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Doctoral Thesis

A Systematic Approach to Work–Life Balance Research: Theoretical Development and Empirical Examination

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ABSTRACT

Work–life balance research has been extensively studied in Western contexts with a focus on high-income and industrialized societies. However, it is not clear whether this largely Western conceptualization of work–life balance, applying a segmentation-oriented perspective, would be applicable for employees working in fast-changing, low-income, and/or pre-industrial societies. This thesis contributes to extant work–life balance literature by theoretically advancing and empirically applying a systematic approach to analyze the interactions between individuals' work–life experiences and their external environment, encompassing multiple social systems across the societal, workplace, and micro levels. Specifically, I address the research aim of a systematic analysis on the individuals' work–life experiences and their multilevel social environment by means of the following three studies:

Study 1 (see CHAPTER 3) undertakes a multi-disciplinary systematic literature review and offers a systematic theoretical framework and future research agenda for process-oriented, multilevel, and multidimensional analyses of work–life balance support mechanisms. This review draws out the systematic and synergistic cooperation between individuals and their environments in order to mobilize sufficient resources for meeting individuals' work–life demands and achieving better work–life balance.

Study 2 (see CHAPTER 4) offers a longitudinal quantitative study that examines how work and parental demands and resources from workplace- and micro-level social systems simultaneously shape the age-old but under-studied "time–money conundrum" and how it may influence British working mothers' work–life balance satisfaction and job retention via three mechanisms: resource depletion, resource accumulation, and resource investment.

Study 3 (see CHAPTER 5) is an exploratory qualitative study which advances a holistic perspective of work–life balance and offers a systematic analytical framework for explicating the contextualized relationships between societal development patterns and people's demands, resources, and work–life experiences in the specific context of China through the lens of modernization theory. This holistic perspective underlines

work–life synergy and advocates living a satisfactory life that encompasses complementary work and non-work accomplishments throughout the lifetime. This approach is in contrast to the Western analytic, segmentation-oriented perspective that dominates current work–life balance literature and focuses primarily on the pursuit of minimal conflict between the two distinct spheres of work and personal life.

LAY SUMMARY

Work–life balance has become a hot topic in the West since the 1980s and gradually swept the world. Most prime working age people need to engage in paid employment for sustaining their own and their family members' subsistence and other important pursuits, such as education and leisure. Given that people have finite personal resources, such as time and money, they often have to compromise and trade off between their work and non-work pursuits within their resource constraints. Work–life balance is used to describe the state that both work and non-work objectives are achieved satisfactorily given an individual's resource constraints. However, it may be hard for a person to lead an ideal life according to personal priorities for work and non-work pursuits because a person's work–life experiences are not only influenced by their personal demands and resources but also by demands and resources from external environment.

"*No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.*"

—John Donne (1624)

This poem underlines the interdependent and synergistic relationships between individuals and their embedded multilevel social systems, such as their families, organizations, and communities. My thesis contributes to the work–life balance literature by advancing a *systematic* approach which serves as a useful tool to explore how individuals' work–life experiences interact with their embedded social environment encompassing social systems across societal (e.g., countries and communities), workplace (e.g., organizations and teams), and micro levels (e.g., families). In Study 1 (see CHAPTER 3), I developed a theoretical framework for explaining how the person–environment interplay may shape people's daily work–life experiences. Based on empirical evidence from 384 studies on work–life balance support, I proposed that work and non-work demands or resources from external

environments may urge individuals to deplete or expand their personal resources so as to achieve desirable work and non-work outcomes; positive individual outcomes may in turn bring benefits to higher-level social systems, such as their families, organizations, and countries.

For instance, working parents need to invest substantial time, energy, and money (*personal resource*) in their children (*family demand*) to guarantee children's good education and healthy and happy growth (*family outcome*); such children may become high-skilled workers in the future and may contribute to national economic prosperity in a long term (*societal outcome*). Appropriate national and organizational support mechanisms, such as affordable public childcare services (*societal resource*) and flexible working arrangements (*workplace resource*) may enable working parents to allocate their time and energy (*personal resource*) more effectively and achieve better work–life balance (*personal outcome*) so that they may have greater childbearing intentions (*personal outcome*) and contribute to higher national birth rates (*societal outcome*). In contrast, economic crises (*societal demand*) may exacerbate working parents' job insecurity (*workplace demand*) and decrease their financial resources (*personal resource*) available for housekeeping and childcare (*family demand*). Next, I attempt to explore the underlying mechanisms between individuals' personal resources and environmental factors for achieving work–life balance.

> "*To all who have, more will be given, and they will have more than enough. But everything will be taken away from those who don't have much.*"
>
> —God's Word Translation Bible (1995, Matthew 25:29)

The *Matthew effect* pertains to the tendency of (dis)advantage accumulation whereby wealthy people get wealthier while the impoverished become poorer. In line with the Matthew effect, the *conservation of resources theory* (Hobfoll et al., 2018) suggests that individuals with more personal resources and external resources are more capable of achieving positive work and life outcomes and gaining future resources, forming a virtuous cycle of *resource accumulation*. Based on longitudinal data of a nationally representative sample of British working mothers, Study 2 (see CHAPTER 4) examined three mechanisms underlying the interactions between environmental

factors and two critical personal resources (i.e., childcare time and family finances) for working mothers to achieve a satisfactory work–life balance and stay with the organization—resource accumulation, resource depletion, and resource investment mechanisms over a period of six years.

