can share with your lover, and it is the foundation for our common progress. At the same time, you can also pass on this wealth of experience and knowledge to the next generation, so let him understand the entrepreneurial process in the future.’ (iw-005).</p>		
<p>‘I have been thinking recently, what is the entrepreneurial spirit? An entrepreneurial spirit means that you should constantly discover opportunities, try new opportunities, create regularly, and continuously face some uncertainties and difficulties, and you should insist on getting the results and goals you want. I think these all are the necessary entrepreneurial spirit whether you are starting a business or not. I believe the entrepreneurial spirit should be cultivated, trained, and educated. Without such a spirit, all entrepreneurial enterprises will fail.’ (iw-105).</p>	<p>The importance of Entrepreneurial Spirit</p>	<p>The value of female</p>



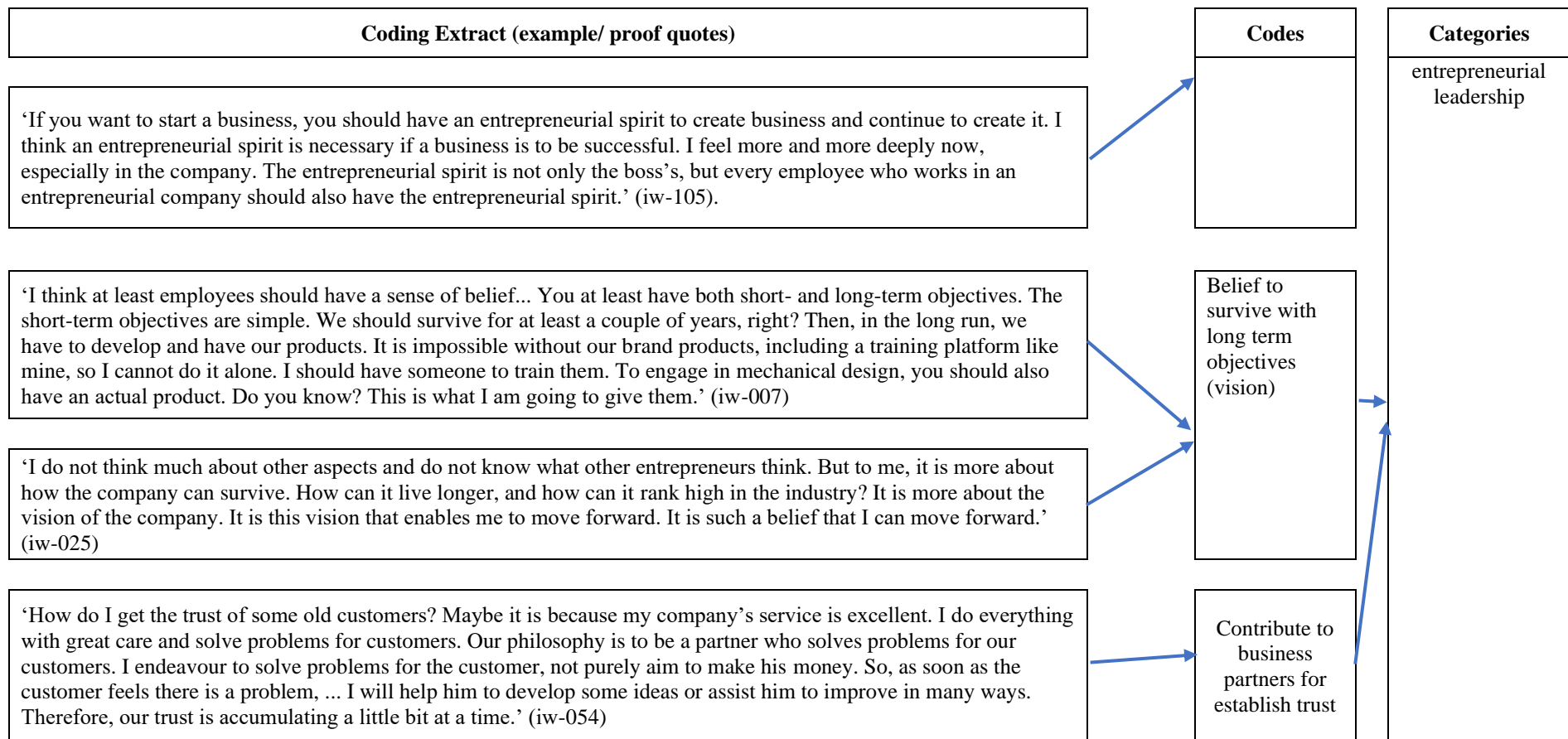
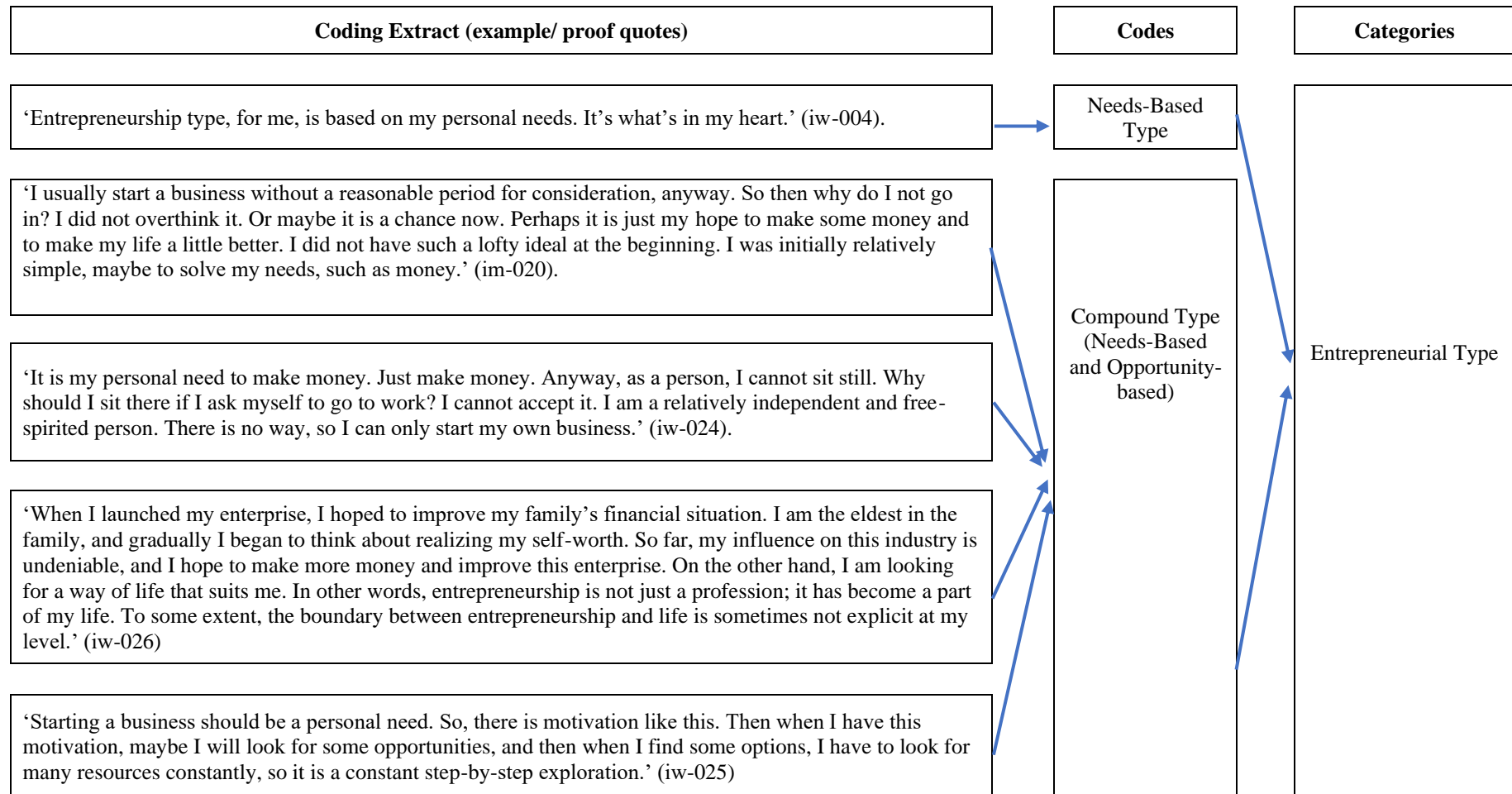


Table 13 Entrepreneurial Type (Coding)



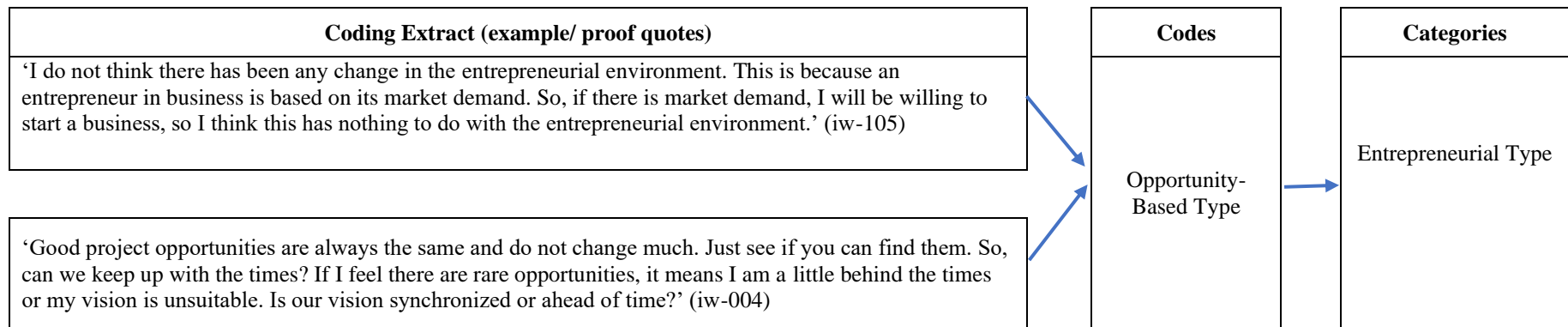
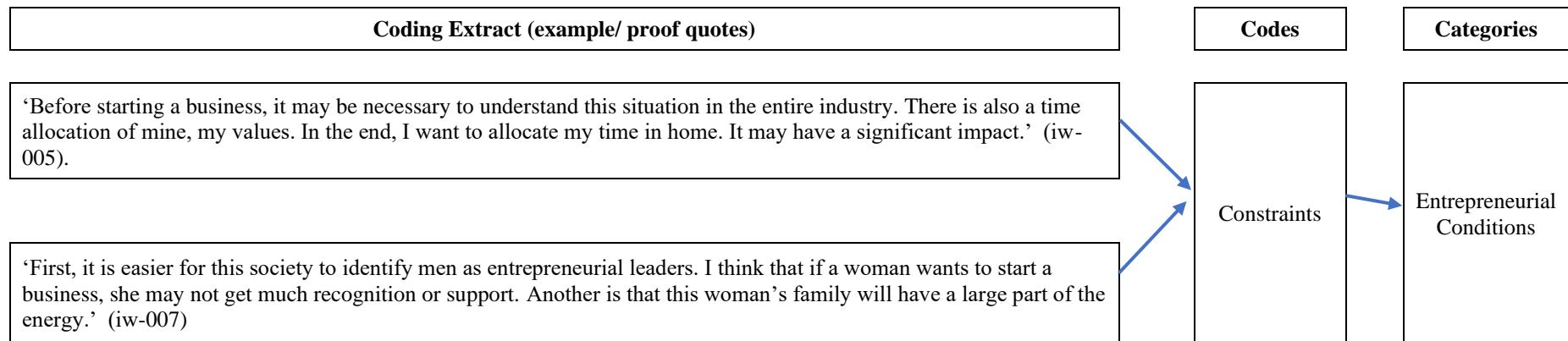


Table 14 Entrepreneurial Conditions



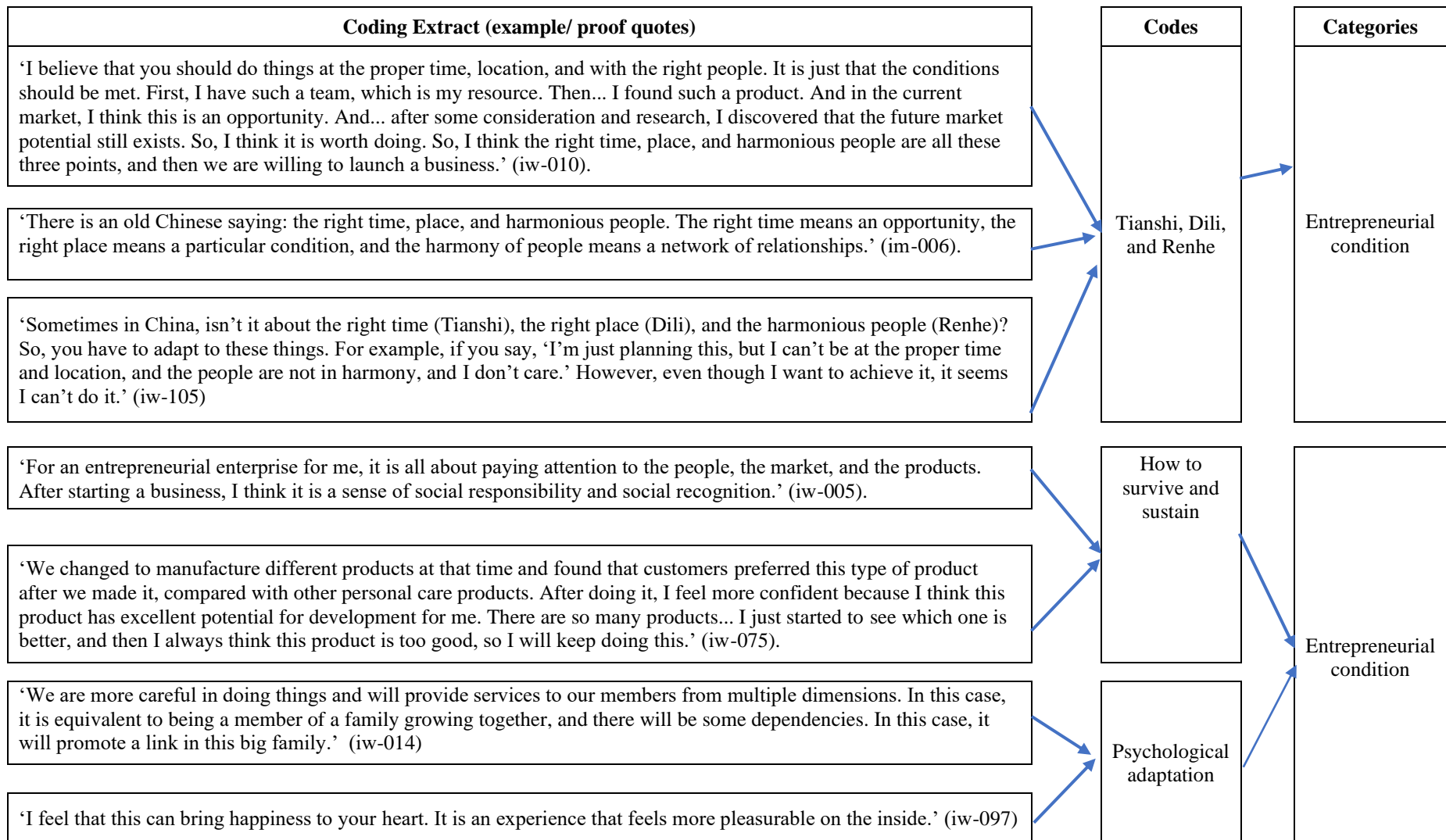


Table 15 Entrepreneurial Mortality

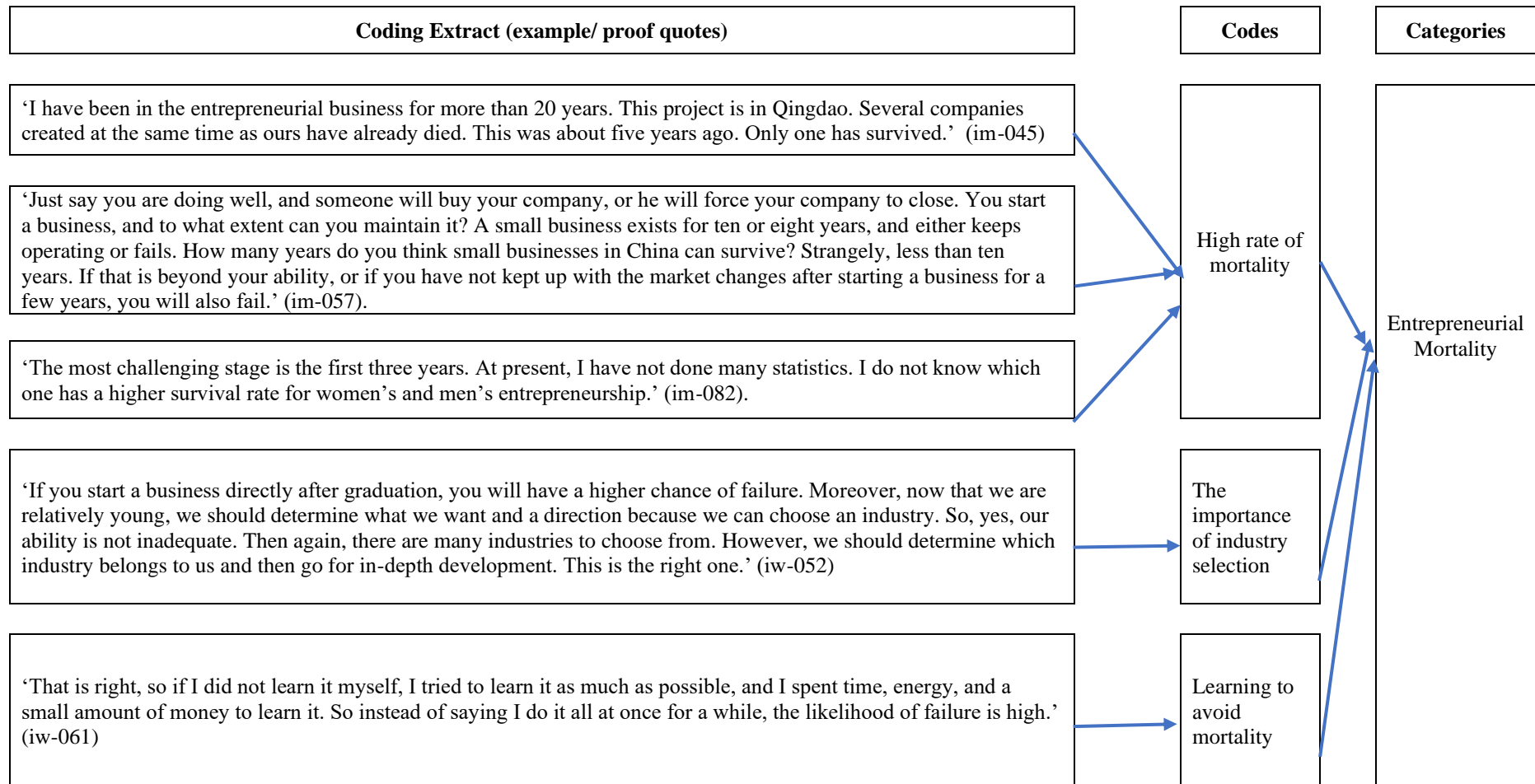


Table 16 Work and Business-Family Balance

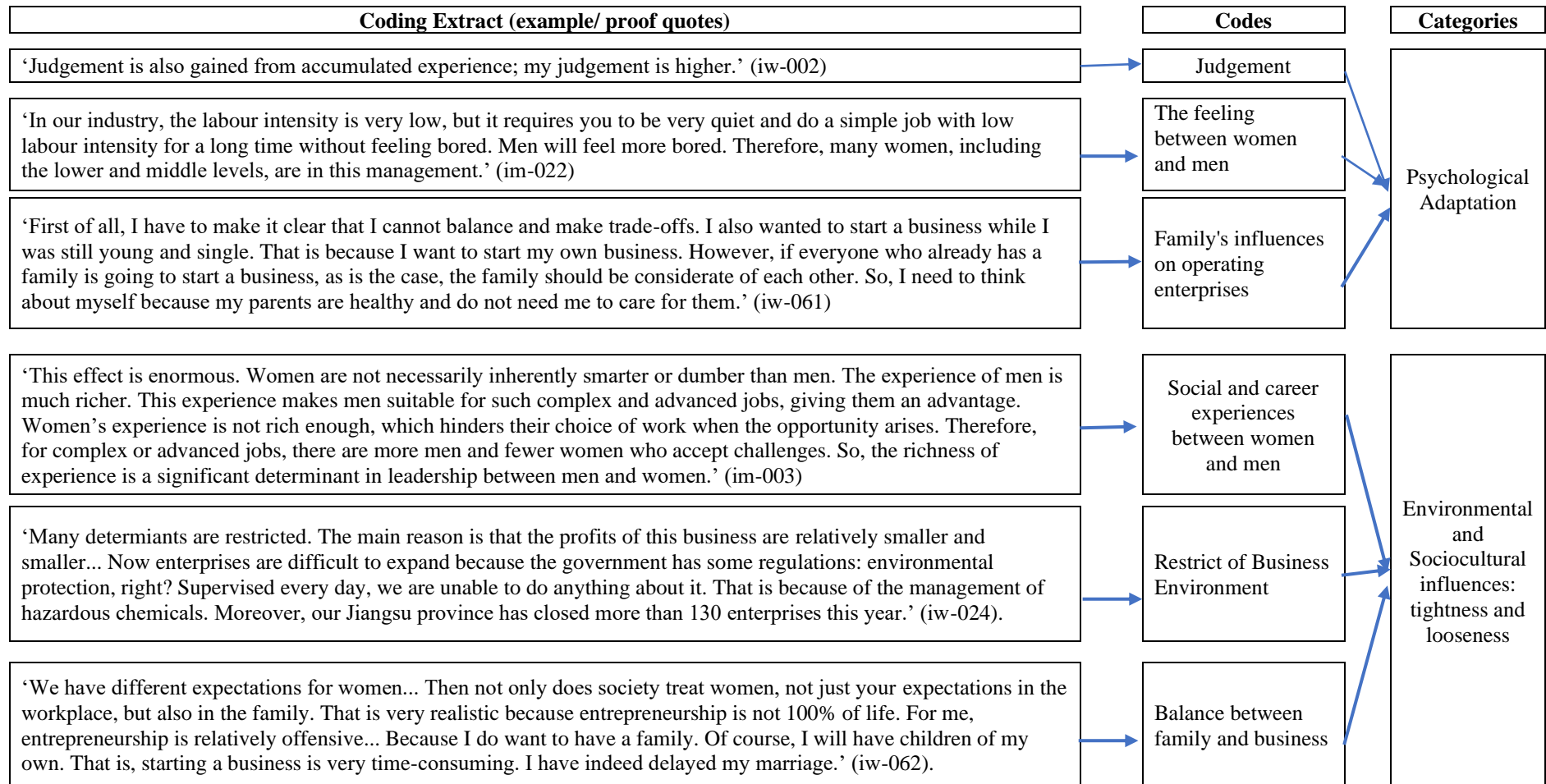


Table 17 Family support and background

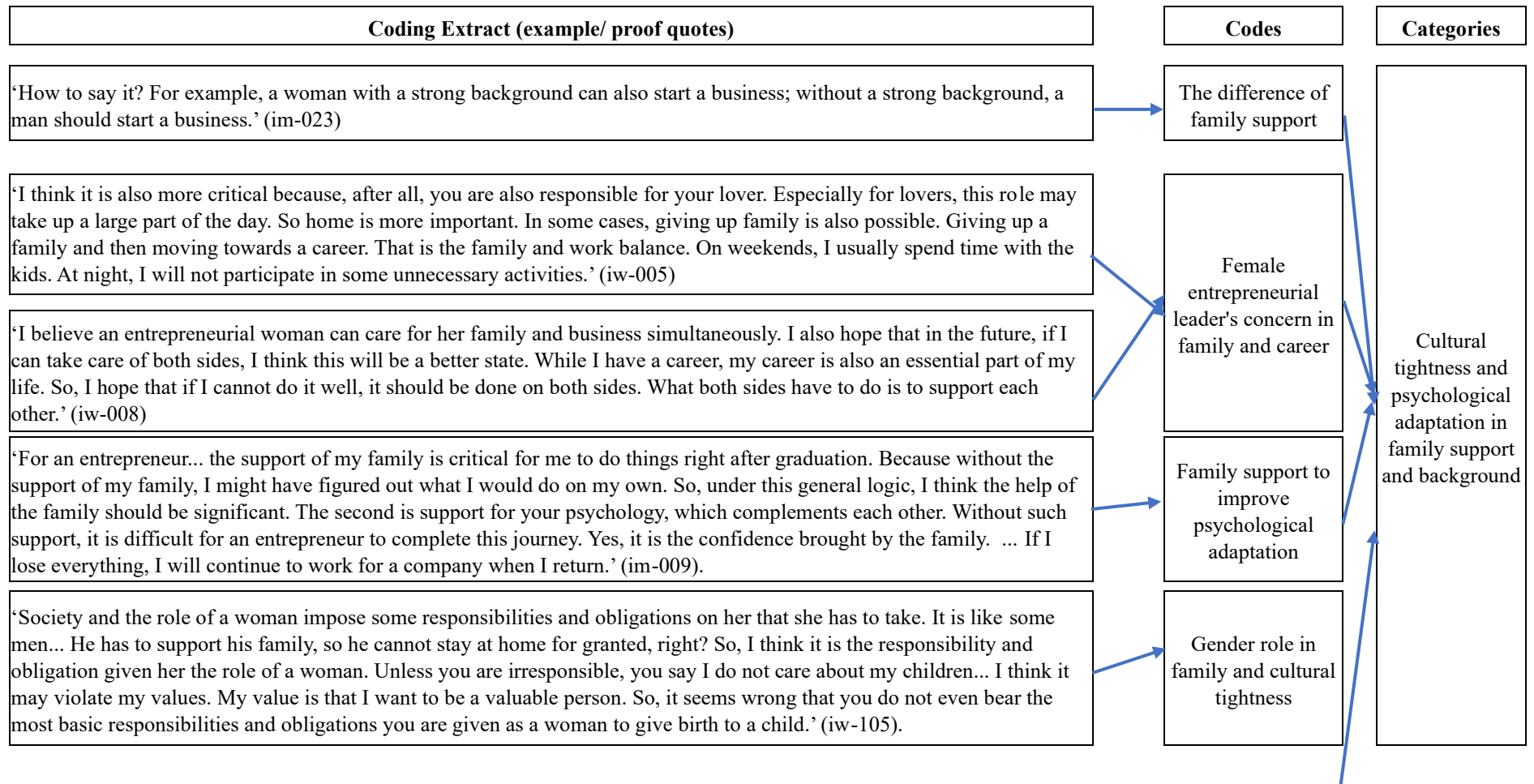


Table 18 Mindset of female entrepreneurial leadership

Coding Extract (example/ proof quotes)	Codes	Categories
<p>‘Because everyone is different, some people want to do things, and some just want to work. The work-thinking means I just finished it. The thinking of doing things is suitable for entrepreneurship, which is very similar to the thinking of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial thinking means that no matter whom the company belongs to, I treat the company like ours. And then what I am doing is what I should do as an individual, on my own as a unit.’ (iw-040)</p>	<p>Different mindset on treating work and career</p>	<p>Psychological adaptation</p>
<p>‘From the very beginning, we were a small company that was very uncertain. Then every step of the way... we seem to feel that we cannot go on, but then I have to solve it later... So, an immense feeling for me now is that my heart has become very strong, ... any difficulties are not complicated for me now, that is, I think this is a very normal thing. ... Our mentality will become more stable and sufficient... I can face it calmly. This is the immense feeling I have felt in the past ten years.’ (iw-025).</p>	<p>Improvement of Psychological adaptation</p>	
<p>‘A female’s responsibility lies in serving her husband and teaching her children; a male can launch an entrepreneurial enterprise.’ (im-023).</p>	<p>Tradition Chinese cultural concept: tightness</p>	<p>Cultural tightness and looseness</p>
<p>‘Social concepts about women are gradually improving. The business environment is improving, and there are more and more women, so I think social concepts about women may increase. It will not stop. In the past, for example, women may have been too weak, some things could not be done, or something else. It may be found later that women are also powerful and can do many things.’ (iw-008)</p>	<p>Cultural tightness shifts to cultural looseness towards Chinese women in Entrepreneurship.</p>	
<p>‘I do not think there is considerable confusion in this regard, and I do not say that there will be differences between men and women in entrepreneurship. However, right now, in my view, entrepreneurship is what you are looking for... how you are more resilient to that, what kind of person do you want to be, and then you do what you want to do, just be brave. As for the eyes of others, maybe I do not care much about it, so I may not think that society treats female entrepreneurial leadership differently. So, I am less sensitive to this information.’ (iw-046).</p>		



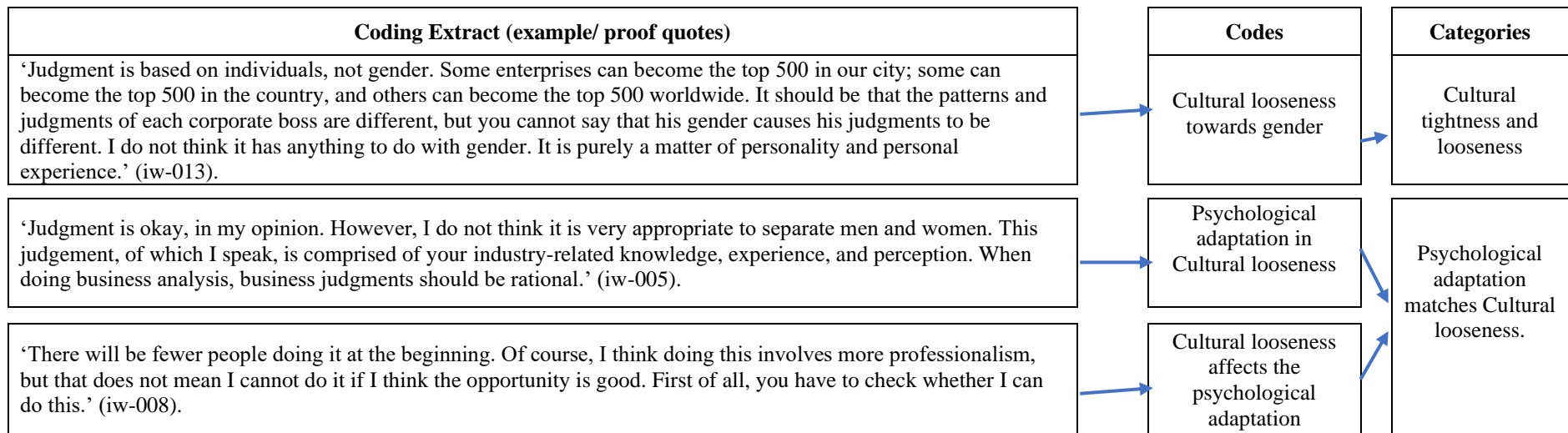
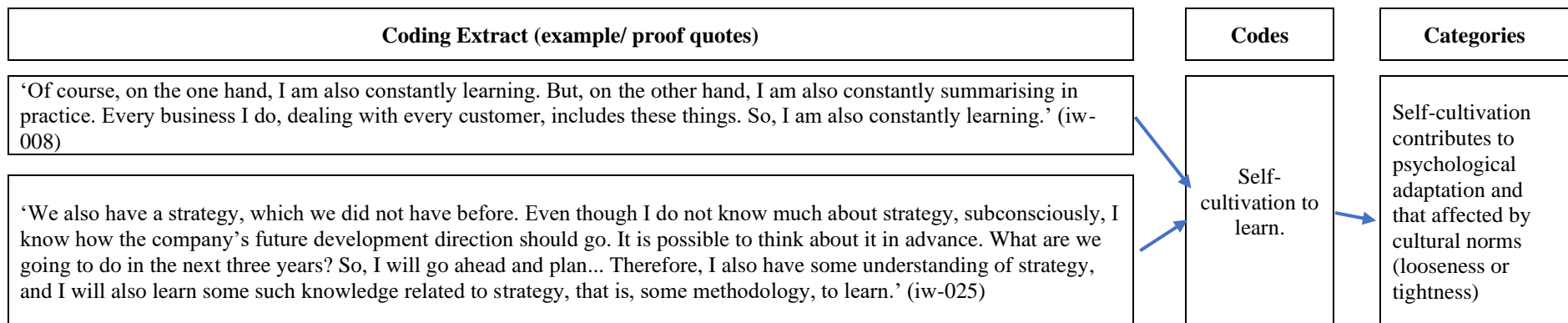


Table 19 Self-cultivation to learn.