Similar to the Matthew effect, *resource accumulation* refers to the mechanism of a virtuous cycle whereby an environmental factor expands or promotes effective allocation of a personal resource and in turn, enhances individuals' work–life balance and generates positive work–life outcomes. Study 2 provided empirical support for this mechanism. I found that utilizing part-time and home-based working arrangements promoted working mothers' work–life balance satisfaction via resource accumulation mechanism in terms of expanding or eliciting effective allocation of both personal resources of childcare time and family finances, functioning as both *time-* and *financial-based resources*. Also, undertaking a managerial role, having a working partner, and establishing a local social support network served as *financial-based resources* as they enhanced working mothers' family financial management capacity.

In contrast, *resource depletion* denotes the mechanism that an environmental factor depletes or impairs effective allocation of a personal resource and in turn, negatively affects work–life balance and inflicts negative work–life outcomes. My findings showed that longer working hours, undertaking a managerial role, frequently working in the evening, having more children in household, having a child with longstanding illness, and longer hours of using home-based childcare support served as *time-based demands* as they hindered working mothers' effective allocation of personal time for childcare, which in turn resulted in poorer work–life balance satisfaction and job retention. Similarly, frequently working in the evening and having a child with longstanding illness served as *financial-based demands* as they impeded working mothers' family financial management capacity for achieving work–life balance.

Resource investment is embodied in the mechanism that an environmental factor requires working mothers to trade one personal resource (e.g., childcare time) for another (e.g., financial resources) so as to fulfil their work–life demands and achieve satisfactory outcomes. In line with the resource investment mechanism, I found that undertaking a managerial role served as a *time-based demand* and a *financial-based*

resource, implying that female managers may trade time for money to spend on their children to maintain a satisfactory work–life balance. In addition to these three mechanisms of person–environment interactions around work–life interface, my thesis sheds light on the contextualized relationships between societal development and work–life balance.

> "*Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.*"
>
> —Karl Marx (1852)

Individuals' work–life experiences are not only circumstanced by the contemporary environmental factors but also shaped by the dynamic societal changes over time, including both individuals' past experiences and their future anticipations. Although work–life balance researchers have occasionally investigated the impact of macro-level factors, such as national family policy and individualist–collectivist cultures, on individuals' work–life balance, they have largely provided a static snapshot of the contemporary contexts without tracking the dynamic societal changes over time. Drawing on the modernization theory and empirical evidence from China, Study 3 (see CHAPTER 5) substantiated that individuals' work–life experiences are constantly changing along with the societal development over time. This exploratory qualitative study offered a *systematic* framework for researchers to analyze how the impact of societal development via four dimensions—economic development, industrialization, social inequality, and social solidarity—penetrates from the societal-level down to workplace- and micro-level social systems and changes people's demands and resources from themselves and embedded multilevel social systems, and in turn, transforms their work–life experiences over time.

Findings from in-depth interviews indicated that China's rapid industrialization over the past seven decades not only brought about new resources but also posed new challenges for individuals to balance their work and non-work pursuits. On the one hand, the widespread use of home appliances and information technology substantially saved heavy manual labor in housekeeping and enhanced work efficiency, leaving

people more time and energy for other activities, such as leisure and social networking. On the other hand, these technological advancements accelerated the pace of work and personal lives and intensified work and parenting demands in various aspects. Consequently, individuals were more likely to encounter burnout due to overwork and parenting stress and become unsatisfied with their work and life arrangements.

Furthermore, Study 3 advanced a novel *holistic* perspective of work–life interface, whereby people evaluate their work–life balance (a) based not only on their contemporary state of work and personal lives but also on their past experiences and anticipations of the future over the life course *and* (b) according to both their own and their significant others' work and non-work achievements, such as the elderly's health and children's academic performances.

LAY SUMMARY

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis has been composed by myself and that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. I confirm that the work submitted is my own, except for Chapters 3 and 4 which has formed part of jointly-authored publications. The contributions of my own and the other authors to this work, respectively, have been explicitly indicated below. I confirm that appropriate credit has been given within this thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.

The work presented in Chapter 3 has been accepted by the *International Journal of Management Reviews* for open-access publication (in press) as "*A process-oriented, multilevel, multidimensional conceptual framework of work–life balance support: A multidisciplinary systematic literature review and future research agenda*". I co-authored this publication with my supervisors, Kristina Potočnik and Sara Chaudhry. I serve as the first author and corresponding author of this paper and have contributed by conceiving the original idea, developing the theory, creating the literature search protocol, conducting literature search and selection, literature coding and analysis, visualizing the findings, and taking the lead in writing and revising the manuscript. Kristina Potočnik and Sara Chaudhry have jointly supervised my research project, advanced the conceptual development, discussed and decided the literature search protocol, validated literature coding and analysis by double coding, and refined the manuscript. Previous versions of this paper were presented at the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) Congress (Turin, Italy, 2019), the Academy of Management (AOM) Annual Meeting (Boston, the United States, 2019), and honored with the "Best Full Paper Award (Human Resource Management track)" at the British Academy of Management (BAM) Conference (Birmingham, the United Kingdom, 2019).

The work presented in Chapter 4 has been submitted to a journal and is currently under review as "*The Impact of the Depletion, Accumulation, and Investment of Personal Resources on Work–Life Balance Satisfaction and Job Retention: A*

Longitudinal Study on Working Mothers". I co-authored this paper with my supervisor, Kristina Potočnik. I serve as the first author and corresponding author of this paper in charge of theoretical development, methodology, data curation, data analysis and validation, visualization of findings, and writing the original draft. Kristina Potočnik has contributed to this paper in terms of theoretical development, review and editing, and supervision. In this research, we used secondary data from the *Millennium Cohort Study* (Centre for Longitudinal Studies, 2017), a British national longitudinal survey on families with a cohort of children born between 2000–2002, with consent of the UK Data Service. Previous versions of this manuscript were presented at the Academy of Management (AOM) Annual Meeting (virtual conference, 2020) and the British Academy of Management (BAM) Conference (virtual conference, 2020).