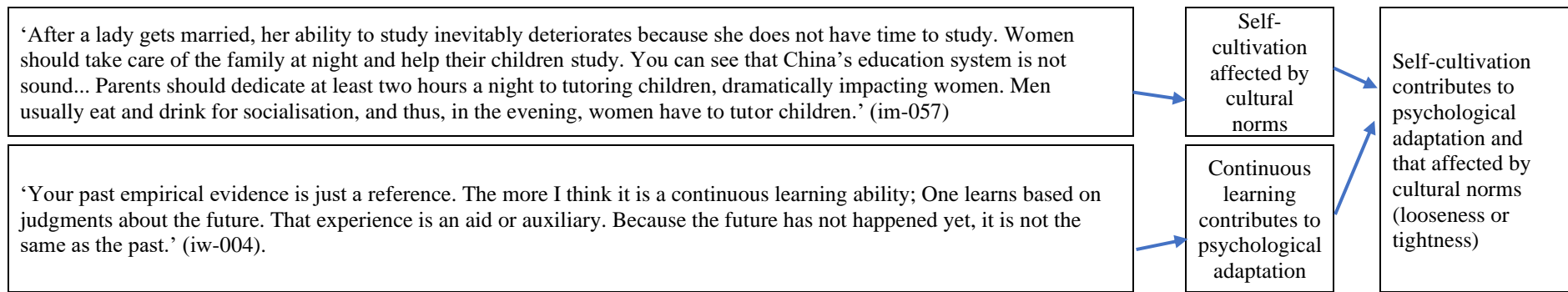


Table 20 Other-oriented culture and Self-oriented culture

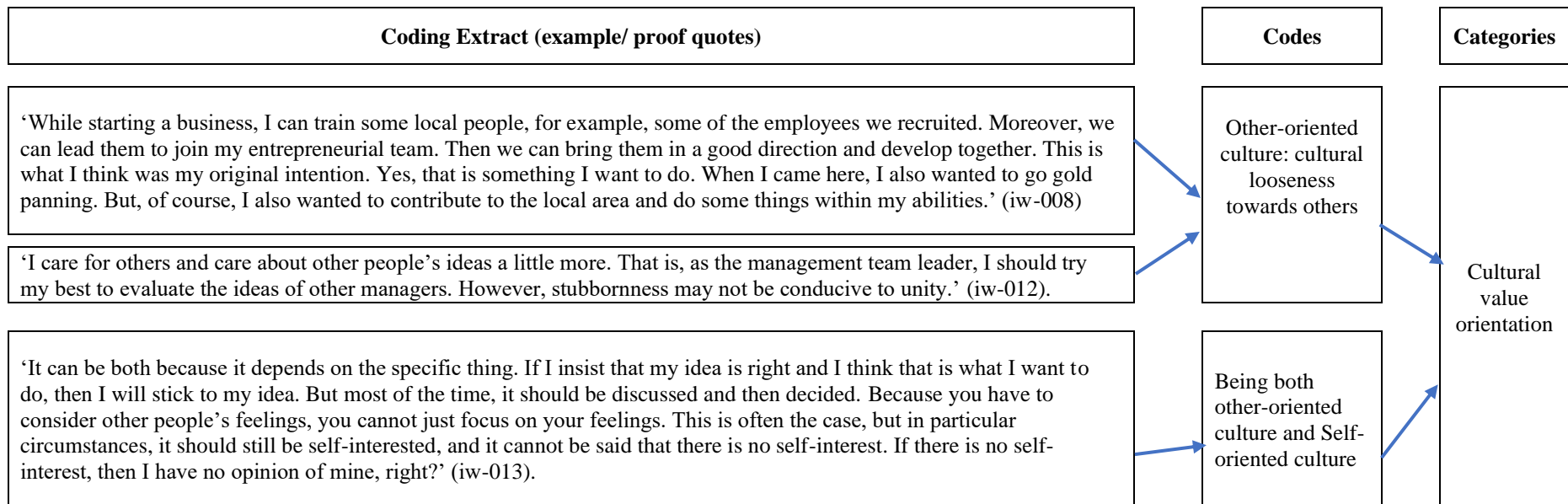
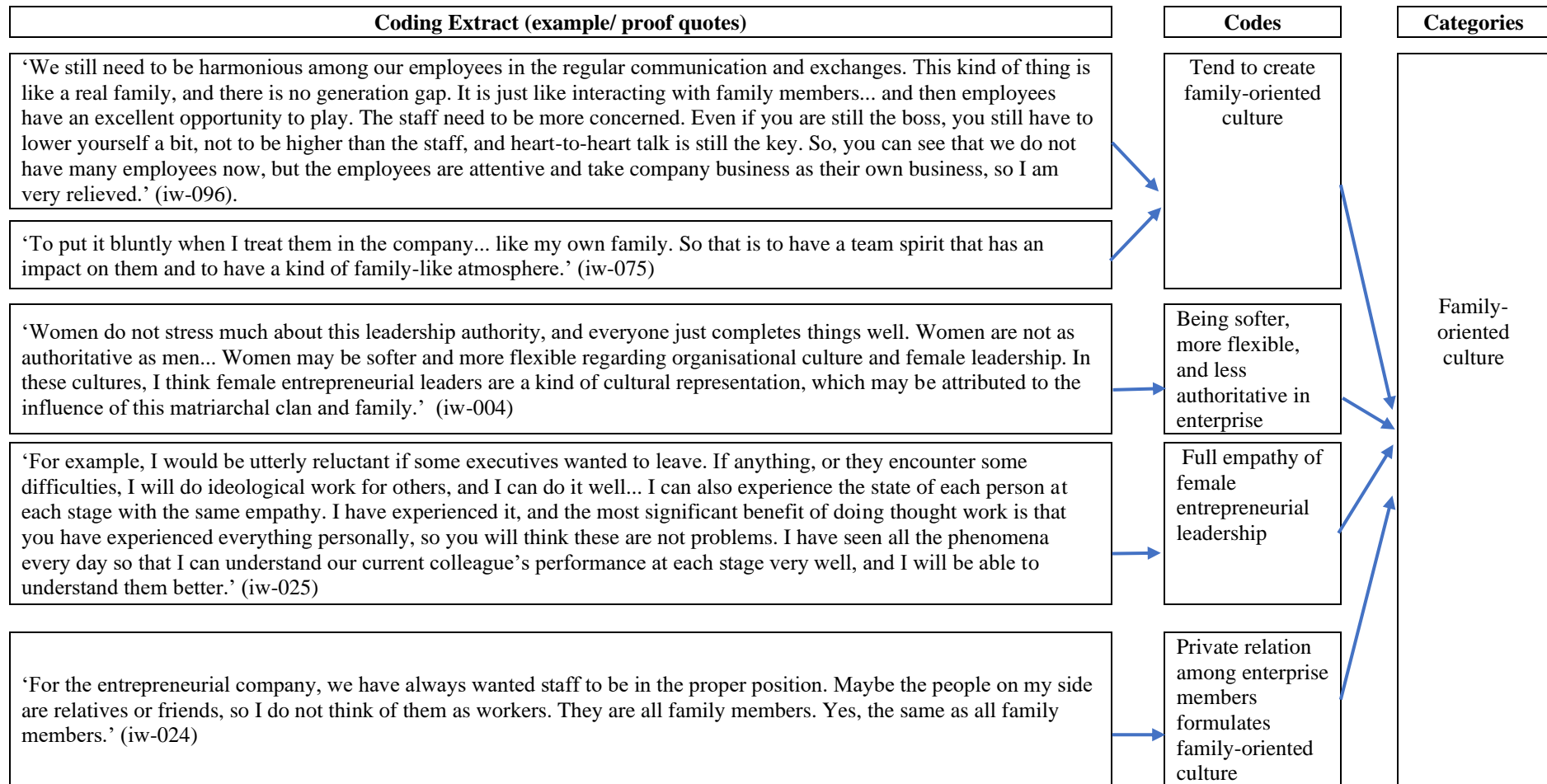
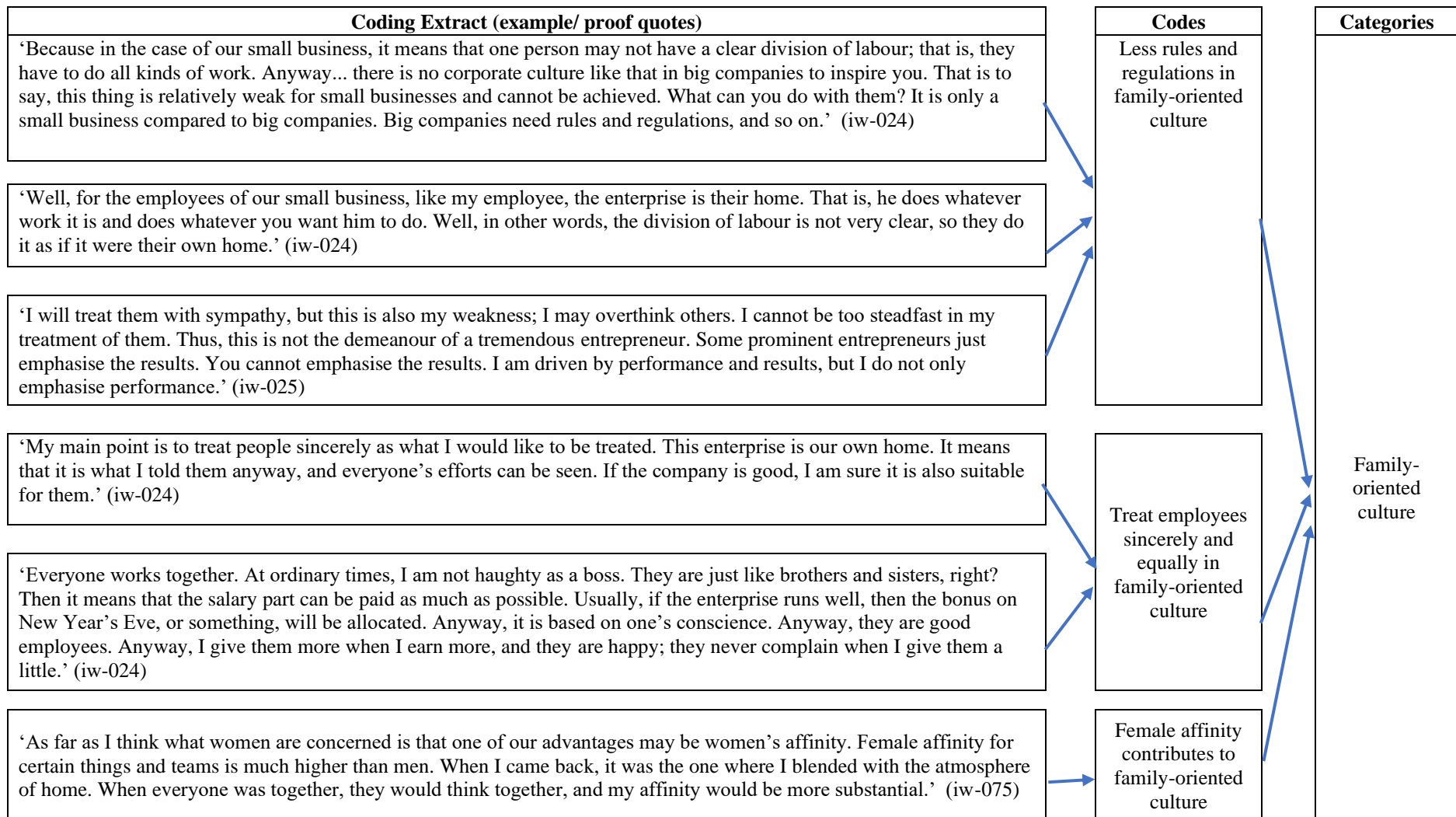