The work presented in Chapter 5 has been composed entirely by myself. An initial version of this manuscript was presented at the Annual Edinburgh Paper Development Workshop (virtual workshop, 2021).

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Furthermore, I want to acknowledge the research participants for their valuable contributions, the attendees of conference presentations for their enlightening insights, and the journal editors and reviewers for their constructive comments, which have

jointly helped me refine my thesis into a stronger piece of work.

Overall, I highly appreciate my PhD journey which equips me with necessary knowledge and skills for an academic career and deepens my understanding of cultural and historical differences between Western and Eastern societies. The global suffering in the COVID-19 pandemic underscores the importance of the solidarity of all humankind and enlightens my aspiration as an academic to explore how to unite, rather than divide, people with diverse interests from all over the world as a global community with shared goals for a better future.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This chapter begins with the introduction of the significance and the gaps of the current work–life balance literature, followed by the articulation of how this thesis addresses the gaps and makes theoretical contributions through three inter-related studies. Finally, this chapter elucidates the structure of the whole thesis.

In this era of informatization (Adisa et al., 2017; Duxbury & Smart, 2011; Nam, 2014) and aging society (Khallash & Kruse, 2012; Silverstein, 2008), working population is faced with unprecedented challenges for achieving a good work–life balance. In the information age, the advanced information technology initiates free communication irrespective of time and space, increasingly blurring the lines between work and non-work issues (Adisa et al., 2017). The aging society poses a major challenge for a lower proportion of working people to support a growing number of old people and sustain economic development (Silverstein, 2008). Working population, especially women, are faced with more intensive caring responsibilities for children and the elderly along with higher work intensity, which raises the bar for people to balance their multiple roles (European Commission, 2017).

Apart from these factors, other work- and lifestyle-related trends have also contributed to increasing difficulty in dealing with work–life balance, such as work intensity becoming much higher (Paškvan & Kubicek, 2017); the rate of female workforce participation growing (Thévenon, 2009); and single-parent families and dual-career couples increasing (Debus & Unger, 2017; National Research Council, 1999). It is impossible for every individual to make a difference to these macro-level societal trends. The underlying assumption of many work–life balance studies is that every individual should be responsible for their own work–life balance (S. Lewis et al., 2007). However, the fact is that no one can fully control his or her work and personal life; a good work–life balance necessitates support from family members

(Halbesleben et al., 2012), the workplace (Jang, 2009), and the society (Bauer et al., 2007; Fagnani & Letablier, 2004). Therefore, a systematic approach to work–life balance research is needed to advance our understanding of how the collaboration between individuals and their embedded social systems can better facilitate individuals' work–life balance and generate benefits for related social systems, such as family, organizations, and societies (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017).

The concept of work–life balance can be traced back to Robert Owen's (1817) motto "eight hours labor, eight hours recreation, eight hours rest" in the early 19th century and the subsequent two centuries of labor movements struggling for an eight-hour work day (McKinnon, 2020). The work–life balance research emerged in the 1960s in the United States when the industrial production distinguished work from family lives both temporarily and spatially and the information technology had not yet prevailingly blurred the work–life boundaries (Naithani, 2010). Since then, a work–life segmentation approach and a work–life conflict perspective have dominated the work–life balance literature till today as Western scholars have predominantly instilled the work–life relationship as a zero-sum game and emphasized the distinction between work and non-work spheres (Grawitch et al., 2010; ten Brummelhuis & van der Lippe, 2010). The tacit assumption of work and non-work as two separate spheres even underpins the research on positive perspective of work–life interface, such as work–life enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), which has recently received growing attention.

Work–life balance literature has been criticized for its primary focus on the high-income and industrialized Western societies (Chang et al., 2010). The Western dominance in the current work–life balance literature has also been mirrored in its commonly used (1) individualistic narrative that interprets work–life experiences predominantly addressing individual-focused and micro-level outcomes and explanations rather than contextualizing individual experiences within their social environments encompassing multiple social systems (e.g., families, organizations, and societies) and articulating relevant family, organizational, and societal implications (Brough et al., 2008; Caproni, 2004); and (2) segmentation-oriented perspective that stresses the clear separation and conflict minimization rather than the interdependence and harmony between work and non-work spheres (Grawitch et al., 2010).

The longstanding Western dominance in the work–life balance discourse and the growing popularity of relevant research in non-Western contexts have given rise to the importance of contextualizing work–life interface by unlocking puzzles such as: (a) in what contexts work and life are clearly distinguished or highly intertwined and how people cope with work–life balance in such contexts; (b) what are the underlying mechanisms of a contextual factor impacting individuals' work–life balance by acting as either a demand or resource; and (c) to what extent we can apply the theories mainly underpinned by Western research to non-Western contexts. I argue that a plausible answer to these questions necessitates a systematic consideration of the interplay between individuals and their social environments over time by contextualizing individual work–life experiences in their embedded societal-, workplace-, and micro-level social systems. However, a rigorous *systematic* approach has been neglected in the work–life balance research.

The *systematic* approach originated from a series of systems theories across multiple disciplines such as sociology (Parsons, 1951), biology (von Bertalanffy, 1968), psychology (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), and management studies (Senge, 1990). The systematic approach emphasizes the bi-directional influences between individuals and their social environments and comprehends an individual as a member of multiple interdependent social systems, such as families, organizations, communities, and societies (L. A. Wilkinson, 2011). Different from an *individualistic* approach that concentrates on individuals, the focus of a *systematic* approach is the society at large encompassing iterative interactions between individuals and social systems and between different social systems over time (Mayrhofer, 2004).