Table 21 Family-oriented culture





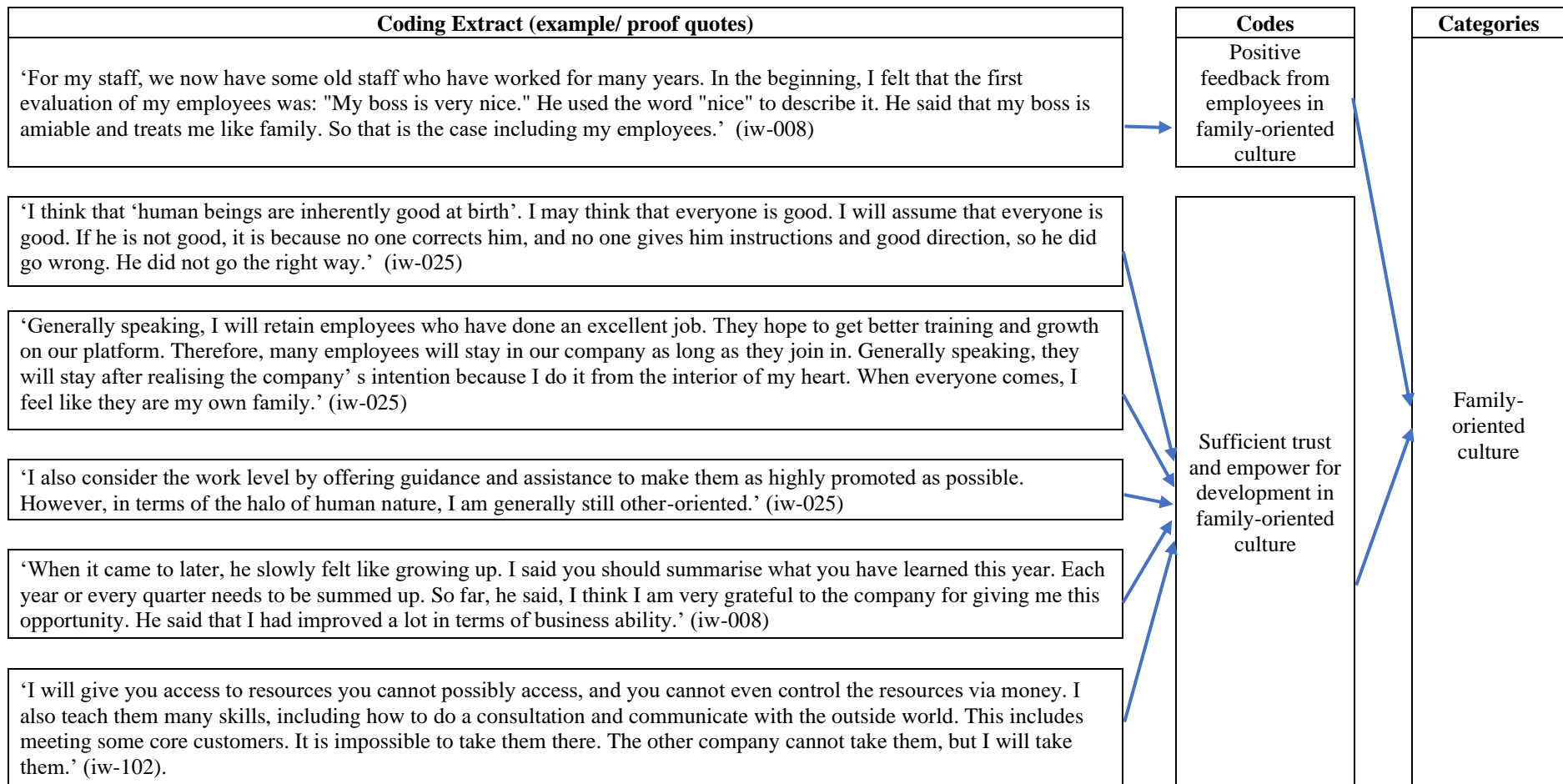
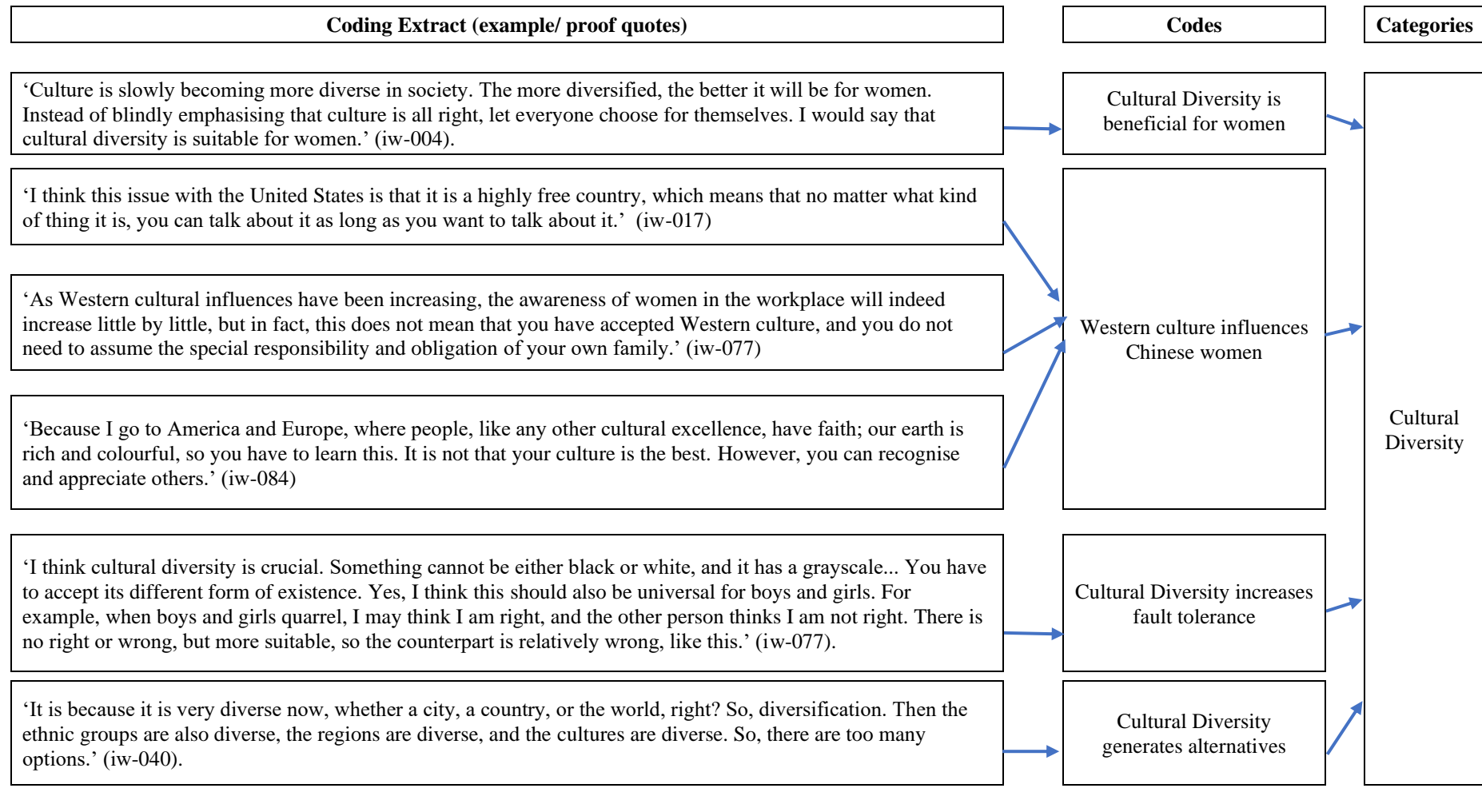


Table 22 Teamwork and team cultivation

Coding Extract (example/ proof quotes)	Codes	Categories
<p>‘When I was away, there was a partner, ... I even invested a little money in him, but he did not complete a single business and even took people away. This is also a lesson for me. The first lesson is about the partner. I thought that the one he said was 1, but the one he said might be 0.1, so now I have been angry several times... Therefore, we should also establish corporate rules and regulations... This is not established in a day or two. I hope there can be a standard, at least some of the norms on paper, and then they can gradually be corrected.’ (iw-007)</p>	<p>The importance of rules and regulations in teamwork</p>	<p>Teamwork and Cultivation</p>
<p>‘The best part is that after we have done a project with the client, even after the project is over, we can still be together as friends. So, I think this is a good one. In fact, from the beginning to the present, I have constantly been trying to improve myself in all aspects, and I believe the team can gradually become more vigorous.’ (iw-008).</p>	<p>Team cultivation in a dynamic and friendship-oriented manner</p>	
<p>‘I also met outstanding employees here and they have been with me since the early days of my business, and they have also improved and learned a lot. I also feel delighted in my heart because I let others keep making progress. When some employees come in, they may think more of themselves. He did not think about how I could progress with the company, ... Maybe he was thinking of this. For our start-up company, it may be more that everyone can get together to do things, which is the most important thing.’ (iw-008).</p>	<p>Continuous development of team members</p>	

Table 23 Cultural diversity



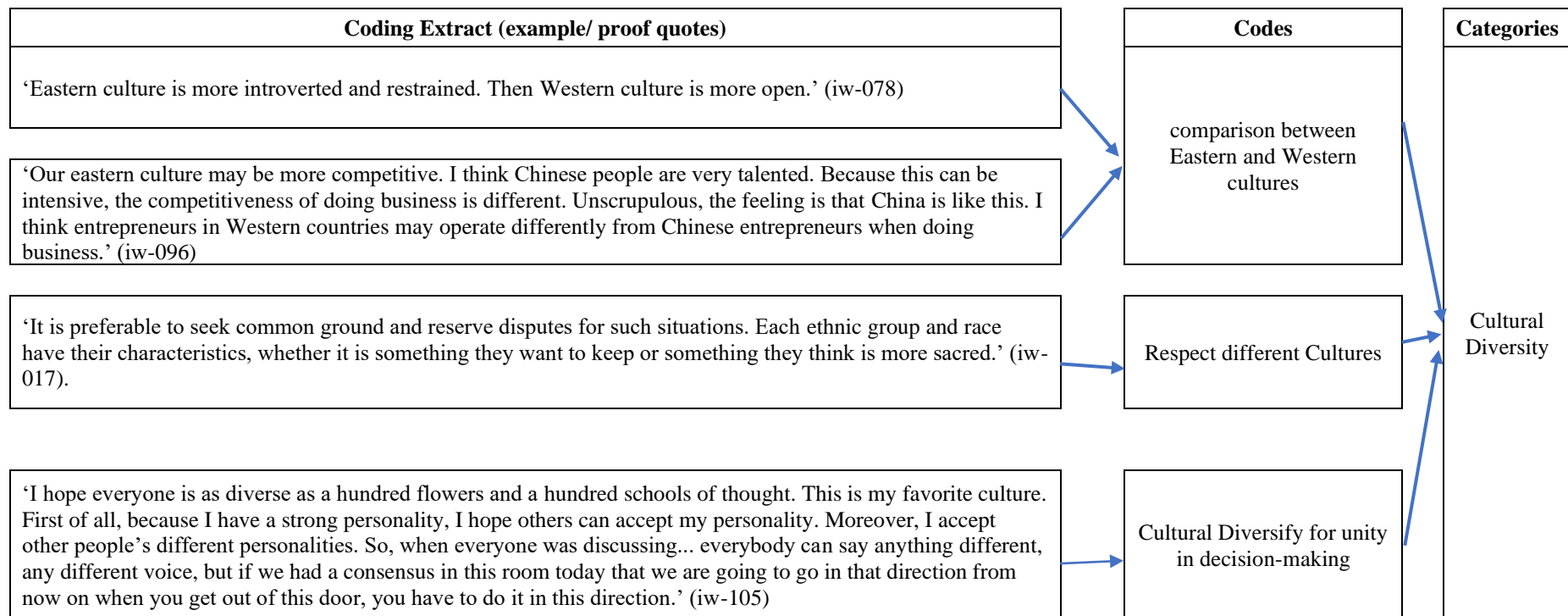


Table 24 Sociocultural inertia



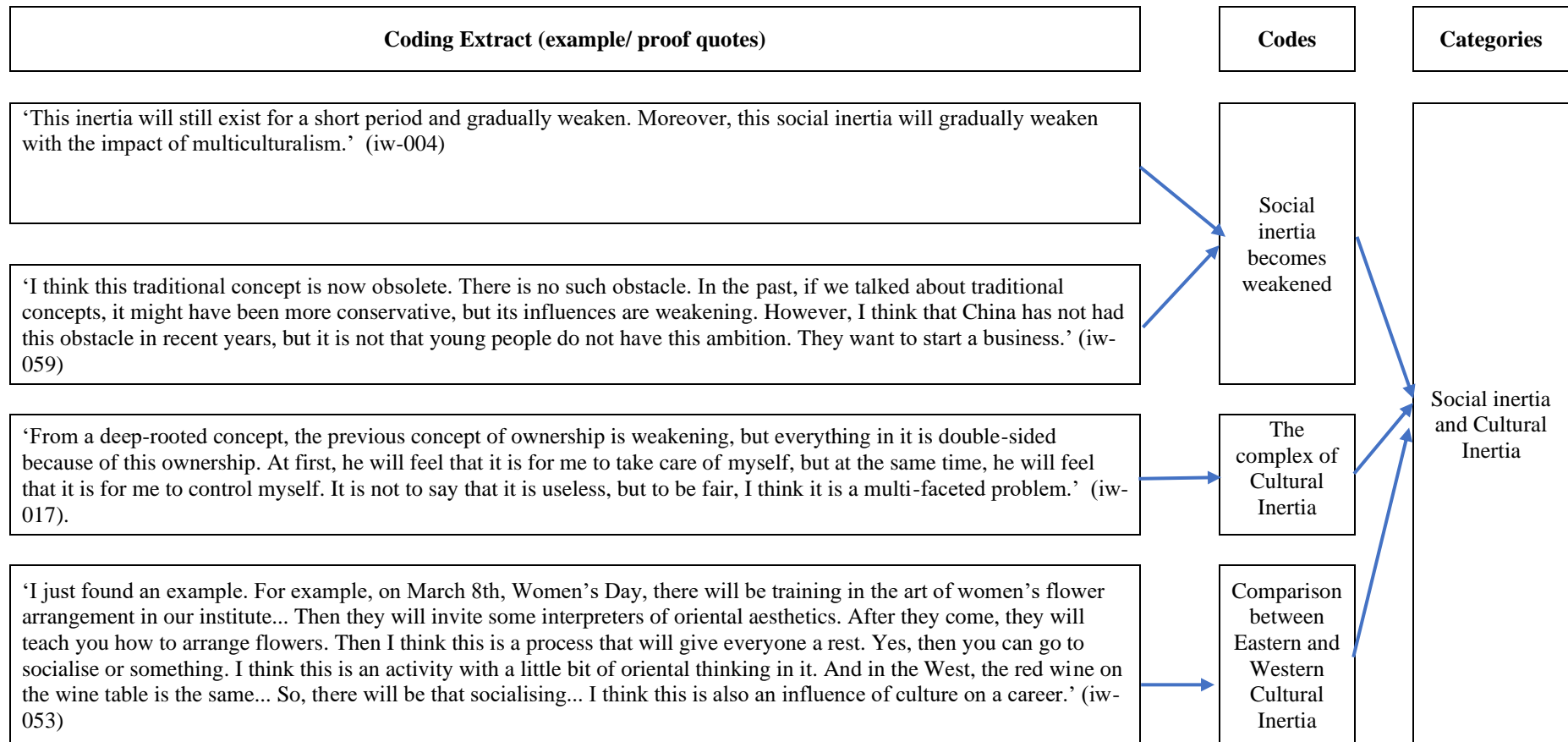
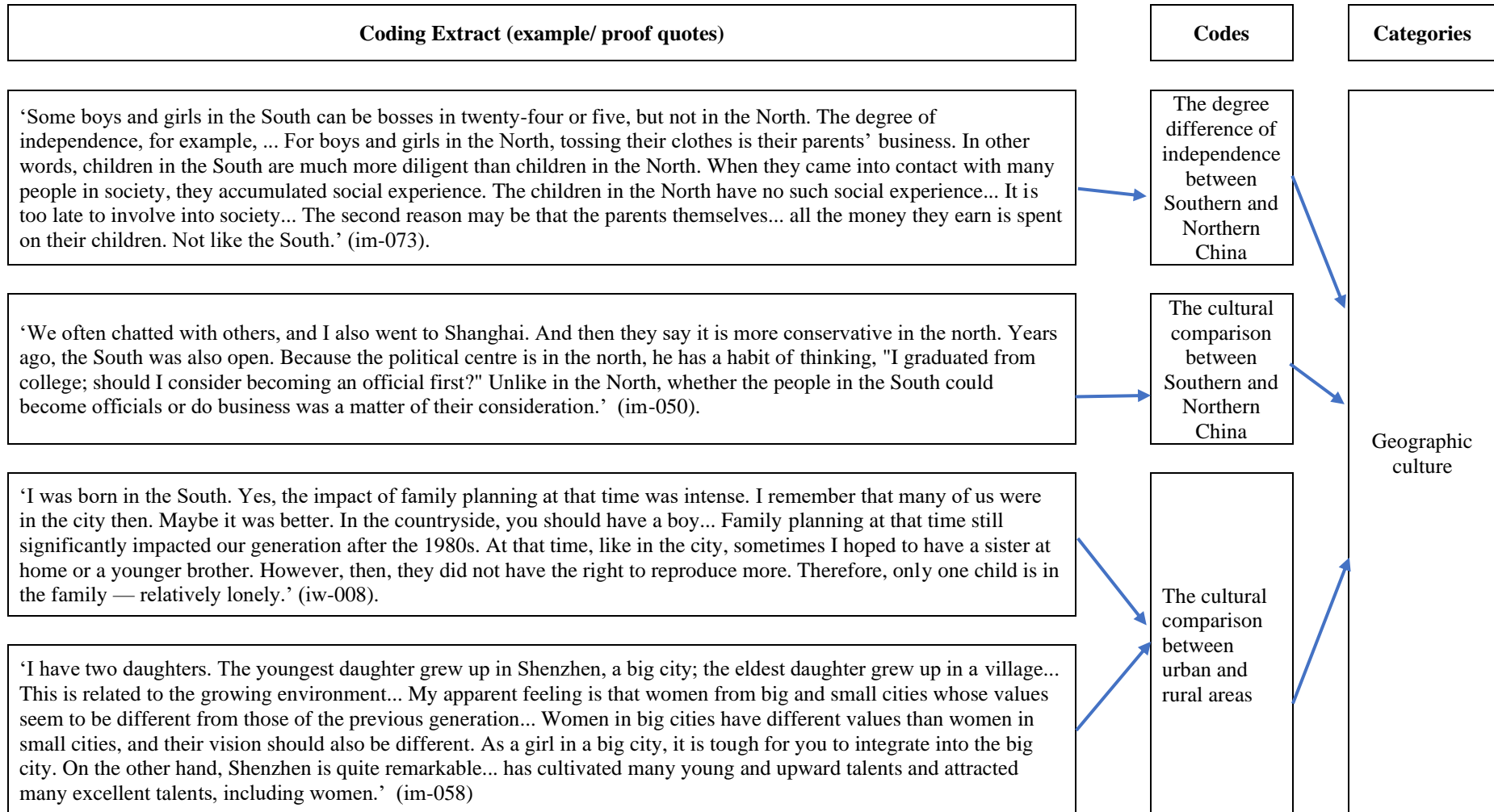


Table 25 Geographic culture



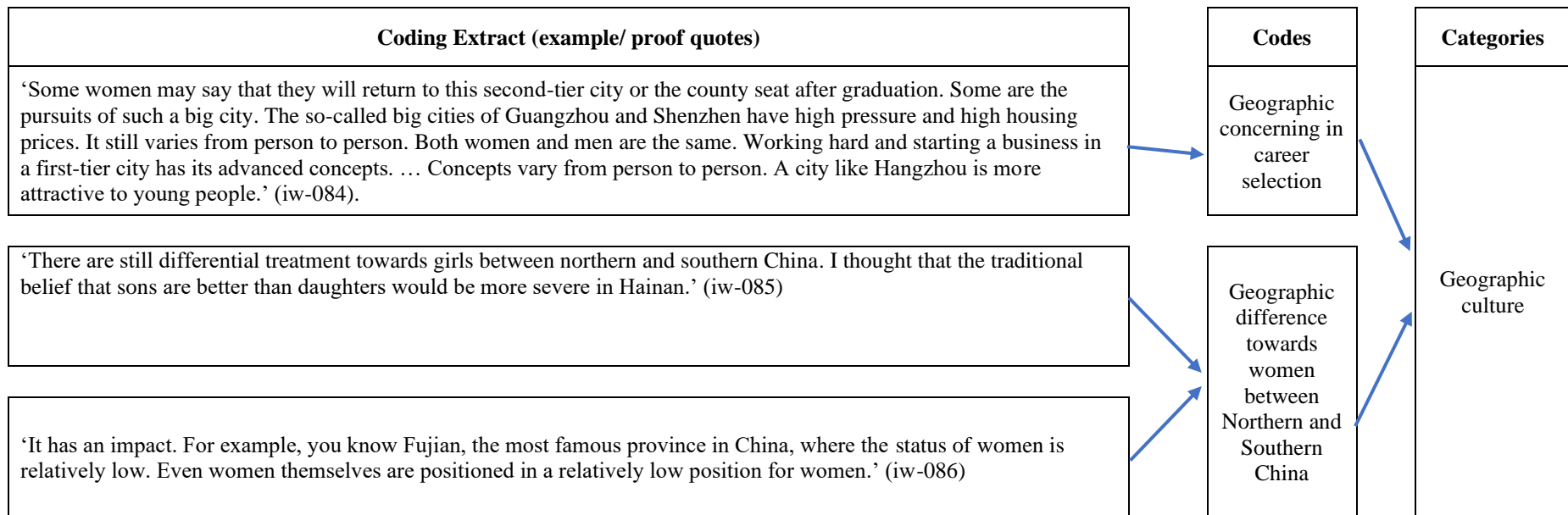


Table 26 A shift from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism

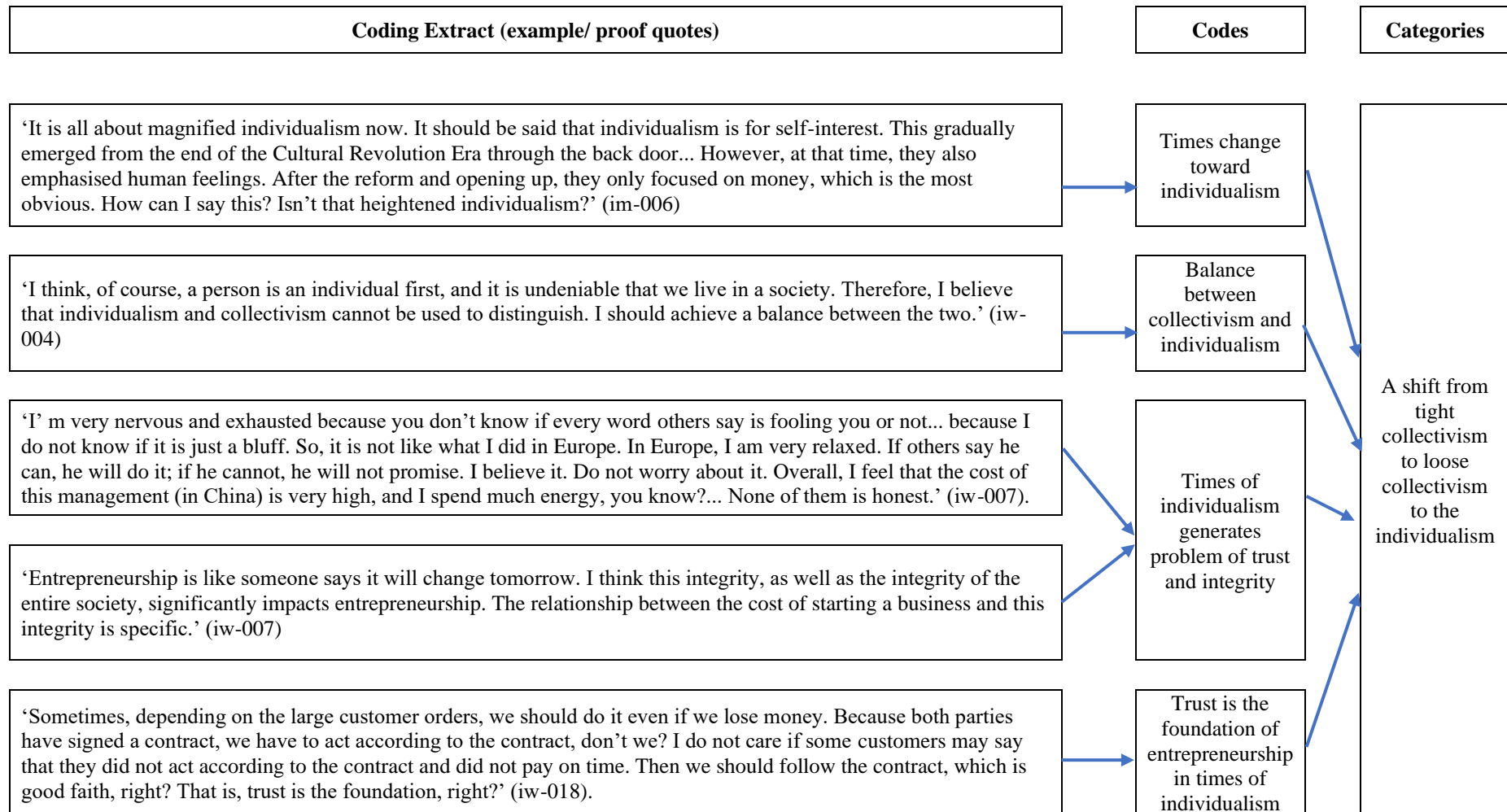


Table 27 Social class

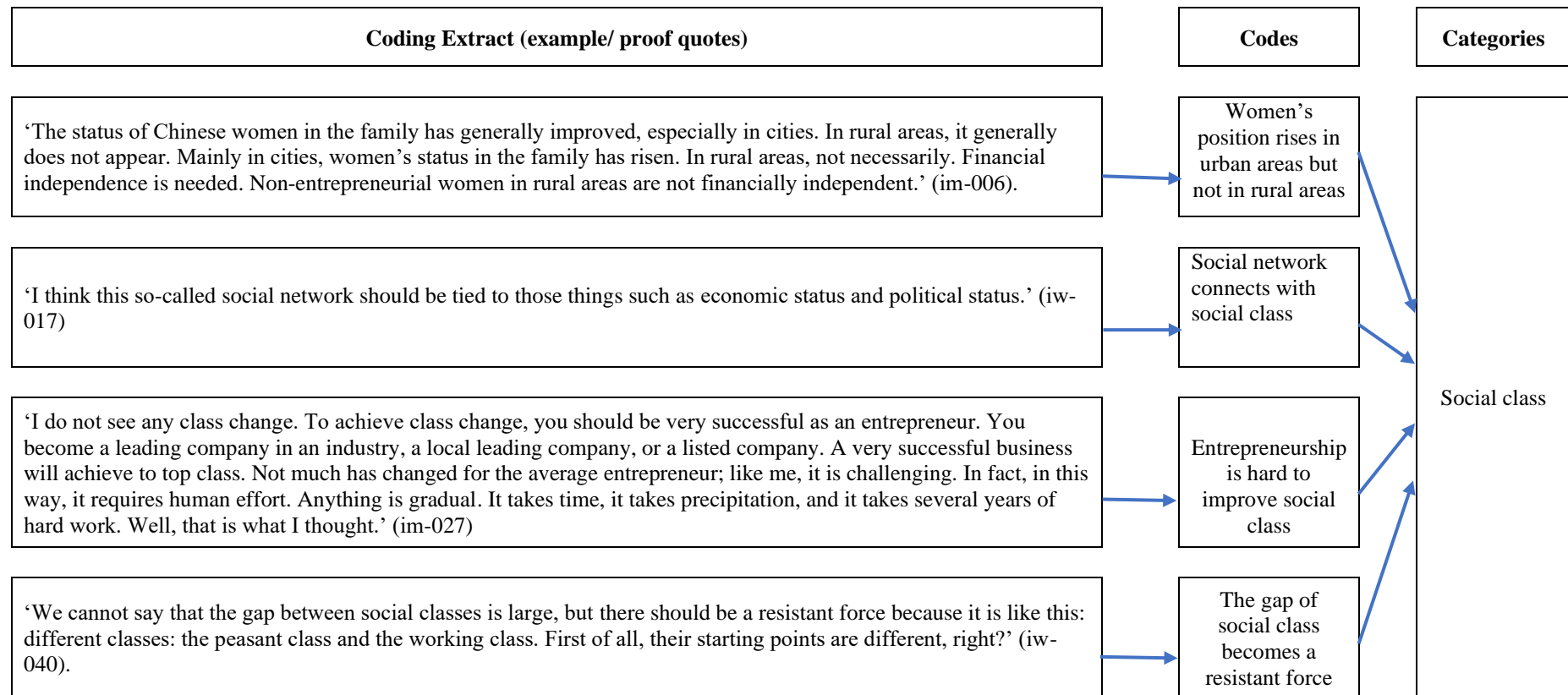
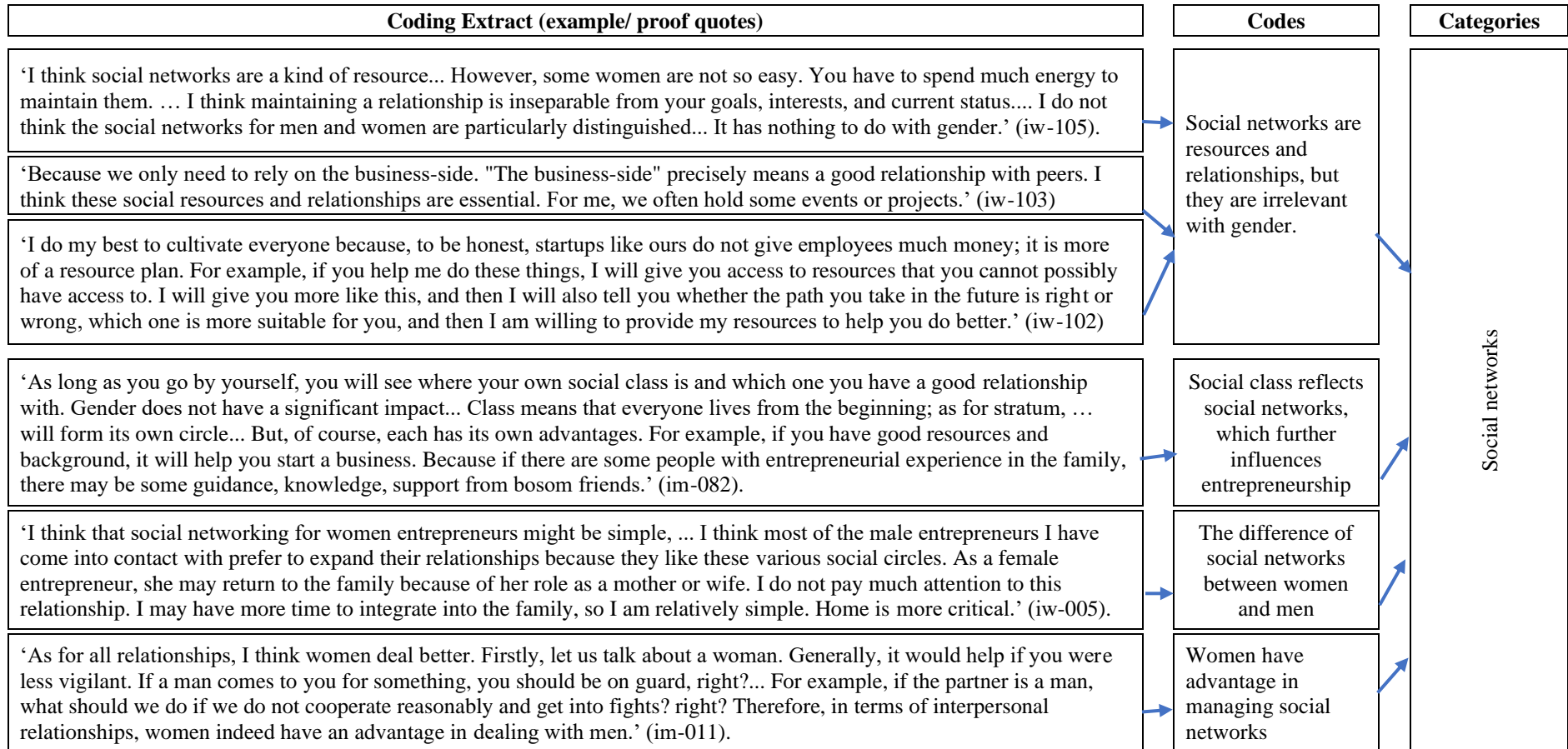