A systematic approach is often underpinned by holistic thinking (Krippner, 1991; Laszlo & Krippner, 1998) in contrast with the dominant segmentation-oriented perspective in the extant work–life balance research. *Holistic* thinking focuses on the synergy between multiple interdependent parts and how these parts form a whole that functions better than the sum of its separate parts (Krippner, 1991; Lewin, 1951) and in work–life balance research, the holism unifies work and life as a whole and emphasizes the interdependence and synergy between work and life (Grawitch et al., 2010). In contrast, *analytic* thinking which prevails in Western cultures tends to subdivide and simplify the whole into relatively isolated parts and downplay the

interdependence and synergy between these parts and their contexts (de Oliveira & Nisbett, 2017). In work–life balance research, analytic thinking underpins the segmentation-oriented perspective that draws clear lines between work and non-work aspects and focuses primarily on reducing conflict derived from work–life spillover (Friedman et al., 1998; Grawitch et al., 2010).

This thesis aims to theoretically advance and empirically apply a systematic approach encompassing process-oriented, multilevel, and multidimensional perspectives to work–life balance research so as to address the following research question:

How do demands and resources from individuals and their embedded multilevel social systems jointly shape individuals' work–life experiences and generate desirable outcomes for individuals and their embedded social systems?

Specifically, I conducted three interrelated studies to explore this question theoretically and empirically from different perspectives as follows.

First, I conducted Study 1 (see CHAPTER 3), a systematic literature review on work–life balance support based on 384 studies. This conceptual work aims to explore how the extant literature has conceptualized and investigated the antecedents, contents, and effects of external resources for facilitating individuals' work–life balance (i.e., work–life balance support mechanisms). To fulfil this research purpose, I systematically synthesized and integrated the dispersed multi-disciplinary evidence from the work–life balance support literature.

The major contribution of Study 1 is the development of a process-oriented, multilevel, and multidimensional conceptual framework of work–life balance support contending that an individual's work–life experiences interact with the external environment via the process of (1) drawing *work–life balance support* from external social systems to adjust, expand, and/or reallocate *personal resources* to (2) cope with *stressors* from social systems nested at multiple levels, and subsequently, (3) bring about positive *outcomes* to multilevel social systems. These positive *outcomes* may further (4) replenish/expand individuals' *resources* to (5) cope with *stressors* associated with work–life balance, forming a virtuous cycle. This conceptual framework also underscores the importance of pluralist thinking, context specification, and cost-effectiveness analysis for future research.

Second, I conducted Study 2 (see CHAPTER 3) which is based on a quantitative longitudinal study using a nationally representative sample of 10,983 British working mothers from the UK *Millennium Cohort Study* (Centre for Longitudinal Studies, 2017). Drawing on the *conservation of resources (COR) theory* (Hobfoll, 1989) and deploying the systematic framework which I proposed in Study 1, this study adopts a process-oriented view and aims to examine the underlying mechanisms of how contextual factors from workplace- and micro-level social systems simultaneously shaped working mothers' work–life balance satisfaction and their subsequent job retention through expanding or reducing their personal resources of childcare time and family finances during the six years of their children's primary education.

Study 2 contributes to the work–life balance literature by validating three mechanisms through which contextual factors from external social systems impact individuals' personal resources and work–life outcomes: resource depletion, accumulation, and investment mechanisms. Specifically, through the *resource depletion* mechanism, a contextual factor reduces or hinders effective allocation of a specific personal resource and consequently, yields lower work–life balance satisfaction and poorer retention. Through the *resource accumulation* mechanism, a contextual factor expands or elicit effective allocation of a specific resource, resulting in enhanced work–life balance satisfaction and improved retention. Through the *resource investment* mechanism, an individual trades one personal resource (e.g., time) for another one (e.g., money) to achieve a satisfactory work–life balance. Another major contribution of Study 2 is that we advance the conceptualization of contextual demands and resources by proposing that a contextual factor should be conceptualized either as a demand or resource according to its depletion or accumulation effect on a specific personal resource. Our research reveals that undertaking a managerial role simultaneously serves as a time-based demand and a financial-based resource for working mothers to achieve their work–life balance. This finding echoes the resource investment mechanism and addresses the time–money conundrum in achieving work–life balance. It also underscores the importance of a holistic evaluation of a contextual factor by looking at its overall impact on work–life balance mediated through multiple key personal resources rather than a single personal resource.

Third, I conducted Study 3 (see CHAPTER 5) which is an exploratory qualitative

study based on primary interview data on the track of individuals' changing work–life experiences accompanied by China's modernization process during 1949–2019. Drawing on the modernization theory and Study 1's systematic framework, Study 3 spotlights the interface of macro-level dynamic process and micro-level experiences by exploring individuals' perceptions and lived experiences about how China's modernization process has changed their demands and resources that emerged from multilevel environments and how these changes have shaped their work–life experiences over time.

Study 3 contributes to the literature by providing a systematic framework for analyzing how the multi-faceted societal development (from the dimensions of economic development, industrialization, social inequality, and social solidarity) transforms individuals' work–life experiences through the lens of modernization theory and advancing a holistic perspective and conceptualization of work–life balance in contrast to the dominant Western analytic, segmentation-oriented perspective.

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 1 outlines the aim, the overarching research question, the contributions, and the structure of this thesis. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the development of work–life balance theories and proposes the avenues for theoretical advancement in this field. Then three studies are presented in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, respectively, to address the overarching research question from different, but complementary perspectives. Finally, I conclude this thesis with a discussion about my overarching contributions, research limitations, and recommendations for future research in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 2

An Overview of Theoretical Development in Work–Life Balance Research

This chapter reviews the key trends in theoretical underpinning of work–life balance research and discusses how this thesis aims to respond to these research trends and contribute to further theoretical development in this field.