Table 28 Social network



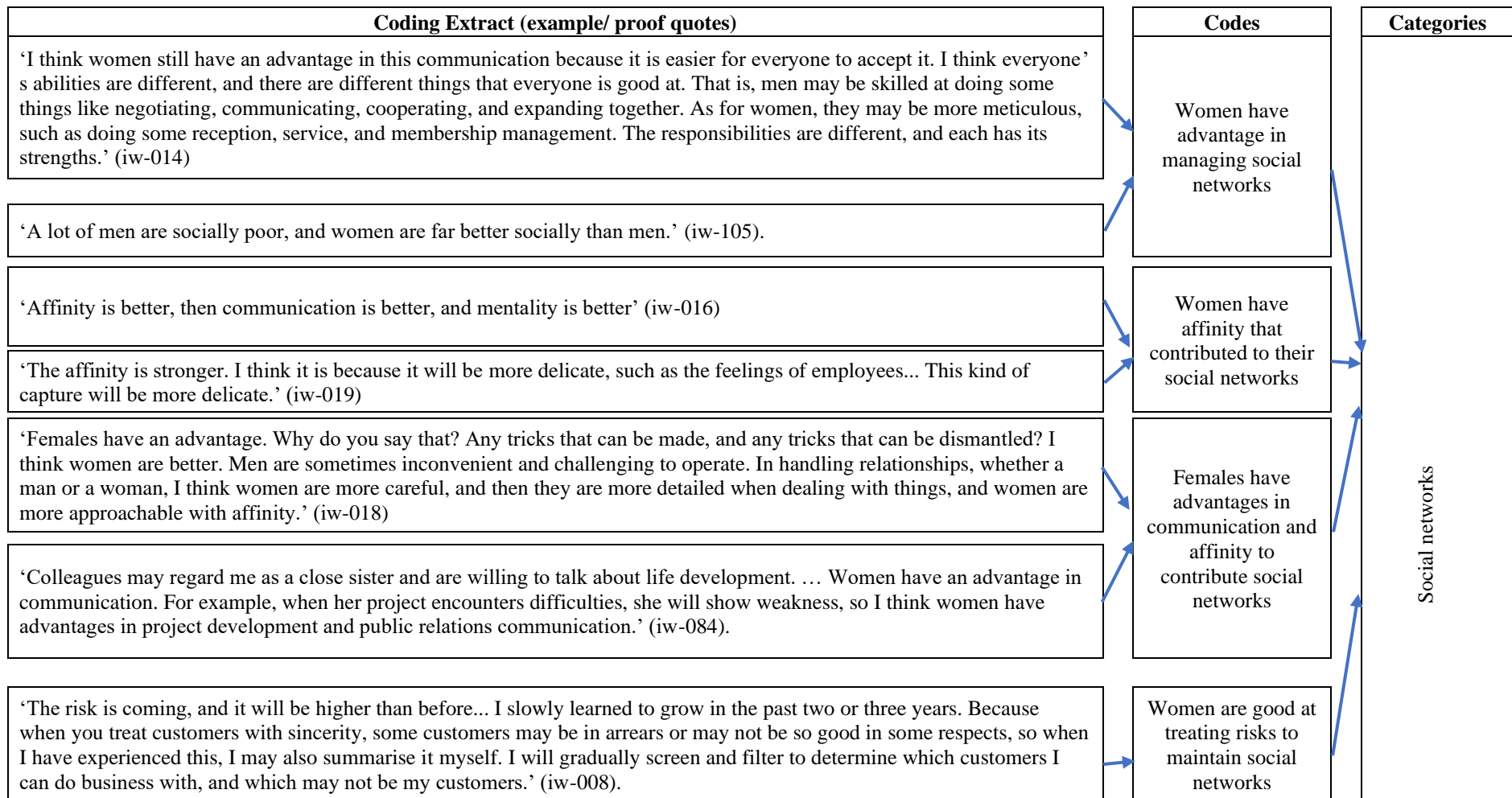
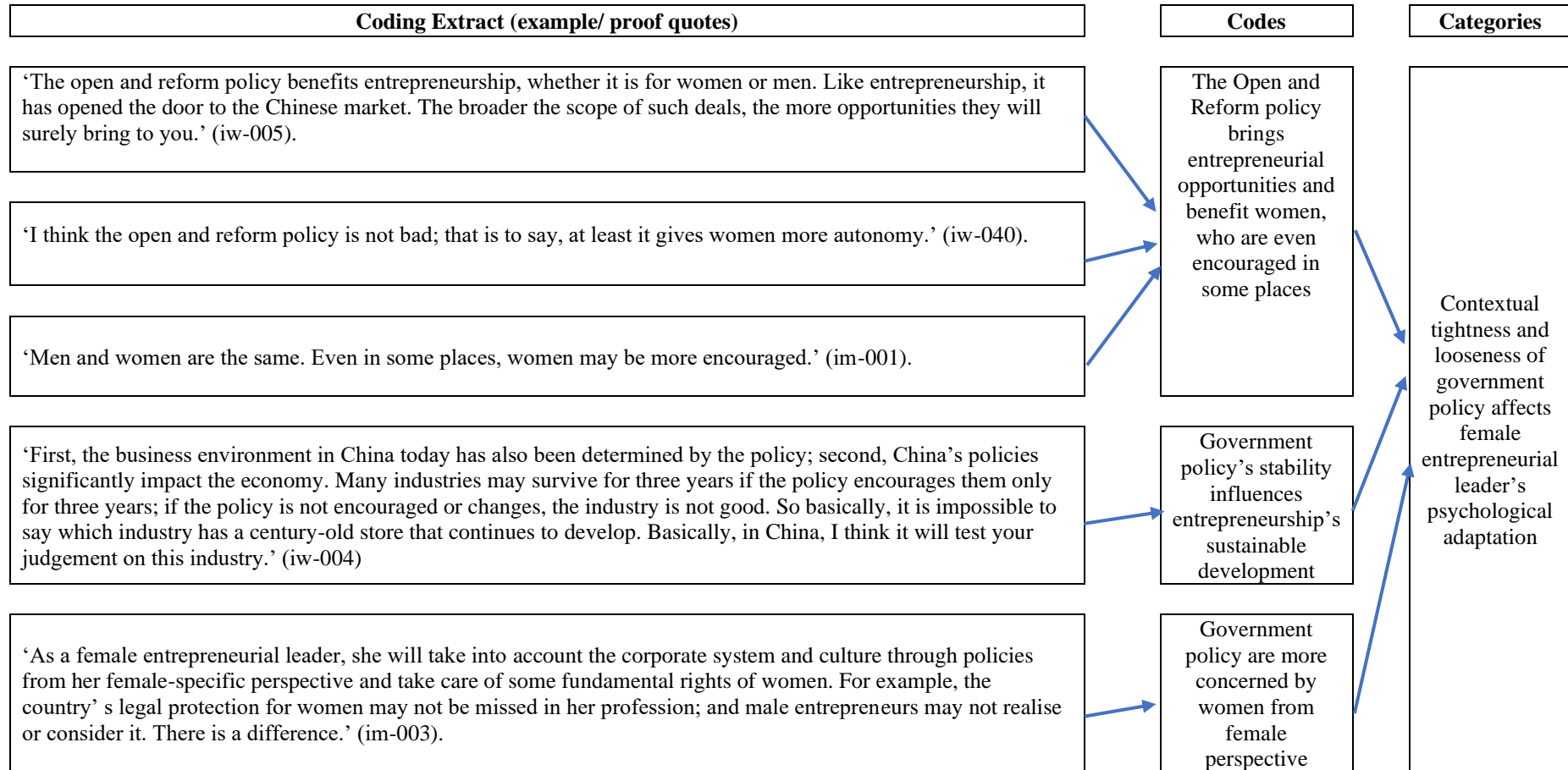


Table 29 Government policy





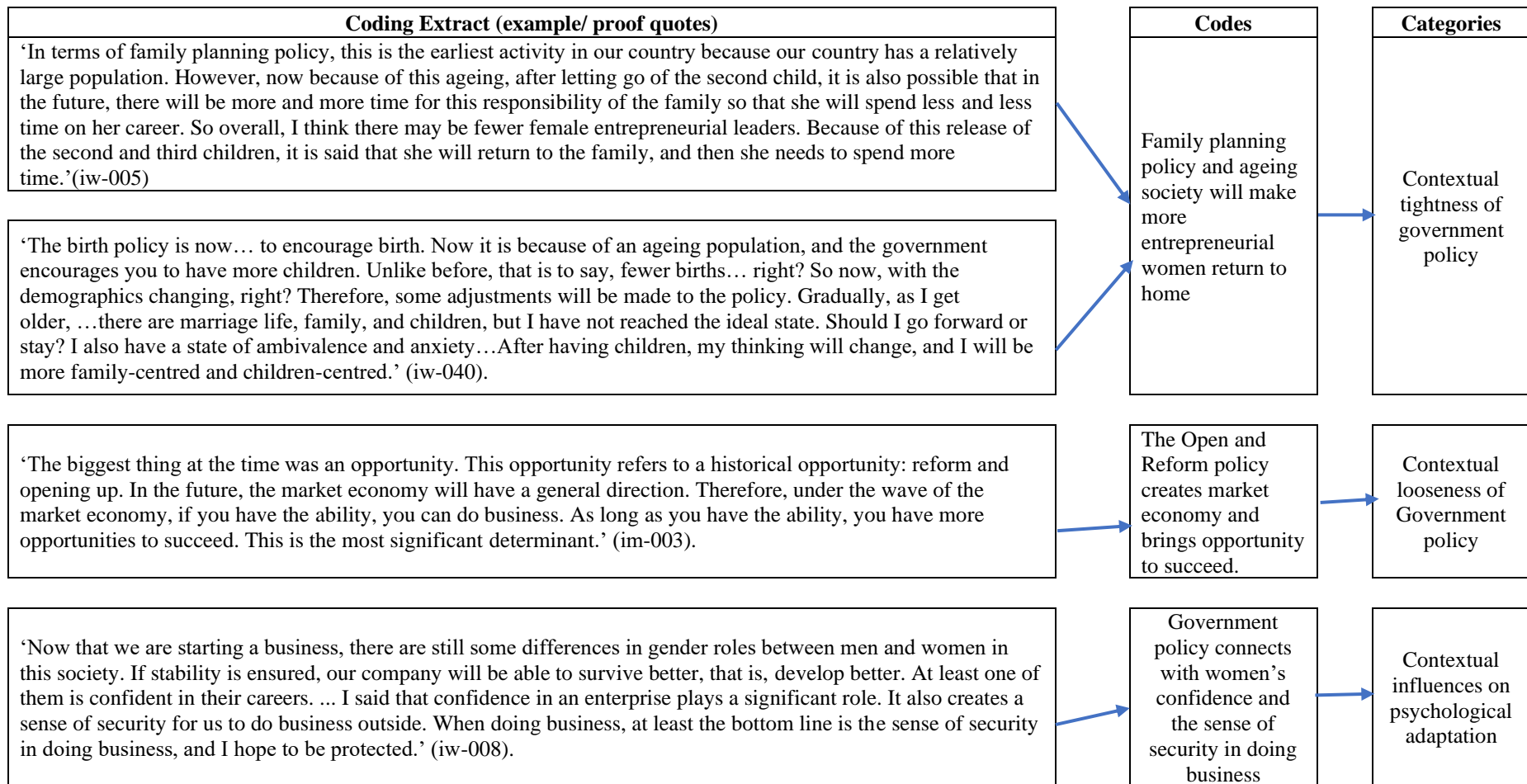


Table 30 Institutional uncertainty

Coding Extract (example/ proof quotes)	Codes	Categories
<p>'In the face of such a sudden epidemic, no one could have imagined it. So, I think, first of all... we should learn to identify and distinguish customers, which is very important. ... if I have made some relatively unfamiliar, unknown customers, then we may be worried that the payment for the goods will not be recovered, or that the cash flow will be strenuous. So, there is a lot of pressure and much risk. However, if we did this kind of customer selection well in the past, it might be a little conscious.' (iw-008).</p>	<p>Tightness of Institutional Uncertainty</p>	<p>The relationship between the tightness of institutional uncertainty and female entrepreneurial leader's psychological adaptation</p>
<p>'The sales and production of this product are OK, but the first half of the year was relatively affected. Because everyone cannot go out, the product cannot come out. Anyway, on the whole, for example, everyone is affected, and all industries are affected. Therefore, the second half of the year was relatively busy, and all the work backlogged in the year's first half was done in the second half of the year. Therefore, it did not make much difference for the whole year.' (iw-024)</p>		
<p>'The impact on me means that I can only stay in the United States and not go back to China, which is my most significant impact. I was very anxious in February, March, and April last year... workers could not go to work... By June, we were disappointed.... so, what should I do? At that time, I felt that I could only comfort myself. However, starting from the year's second half, we did very well. Last year we completed all the performances that we fell behind on.' (iw-075)</p>	<p>Tightness of Institutional Uncertainty influences on psychological adaptation</p>	
<p>'I think that in all businesses, you have to be very resilient. My own company should persevere no matter how difficult it becomes. It is tenacity and enthusiasm... You should be happy when you do things. If you are not happy, I think you will be unable to do well. That is what we want for our brand, our culture. I think you should be persistent and resilient in whatever you do, and then you should be passionate about your life, your products, and your work. We have always told our employees that they should be enthusiastic. How can you get the job done if you do not like your work?' (iw-101).</p>		
<p>'It is nothing, just because I still found an opportunity. There are facilitators and constraints to the development of anything. On the whole, it may be a bad thing, but it is also the progress of humankind. I have not deliberately studied it, but I think there are other opportunities to seize during the epidemic.... First resilience. Second is the ability to withstand pressure; third, women's general emotions are relatively soft. I am more flexible in business than others.' (iw-004)</p>		

Table 31 Entrepreneurial context

Coding Extract (example/ proof quotes)	Codes	Categories
<p>'In terms of the entrepreneurial environment, especially in the current status quo of micro-business or e-commerce industries, all these have nothing to do with gender. Moreover, when employees leave, they are often engaged in activities of entrepreneurship, both men and women.' (im-001).</p>	<p>Entrepreneurial context is irrelevant with gender</p>	<p>Entrepreneurial context</p>
<p>'The company environment is much better than before, and the entrepreneurial environment is good.' (iw-002)</p>	<p>Looseness of Entrepreneurial environment</p>	
<p>'I think the entrepreneurial environment has little to do with it. If the entrepreneurial environment is not good, it is a waste of time, which is quite a waste of time on unimportant things. I feel our time is too precious and we should go wherever we like the most. That water goes down low, and then we go where we are most popular. If it were apparent that I might feel rejected in this environment, I would leave here.' (iw-004).</p>	<p>Active selection of Entrepreneurial environment</p>	
<p>'I think Shanghai has two things: one is science, and the other is innovation, which is necessary for the technological entrepreneurship of enterprises.' (iw-005)</p>	<p>Conditions of Entrepreneurial context</p>	
<p>'First, whether they attach importance to talents and whether we acquire some related auxiliary support. Well, where I am now, they do not value talent; it has become a slogan. Second, they said to give me a house, but I have not gotten it yet. So how much is my talent allowance? I have not seen a penny, have I? so this does not make sense. So, I will just let it go.' (iw-007)</p>	<p>Contextual tightness is harmful to entrepreneurship</p>	

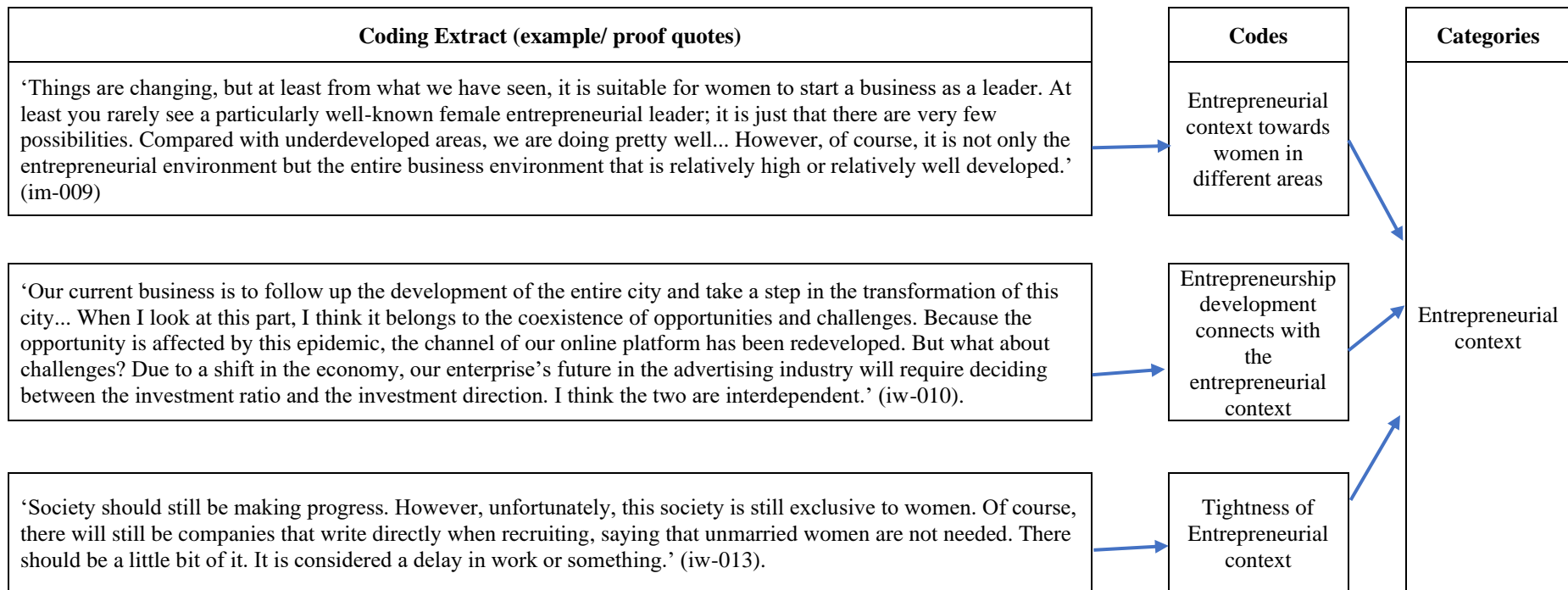


Table 32 The feminism status quo of female entrepreneurial leaders

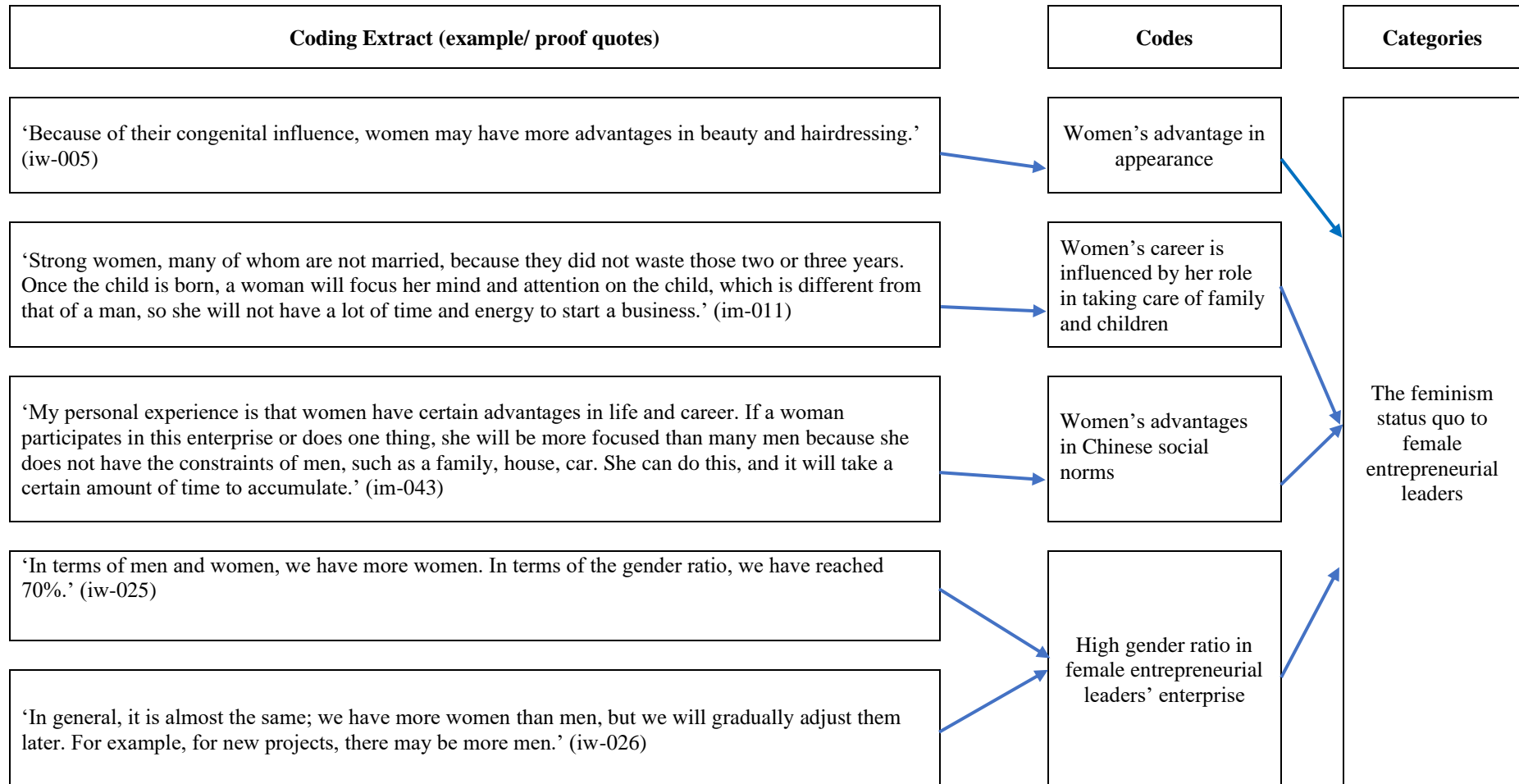
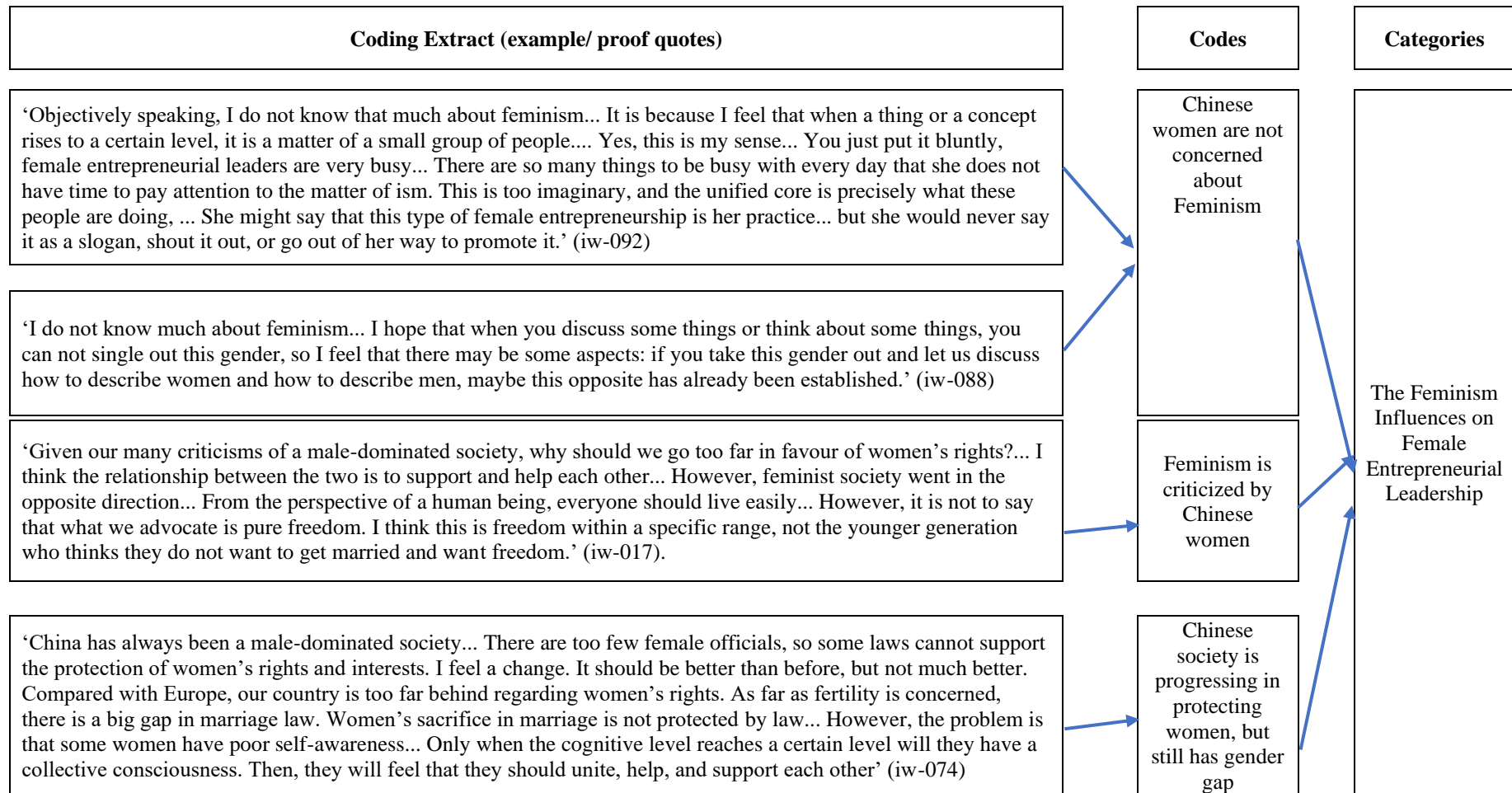
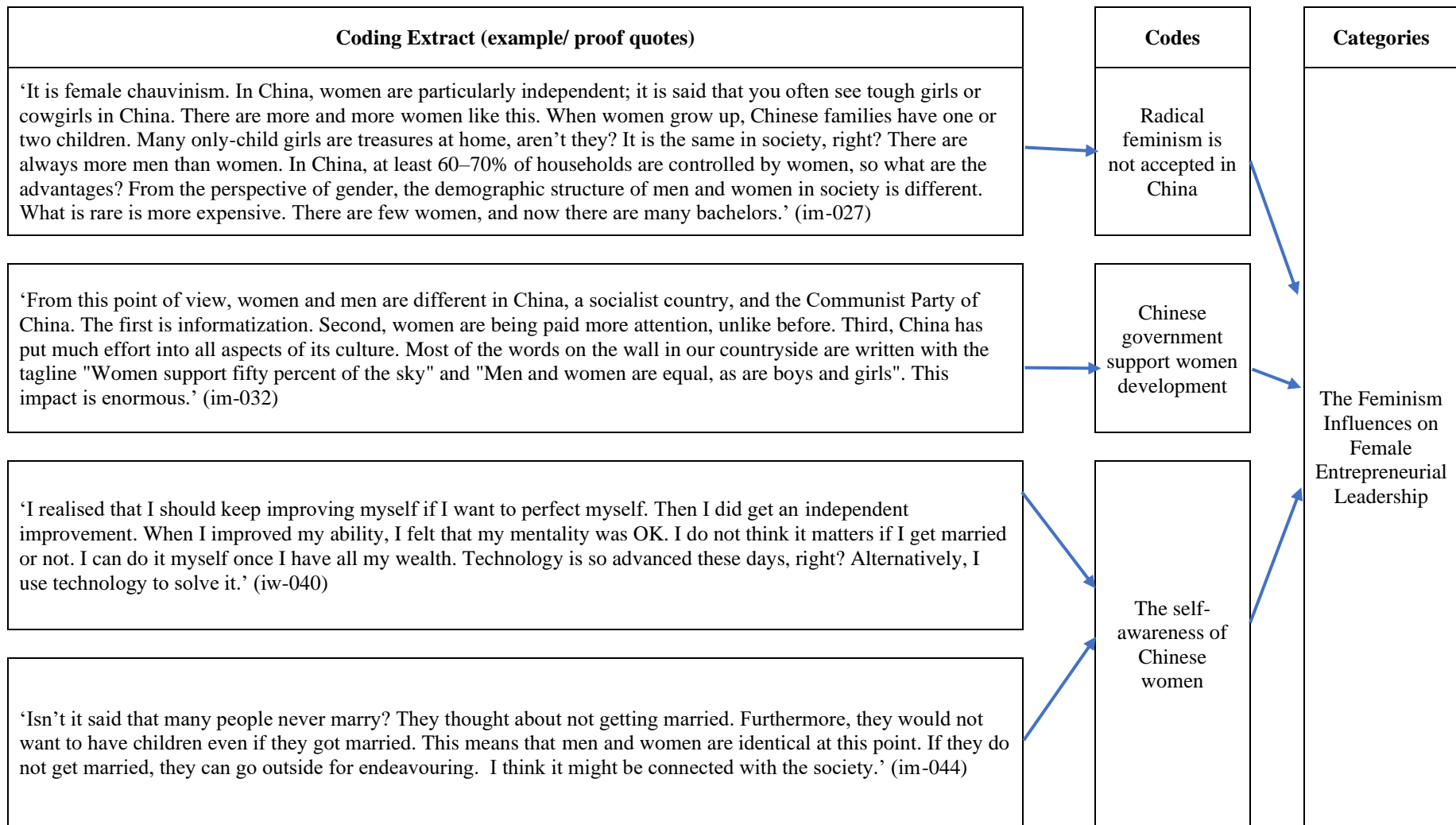
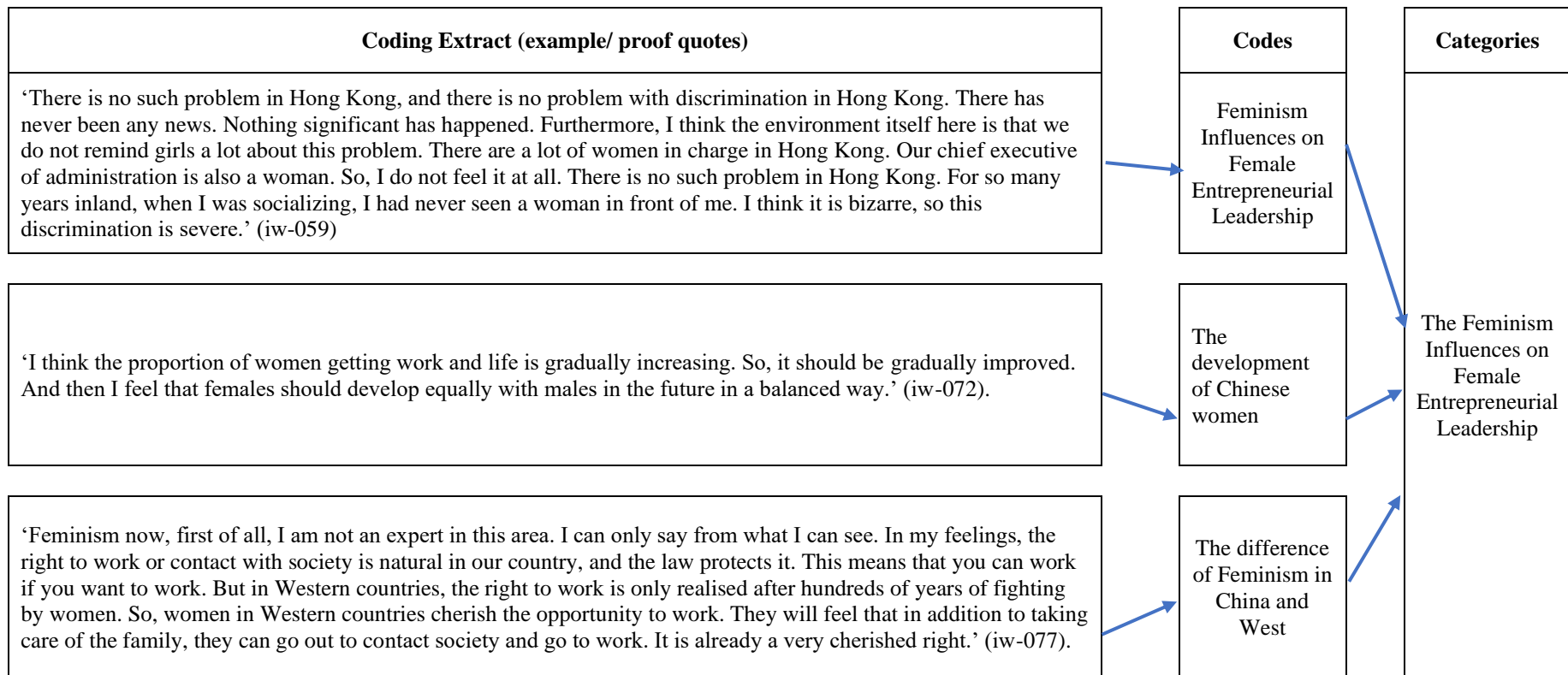


Table 33 The feminism influences on female entrepreneurial leadership.