The term *work–life balance* has been widely used but vaguely defined (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Greenhaus et al. (2003) construct "balance" as the equal time distributed to, equal involvement in, or equal satisfaction with the work and non-work roles; but equality is not reality. It is easy to associate the word "balance" with seesaws and scales; hence the term work–life balance may give people a hint of confrontation or battle between the work and non-work roles. However, the relationships between people's work and non-work roles are not always incompatible or zero-sum games. In contrast, Kalliath and Brough (2008) defined work–life balance as an individual's perceived compatibility between work and non-work activities in line with one's life priorities.

Previous literature reviews have concluded that empirical work–life balance studies have mostly attempted to investigate the relationships between the antecedents (e.g., work demands and family demands), perceptions (e.g., work–life conflict and enrichment), and outcomes (e.g., life satisfaction and job satisfaction) of work–life balance under the guidance of a wide variety of theoretical frameworks (AlHazemi & Ali, 2016; Guest, 2002; Sirgy & Lee, 2018; Tung, 2009). The theoretical focus of work–life balance research has experienced three major shifts, as follows: (1) from work–life segmentation to integration, (2) from conflict to positive interaction between work and non-work roles (e.g., work–life enrichment), and (3) from an individual's internal coping strategies to external sources of support for work–life balance. The

theoretical development of work–life balance research cannot be detached from its historical backgrounds. I turn to each of these three trends next.

2.1 The First Trend: From Work–Life Segmentation to Integration

According to Naithani (2010) and Kumar and Janakiram (2017), the history of work–life balance research began in the 1960s when scholars started to reflect on how work life was gradually separated from personal life in the context of industrialization and urbanization between the 1700s and 1800s. Initially, the *role theory* (Kahn et al., 1964) assumed that every person has to perform multiple roles, including work roles (e.g., employers and employees) and non-work roles (e.g., parents, partners, and friends). Gender division of labor was more explicit in the 1960s: men were predominantly responsible for working and earning the money, whereas women looked after families (Snooks, 1996). The *work–family segmentation approach* originated from this context and advocated that work and family lives should be dealt with as two separate and independent spheres (Staines, 1980).

Since the late 20th century, the technological advancement (e.g., automatization and informatization) has initiated a more connected world and made the boundaries between work and life domains more blurry and harder to maintain (G. V. Kumar & Janakiram, 2017). It has become almost impossible to clearly segment work and non-work roles due to their interdependence (Kanter, 1977) and blurring boundaries given the prevalent use of information technology (Nam, 2014). Corresponding to this trend, there is an increasing scholarly emphasis on the integration between multiple roles. Scholars proposed the *spillover theory* (Pleck, 1977; Staines, 1980) and contended that there may be positive or negative permeation (i.e. spillover) between the family roles and the work roles. From a psychological perspective, spillover involves transitions between multiple roles across work and non-work domains (Ashforth et al., 2000). An example of work-to-life spillover would be work-related phone calls after working hours, whilst bringing family-related negative emotions to work may be an illustration of life-to-work spillover. The *crossover theory* (Westman, 2001, 2002, 2016) defines crossover as “bidirectional transmissions of both positive and negative affect between intimately connected individuals” such as family members and colleagues (van Emmerik *et al.*, 2015, p. 97–98). For instance, a man gets salary increase and shares

his happiness with his family and lets family members be cheerful, too.

The *work–family border theory* (Ashforth et al., 2000) and the *boundary theory* (Clark, 2000) define the boundary (or the border) as the psychological or physical divider that separate work and non-work roles by time, space, behaviors, and mental activities. Ashforth *et al.* (2000) conceptualized role transitions between domains (e.g., from a manager to a father) as a "boundary-crossing activity" (p.472). The strength of a boundary is characterized by its flexibility and permeability, namely how penetrable and pliable the boundary is; a weak boundary is highly flexible and permeable (Ashforth et al., 2000). Flexibility consists of two indicators: one is flexibility-willingness, which describes to what extent an individual would like to have a flexible schedule; the other is flexibility-ability, which depicts to what degree a person is competent to schedule his or her work and personal lives flexibly (Ashforth et al., 2000).

Based on boundary theory (Clark, 2000), abundant studies discuss personal coping strategies for work–life balance, i.e., how people manage their work and life boundaries (e.g., Ammons, 2013; Kossek et al., 2012). One of the most famous boundary management theories is the *segmentation–integration continuum model* (Bulger et al., 2007; Nippert-Eng, 1996), whereby the continuum represents the degree to which an individual chooses to retain (i.e., segmentation approach) or blur (i.e., integration approach) the boundaries between work and non-work roles.

Scholars are increasingly in favor of a work–life integration approach but this approach is found to cause more work–family conflict (Desrochers et al., 2005; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006). Also, we cannot simply replace the integration approach by a segmentation approach because it is not feasible to keep clear boundaries between work and family roles anymore in this 24/7 accessible and connected world with the help of information technologies. Indeed, the trend of work–life integration seems to be irreversible. Scholars have gradually turned their attention to studying the positive interaction between work and family roles; they premised that a good work–life balance is achieved when the conflict is minimized and the positive interaction is maximized (Frone, 2003; Grzywacz & Bass, 2003).

2.2 The Second Trend: From Work–Life Conflict to Positive Interaction

The second research trend is the shift of research focus from work–life conflict to positive interaction between both spheres. Chang *et al.* (2010) proposed that a majority of work–life balance research focuses on the negative aspects of work–life interface. A number of role theories serve as the rationale underlying this assumption of negative and incompatible relationships between work and non-work roles. In Goode's (1960) *role strain theory*, he raised a "*scarcity hypothesis*" insisting that when people engage in a larger number of roles, they are more likely to exhaust their finite resources (e.g., time and energy), fail to meet their role obligations, and encounter higher levels of stress (p.483). Following the "scarcity hypothesis" (Goode, 1960), Kahn *et al.*'s (1964) *role theory* proposes that the incompatibility and ambiguity within a role (intra-role) or between multiple roles (inter-role) will result in higher levels of pressure and conflict. Comprehending the above role theories, the *work–family conflict theory* (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) postulates that time-, strain-, and behavior-based conflict exists between an individual's work and family roles. Macewen and Barling's (1994) *work–family interference theory* further posits that there are two directions of conflict: work interference with family (i.e. work-to-family conflict) and family interference with work (i.e. family-to-work conflict).

On the contrary, the "*expansion hypothesis*" (Marks, 1977; Sieber, 1974) proposes that resources are not limited and can be expanded. Hence, the benefits accumulated through assuming multiple roles can compensate the consumption of resources. Following the expansion hypothesis, several theories highlights the positive interactions between work and non-work domains. The *work–family compensation theory* (Lambert, 1990; Piotrkowski, 1979) insists that positive experiences or resources in one domain can offset what is missing, lacking or dissatisfying in another domain. Three identical theories—Barnett and Hyde's (2001), Frone's (2003), and Greenhaus and Powell's (2006) *work–family enrichment theory*, Grzywacz et al.'s (2007) *work–family facilitation theory*, and Wadsworth and Owens's (2007) *work–family enhancement theory*—contend that resources obtained from assuming work roles can help promote the functioning of family roles and vice versa.

Given the gradual maturation of work–life conflict perspective, the irreversible

trend of work–life integration, and the flourishing of the positive psychology, scholars have shifted their attention to the positive side of work–life interface in order to seek better personal, organizational, and societal solutions to mitigate conflict and enhance the quality of people's work and lives (Field & Chan, 2018; Ellen Ernst Kossek, Baltes, et al., 2011). To this end, both personal coping strategies and external support mechanisms for work–life balance have received growing research attention.

2.3 The Third Trend: From Personal Coping Strategies to External Support Mechanisms

Female workforce participation rate went up in the 1980s, thanks to the less emphasis on manual labor intensity with the help of technological development (Snooks, 1996) and enhanced gender equality as a result of decades of women's liberation movement (Goldin, 2006). During the 1980s and 1990s, organizations started to support people's work–life balance by offering work–family policies or family-friendly initiatives, the target population of which initially included working mothers only and later expanded to all genders and different family structures (Lockwood, 2003). Scholars gradually enlarged the scope of "work–family" into "work–life" (S. Lewis et al., 2007). Keeney et al. (2013) suggested that a life domain includes far more elements than family—"education, health, leisure, friendships, romantic relationships, family, household management, and community involvement" (p.224). Also, scholars have come to realize that people may not have full control over the macro and organizational contexts which have an impact on their work–life balance and hence, they have to resort to external support from their governments (Fagnani & Letablier, 2004), employers (Jang, 2009), and personal social networks (Halbesleben *et al.* 2012) to cope with their work–life demands.

The above context triggers the third research trend shifting the focus from an individual's personal coping strategies to manage work–life balance, such as the segmentation–integration continuum model (Bulger et al., 2007; Nippert-Eng, 1996), to using external support mechanisms. A number of resource theories have highlighted the critical role of external resources in helping individuals fulfil their work and non-work demands and achieve a satisfactory work–life balance. As one of the most frequently used theories in this line of work, the *conservation of resources theory*

(Hobfoll, 1989) contends that resources are valuable and meaningful factors for sustaining people's lives. Stress arises from potential or actual losses or less-than-expected gain in resources and hence, people have the instinct to protect their resources and invest their subsistent resources to obtain future resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Echoing the Matthew Effect (Merton, 1968) pertaining to the tendency of the rich getting richer, the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) suggests that people who have more personal resources and/or gain greater support from their environments have stronger capacity to protect their resources and replenish new resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Building on the *conservation of resources theory* (Hobfoll, 1989), the *personal resource allocation framework* (Grawitch et al., 2010) and the *work–home resources model* (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012) suggest that environmental support may expand individuals' personal resources (e.g., time and energy) or promote effective allocation of their personal resources so that individuals are more capable to fulfil their role obligations and maintain work–life balance. Abendroth and den Dulk (2011) highlighted three major sources of work–life balance support mechanisms, namely the state, the workplace, and the private social networks. However, a systematic examination of these three major sources of work–life balance support on account of contextual changes over time has been scarce in the extant research, which restrains us from developing a comprehensive understanding of work–life balance support. Such an endeavor would require not only a systematic approach, but also a multilevel one in order to rigorously examine the effects of different support mechanisms across different levels of analysis.

Inspired by these three research trends, I designed three studies in this thesis which jointly advance our understanding of how support mechanisms from external environments can have a positive impact on individuals' work–life interface and external environments, especially when the tendency of work–life integration seems irreversible. In Study 1 (see CHAPTER 3), a systematic review, I synthesized the dispersed and fragmented evidence on work–life balance support and advanced a systematic conceptual framework for the process-oriented, multilevel, and multidimensional investigation of work–life balance support. This first study drew heavily from the *conservation of resources theory* (Hobfoll, 1989) and the *personal*

resource allocation framework (Grawitch et al., 2010) to refine the process-oriented conceptual model of work–life balance support. Also, I adapted a systematic and multilevel approach from the *socio-ecological systems theory* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to advance our multilevel conceptualization of work–life balance support. Furthermore, I brought in insights from the social support literature (e.g., Cohen and Wills, 1985) to enhance our understanding of work–life balance as a multidimensional construct. This analytical framework has laid the ground for the systematic analysis and holistic conceptualization of work–life interface in Study 2 and Study 3.