A14 Analysis of the Determinants of Female Entrepreneurial Leadership



Table 34 How the determinants work

Determinants			Roles		Cultural Properties		Cultural Gateway	
			Facilitative	Constrained	Tightness	Looseness	Closed	Opened
External	Micro Level	Work and Business-family Balance	Spending less time on balancing business-family is facilitative	Spending much time on balancing business-family is constrained	Spending much time on balancing business-family tends to generate tightness	Spending less time on balancing business-family tends to formulate looseness	If spending much time on balancing business-family	If spending less time on balancing business-family
		Family support and background	Getting family support with powerful background is facilitative	Lacking family support or without powerful background will be constrained	Lacking family support or without powerful background tends to formulate tightness	Getting family support with powerful background tends to formulate looseness	Lacking family support or without powerful background	Getting family support with powerful background
		Self-cultivation to learn	Emphasising self-cultivation is facilitative	Ignoring self-cultivation is constrained	Ignoring self-cultivation tends to create tightness	Emphasising self-cultivation tends to create looseness	Ignoring self-cultivation	Emphasising self-cultivation is facilitative
	Meso Level	Other-oriented culture and Self-oriented culture	Other-oriented culture tends to be facilitative	Self-oriented culture tends to be constrained	Self-oriented culture tends to create tightness	Other-oriented culture tends to create Looseness	Self-oriented culture	Other-oriented culture

Determinants			Roles		Cultural Properties		Cultural Gateway	
			Facilitative	Constrained	Tightness	Looseness	Closed	Opened
External	Meso Level	Family-oriented culture	Facilitative to ingroup members	Constrained to outgroup members	For outgroup members, family-oriented culture tends to create tightness	For ingroup members, family-oriented culture tends to create looseness	To outgroup members	To ingroup members
		Teamwork and Team cultivation	Emphasising teamwork and team cultivation is facilitative	Ignoring teamwork and team cultivation is facilitative	Ignoring teamwork and team cultivation is constrained	Emphasising teamwork and team cultivation tends to create looseness	Ignoring teamwork and team cultivation	Emphasising teamwork and team cultivation
	Macro Level	Cultural diversity	High cultural diversity is facilitative	Low cultural diversity is constrained	Low cultural diversity tends to formulate tightness	High cultural diversity tends to formulate looseness	Low cultural diversity	High cultural diversity
		Social inertia and culture inertia	Entrepreneurial social inertia and culture inertia can be facilitative	Conservative social inertia and culture inertia are constrained	Conservative social inertia and culture inertia tend to formulate tightness	Entrepreneurial social inertia and culture inertia tend to formulate looseness	Conservative social inertia and culture inertia	Entrepreneurial social inertia and culture inertia
		Geographic culture	If local culture is inclusive	If local culture is conservative	If local culture is conservative	If local culture is inclusive	If local culture is conservative	If local culture is inclusive

Determinants			Roles		Cultural Properties		Cultural Gateway	
			Facilitative	Constrained	Tightness	Looseness	Closed	Opened
External	Macro Level	A shift from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism	Increase the facilitative role	Decrease the constrained role	Decrease tightness	Increase looseness	Decrease the probability of closing cultural gateway	Increase the probability of opening cultural gateway
		Social class	Middle and above level social class tends to be facilitative	Low level social class tends to be constrained	Low level social class tends to involve in tightness	Middle and above level social class tends to acquire looseness	Low level social class	Middle and above level social class
		Social networks	Expanding social networks tends to be facilitative	Narrowing social networks tends to be constrained	Narrowing social networks tends to involve in tightness	Expanding social networks tends to acquire looseness	Narrowing social networks	Expanding social networks
		Government policy	Liberal policy (Open and Reform policy and market-economy policy) are facilitative	Conservative policy (Family-planning policy) is constrained	Conservative policy tends to formulate tightness	Liberal policy tends to formulate looseness	Conservative policy (Family-planning policy)	Liberal policy (Open and Reform policy and market-economy policy)
		Institutional uncertainty	Low institutional uncertainty is facilitative	High institutional uncertainty is constrained	High institutional uncertainty tends to create tightness	Low institutional uncertainty is facilitative	If have high institutional uncertainty	If have low institutional uncertainty

Determinants			Roles		Cultural Properties		Cultural Gateway	
			Facilitative	Constrained	Tightness	Looseness	Closed	Opened
External	Macro Level	Entrepreneurial context	Inclusive and high-level entrepreneurial context is facilitative	Low level entrepreneurial context is constrained	Low level entrepreneurial context tends to formulate tightness	Inclusive and high-level entrepreneurial context is facilitative	If in a low-level entrepreneurial context	If in an inclusive and high-level entrepreneurial context
		Feminist status quo	Reducing distance to the feminism tends to be constrained	Keeping distance to the feminism tends to be constrained	Keeping distance to the feminism tends to involve in tightness	Reducing distance to the feminism tends to acquire looseness	If keeping distance to the feminism	If reducing distance to the feminism
		Feminism influences	Liberal feminism tends to be facilitative	Radical feminism tends to be constrained	Radical feminism tends to create tightness	Liberal feminism tends to create looseness	For radical feminism	For liberal feminism
Determinants			Role		Effects		Psychological Adaptation	
			Facilitative	Constrained	Tightness	Looseness	Low level	High level
Internal	Micro Level	Mindset of female entrepreneurial leaders	Entrepreneurial mindset is facilitative	Traditional-working mindset is constrained	Traditional-working mindset tends to be inactive	Entrepreneurial mindset tends to be active	If have traditional-working mindset	If have entrepreneurial mindset
		Confidence	Sufficient confidence tends to be facilitative	Lack of confidence tends to be constrained	Lack of confidence tends to be inactive	Sufficient confidence tends to be active	If lack confidence	If have sufficient confidence

## A15 The Mutual Relationship Between the Psychological Adaptation and Cultural Gateways at Different Levels

Table 35 The Mutual Relationship between Psychological Adaptation and Cultural Gateway (at the micro-level)

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>Psychological Aspects</span> <span>Opportunities or Challenges</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>Cultural Aspects</span> </div>				Mindset of female entrepreneurial leaders		Confidence of female entrepreneurial leaders		Internal Determinants		
				Internal Determinants form Psychological Adaptation						Effect
				Traditional-working mindset tends to be inactive	Entrepreneurial mindset tends to be active	Lack of confidence tends to be inactive	Sufficient confidence tends to be active	Situations		
External Determinants at the Micro-Level	Effect	Situations	Status of Cultural Gateway	Low Level	High Level	Low Level	High Level	Level of Psychological Adaptation		
Work and Business-family Balance	External Determinants form Cultural Gateway	If spending much time on balancing business-family	Closed	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge			
		If spending less time on balancing business-family	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity			
Family support and background		Lacking family support or without powerful background	Closed	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge			
		Getting family support with powerful background	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity			
Self-cultivation to learn		Ignoring self-cultivation	Closed	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge			
		Emphasizing self-cultivation is facilitative	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity			

Table 36 The Mutual Relationship between Psychological Adaptation and Cultural Gateway (at the Meso-level)

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>Psychological Aspects</span> <span>Cultural Aspects</span> <span>Opportunities or Challenges</span> </div>				Mindset of female entrepreneurial leaders		Confidence of female entrepreneurial leaders		Internal Determinants		
				Internal Determinants form Psychological Adaptation						Effect
				Traditional-working mindset tends to be inactive	Entrepreneurial mindset tends to be active	Lack of confidence tends to be inactive	Sufficient confidence tends to be active	Situations		
External Determinants at the Meso-Level	Effect	Situations	Status of Cultural Gateway	Low Level	High Level	Low Level	High Level	Level of Psychological Adaptation		
Other-oriented culture and Self-oriented culture	External Determinants form Cultural Gateway	Self-oriented culture	Closed	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge			
		Other-oriented culture	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity			
Family-oriented culture		To outgroup members	Closed	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	Challenge	Conditional Challenge			
		To ingroup members	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity			
Teamwork and Team cultivation		Ignoring teamwork and team cultivation	Closed	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	Challenge	Conditional Challenge			
		Emphasizing teamwork and team cultivation	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity			

Table 37 The Mutual Relationship between Psychological Adaptation and Cultural Gateway (at the Macro-level)

Cultural Aspects		Psychological Aspects		Mindset of female entrepreneurial leaders		Confidence of female entrepreneurial leaders		Internal Determinants
				Internal Determinants form Psychological Adaptation				Effect
				Traditional-working mindset tends to be inactive	Entrepreneurial mindset tends to be active	Lack of confidence tends to be inactive	Sufficient confidence tends to be active	Situations
External Determinants at the Macro-Level	Effect	Situations	Status of Cultural Gateway	Low Level	High Level	Low Level	High Level	Level of Psychological Adaptation
Cultural diversity	External Determinants form Cultural Gateway	Low cultural diversity	Closed	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	
		High cultural diversity	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	
Social inertia and culture inertia		Conservative social inertia and culture inertia	Closed	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	
		Entrepreneurial social inertia and culture inertia	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	
Geographic culture		If local culture is conservative	Closed	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	
		If local culture is inclusive	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	
A shift from tight collectivism to loose collectivism and then to individualism		Decrease the probability of closing cultural gateway	Closed	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	
		Increase the probability of opening cultural gateway	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	
Social class		Low level social class	Closed	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	
		Middle and above level social class	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	
Social networks	Narrowing social networks	Closed	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	Challenge	Conditional Challenge		

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span style="color: green;">Psychological Aspects</span> <span style="color: green;">Opportunities or Challenges</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 10px;"> <span style="color: green;">Cultural Aspects</span> </div>				Mindset of female entrepreneurial leaders		Confidence of female entrepreneurial leaders		Internal Determinants	
				Internal Determinants form Psychological Adaptation				Effect	
				Traditional-working mindset tends to be inactive	Entrepreneurial mindset tends to be active	Lack of confidence tends to be inactive	Sufficient confidence tends to be active	Situations	
External Determinants at the Macro-Level	Effect	Situations	Status of Cultural Gateway	Low Level	High Level	Low Level	High Level	Level of Psychological Adaptation	
	External Determinants form Cultural Gateway	Expanding social networks	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity		
Government policy		Conservative policy (Family-planning policy )	Closed	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	
		Liberal policy ( Open and Reform policy and market-economy policy )	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity		
Institutional uncertainty		If have high institutional uncertainty	Closed	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	
		If have low institutional uncertainty	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity		
Entrepreneurial context		If in a low-level entrepreneurial context	Closed	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	
		If in an inclusive and high-level entrepreneurial context	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity		
Feminism status quo		If keeping distance to the feminism	Closed	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	
		If reducing distance to the feminism	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity		
Feminism influences		For radical feminism	Closed	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Conditional Challenge	
		For liberal feminism	Opened	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity	Conditional Opportunity	Opportunity		



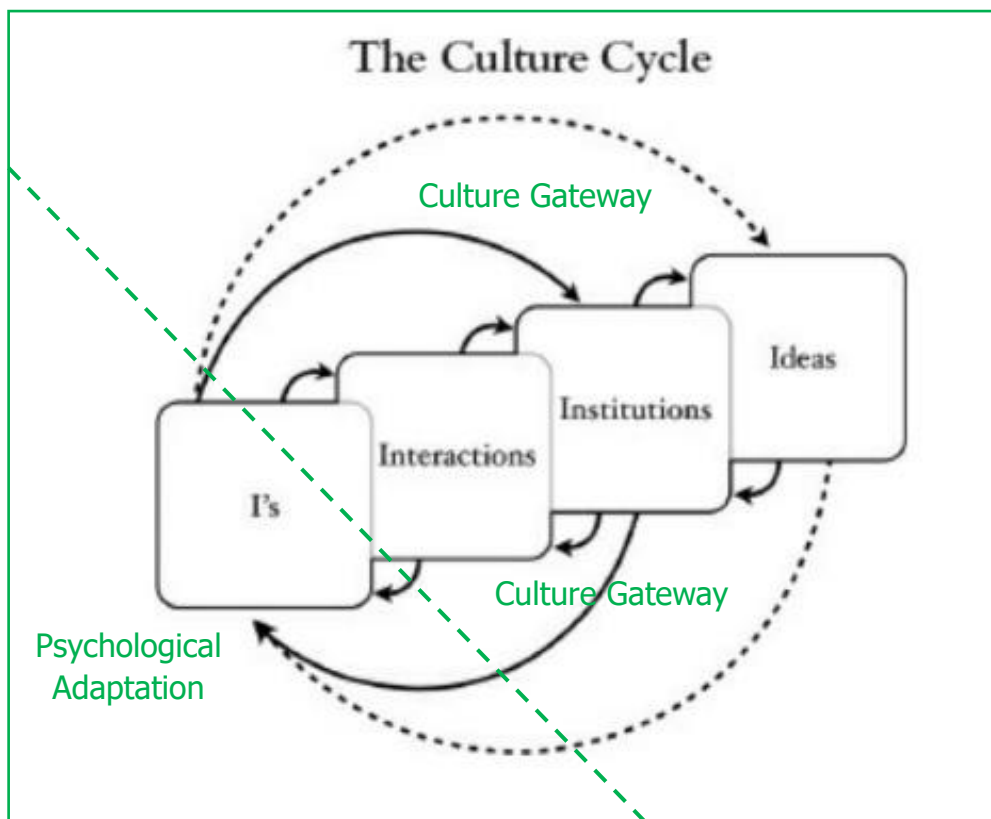
## A16 Four kinds of Situations

Table 38 Four Kinds of Situations about the Match/Mismatch between Cultural Gateways and Psychological Adaptations

		Cultural Gateways	
		Open Status	Closed Status
Psychological Adaptation	High Level	Opportunities	Conditional Challenges
	Low Level	Conditional Opportunities	Challenges

## A17 Categorisation of the Culture Cycle

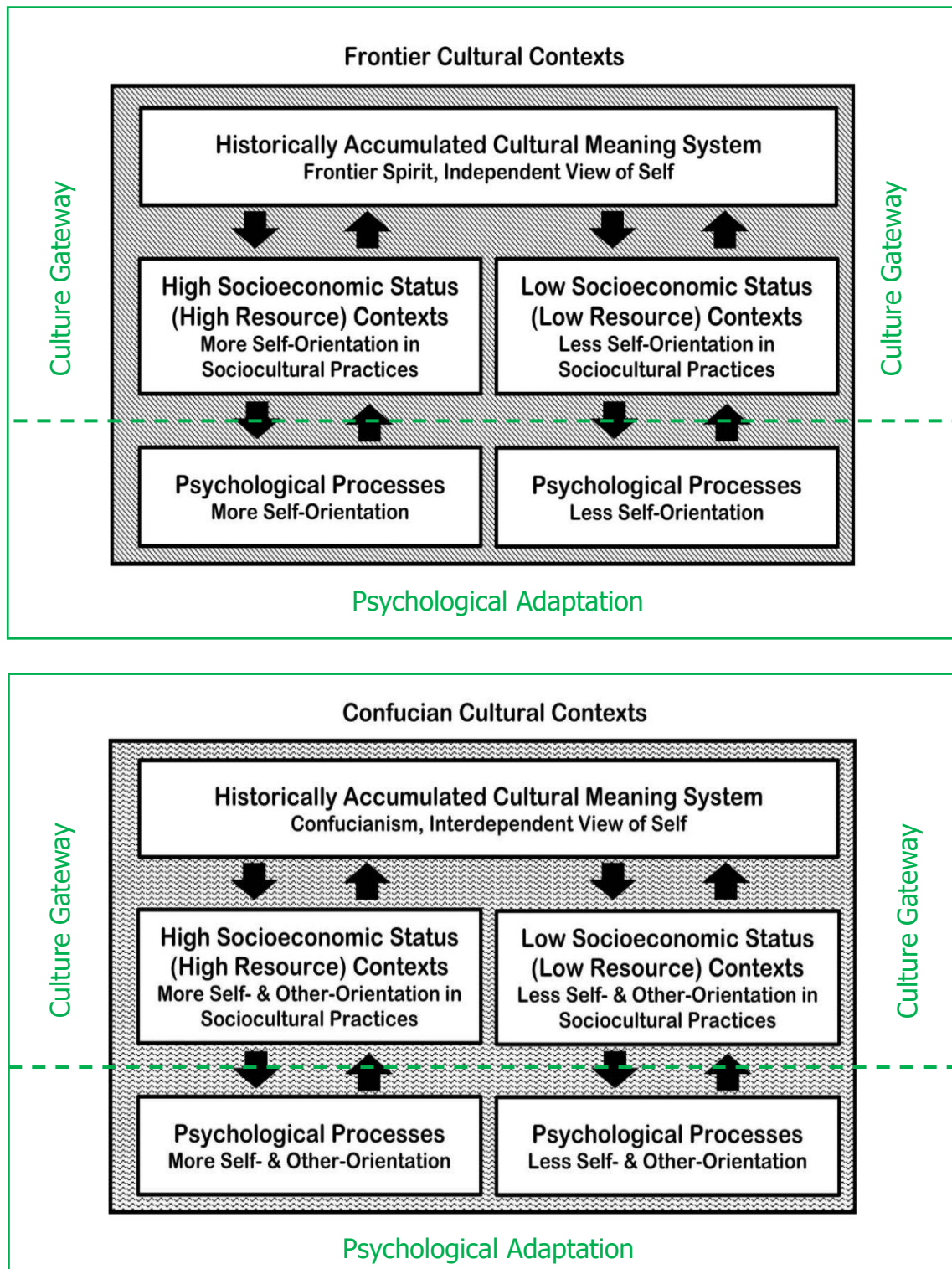
Figure 19 The Categorisation of the Culture Cycle



Sources: Adapted from Markus and Conner (2014, p. 16)

## A18 Categorisations of the Cultural Meaning System

Figure 20 Categorisations of the Cultural Meaning System



Source: Adapted from Miyamoto et al. (2018, p. 339)

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