In Study 2 (see CHAPTER 4), I empirically examined Study 1's systematic framework in a longitudinal quantitative study that explored how external demands and resources from workplace- and micro-level social systems influence working mothers' personal resources of childcare time and family finances, their work–life balance satisfaction, and job retention, respectively. This study also extended the *conservation of resources theory* (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018) in terms of providing evidence for three mechanisms underlying the resource interaction between the person and the environment—resource depletion, resource accumulation, and resource investment. Another contribution to the *conservation of resources theory* was that this research distinguishes between time and financial constraints and resources, which are usually the most essential considerations for women to remain in the workforce and sustain their family lives.

Finally, in Study 3 (see CHAPTER 5), I empirically examined Study 1's theoretical framework in a qualitative study. Through the lens of *modernization theory*, Study 3 further advanced our knowledge of how demands and resources from the societal-, workplace-, and micro-level social systems change over time and transform individuals' work–life experiences across different stages of societal development using China as an example. I advanced the conceptual development of work–life balance by putting forward that in some societies, work and life are seen as holistic and not as two separate spheres. Such a holistic view underpins an integration approach to managing work–life interface. Moreover, I provided a theoretical framework for systematic analysis of individual work–life experiences across different stages and via different dimensions of societal development.

CHAPTER 3[a]

A Process-oriented, Multilevel, Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Work–Life Balance Support: A Multidisciplinary Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Agenda

Abstract

Work–life balance is shaped not only by how individuals manage their personal demands and resources but also by stressors and work–life balance support mechanisms from external environment encompassing multilevel social systems. Our systematic literature review focuses particularly on the role of *work–life balance support* drawing on 384 journal articles and book chapters published between 1960 and 2019 across five research disciplines, including management, applied psychology, industrial relations, family studies, and sociology. We make four major contributions to the literature, including (1) conceptualizing work–life balance support from a *process-oriented* perspective pertinent to a virtuous cycle of resource investment and return drawing on the *conservation of resources theory* and the *personal resource allocation framework*; (2) adopting a *multilevel* approach that construes the interactions in terms of resource changes between individuals' work–life experiences

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and their surrounding social systems nested at multiple levels applying the *socio-ecological systems theory*; (3) proposing a *multidimensional* typology that differentiates the role of actual existence versus subjective perception of support mechanisms as inspired by social support literature; and (4) advocating a *pluralist*, *multi-stakeholder* approach to comprehending and reconciling multiple stakeholders' shared and competing interests around provision/utilization of support mechanisms based on insights from *multidisciplinary* literature. Our process-oriented, multilevel, and multidimensional framework conceptualizes the critical role of work–life balance support in iterative interactions between individuals and their multilevel social environment through resource changes and reality–perception transformation. This conceptual framework also underscores the importance of pluralist thinking, context specification, and cost-effectiveness analysis for future research.

Keywords

Work–life balance support; systematic literature review; multilevel multidimensional process-oriented model; multidisciplinary research

3.1 Introduction

Work–life balance is defined as an individual's perceived optimum allocation of personal resources that helps in coping with stressors and guarantees effective functioning of both work and non-work roles (Grawitch et al., 2010). Work–life balance research in the 1960s initially focused on the division of labor (between male breadwinners and female carers) and associated tensions around separating work and personal lives (Gatrell et al., 2013; Naithani, 2010). Increased female workforce participation from the 1980s (Snooks, 1996) exacerbated these tensions between work commitments and family responsibilities, resulting in both governmental and organizational family-friendly interventions (Lockwood, 2003). More recently, two additional work–life balance challenges have emerged. First, technological advancements are blurring work and non-work roles (G. V. Kumar & Janakiram, 2017)

because information technology enables free communication irrespective of time and space (Adisa et al., 2017). Second, aging societies have resulted in heavier workloads and care burdens for the working population (Khallash & Kruse, 2012).

Many work–life challenges (e.g., motherhood penalties and delayed retirement) are embedded in societal problems (e.g., gender inequality and aging societies) and the broader social environment and therefore, cannot be solved through individual efforts alone; requiring extensive environmental support (Spinks, 2004) from family members (Halbesleben *et al.* 2012), organizations (Jang, 2009), and governments (Fagnani & Letablier, 2004). We combine the concepts of work–life balance (Grawitch et al., 2010) and social support (French et al., 2018; Muñoz-Laboy et al., 2014) to define *work–life balance support* as perceived or actual and tangible or intangible external resources invested by other people or social systems that expand individuals' personal resources or optimize personal resource allocation in fulfilling work and non-work roles.

We argue that work–life balance support mechanisms benefit not just individuals and their families but also organizations and overall society (Brough et al., 2008). Individual and family returns may include higher marital and family satisfaction (Ferguson et al., 2012), organizations may observe lower absenteeism (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011), and societal returns may include increased labor-force participation (Brough et al., 2008). However, work–life balance support literature has been criticized for focusing primarily on individuals and downplaying implications for families, organizations, and societies (Gatrell et al., 2013; Ozbilgin et al., 2011).

Also, limited research addresses the interplay between *actual existence* (i.e., structural dimensions) and *subjective perception* (i.e., functional dimensions) of work–life balance support, despite recognition that *both* dimensions make a difference to individuals' work–life experiences (Lim & Lee, 2011; Yuile et al., 2012). Consequently, extant literature fails to unpack the process through which individuals make sense of, and effectively utilize, work–life balance support mechanisms to balance competing work and life demands, achieve positive work and life outcomes, and contribute to their families, organizations, and wider society.

Drawing on *multidisciplinary* research, we address three gaps by conceptualizing work–life balance support in a (1) process-oriented, (2) multilevel, and (3) multidimensional framework and advance a more holistic research agenda for

exploring the iterative interactions between individuals and social environments at different levels and distinguishing between perception versus reality.

Our systematic review makes four major theoretical contributions. First, drawing on the *conservation of resources theory* (Hobfoll, 1989) and the *personal resource allocation framework* (Grawitch et al., 2010), we provide new insights into work–life interface from a *process-oriented* perspective (see Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.4) of resource changes given interactions between individuals and social environments. We conceptualize *work–life balance support* as resource investments by people and social environments that promote individuals' expansion or effective allocation of personal resources to fulfil work and life demands. Consequently, individuals' enhanced work–life balance brings other positive returns and enriches future resources for both individuals and their environments. Iterative work–life balance support investments and returns form a virtuous cycle of resource accumulation; essential for the effective functioning of families, organizations, and societies.

Second, we undertake a *multilevel* and *systematic* approach (see Figure 3.1 and Table 3.3) by drawing on the *socio-ecological systems theory* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Pocock et al., 2012). We challenge the traditional understanding of work–life balance as an individual-level phenomenon and instead, emphasize how the interactions between individuals' work–life experiences and their environment shape work–life balance. Theoretically, environmental *stressors* necessitate individual acquisition of *work–life balance support* at different levels (i.e., micro, workplace, and societal levels) to achieve positive *outcomes* for both individuals and multilevel social systems. Current work–life challenges cannot be solved through individual effort alone given their embeddedness in broader social environments. Therefore, we claim that minimizing work–life conflict and enhancing individuals' quality of life necessitates systematic changes that combine individual effort with external support from families, organizations, and governments.

Third, by considering *multidisciplinary* literature (i.e., management, applied psychology, industrial relations, family studies, and sociology), we go beyond work–life balance as an individual-level phenomenon and posit it as a *societal concern* involving multiple stakeholders (e.g., individuals, employers, and governments) situated in multilevel social environment. Practically, employers' and policymakers'

design and implementation of work–life balance support mechanisms necessitate a *systematic* and *pluralist* consideration of different stakeholder interests. Therefore, we recommend scholars bridge this research–practice gap by aligning their investigation of work–life balance support with key stakeholders' goals.

Finally, we adapt Cohen and Wills' (1985) classification of social support into a novel *multidimensional* typology (see Table 3.1) that distinguishes between the reality versus perception of work–life balance support. We propose that *structural* dimensions depict the actual existence and quantity of work–life balance support while *functional* dimensions offer a more perceptual and qualitative evaluation. We explore this reality–perception transformation by considering spiral interactions between the physical environment and people's subjective perception (i.e., interplay between *structural* and *functional* dimensions) of work–life balance support via three interconnected *processes*: decision-making, realization, and subjective feedback (see Figure 3.4).

Next, we propose our conceptual framework, highlighting the need for a process-oriented, multilevel, and multidimensional conceptualization and investigation of work–life balance support. Following an overview of our methodological approach, our findings illustrate how extant literature has conceptualized and investigated work–life balance support as well as its antecedents and outcomes. We conclude with a future research agenda.

3.2 Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Framework

Building on resource theories, the socio-ecological systems theory, and social support literature as our theoretical foundation, we advance a process-oriented, multilevel, multidimensional conceptual framework of work–life balance support.

3.2.1 Resource theories: Process of resource investment and return in support of work–life balance

We draw on the *conservation of resources (COR) theory* (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018) and the *personal resource allocation (PRA) framework* (Grawitch et al., 2010) since these theories enable our conceptualization of interactions between individuals' work–life experiences and their social surroundings via the circular

process of resource investment and return.

The *COR theory* rationalizes human instinct to obtain and preserve *resources*, i.e., valuable things needed for survival (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Resource loss creates stress, necessitating individuals' and social systems' investment in existing resources to accumulate future resources as well as protect against and recover from resource loss (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Individuals need to invest *personal resources* such as time and money to fulfil work and non-work demands and achieve good work–life outcomes. Other higher-level social systems, such as families, organizations, communities, and the state, can also invest resources (i.e., *work–life balance support*) that enhance individuals' work–life balance, and generate positive family, organizational, and societal resource returns.

Similar to the *Matthew effect* (Merton, 1968) of (dis)advantage accumulation whereby wealthy people get wealthier while the impoverished become poorer (Bask & Bask, 2015), the *COR theory* (Hobfoll et al., 2018) suggests that individuals with more personal resources and external work–life balance support are more capable of achieving positive work and life outcomes and gaining future resources, forming a virtuous cycle of resource accumulation. Furthermore, the concept of *caravan passageways* highlights environmental conditions that facilitate or hinder resource accumulation. Supportive *caravan passageways*, such as family-friendly corporate cultures or more inclusive societies that promote gender equality, facilitate individual access to obtain personal resources needed for work–life balance. This *resource caravan passageways principle* reinforces the importance of studying a work–life balance supportive social system that creates *synergies* between individuals' *personal resources* and related stakeholders' *work–life balance support* and generates positive returns for all stakeholders.

Applying the *COR theory* (Hobfoll, 1989) specifically to work–life balance research, the *PRA framework* (Grawitch et al., 2010) highlights the virtuous cycle whereby individuals appraise and allocate *personal resources* for handling work–life demands, achieve positive personal outcomes, and acquire future resources for achieving work–life balance. *Personal resources* for achieving a good work–life balance comprise time, finances, physical and mental attributes (e.g., energy), knowledge and skills, and social status and networks (Fletcher & Fincham, 1991;

Grawitch et al., 2010). *Demands* refer to tasks or responsibilities that require consumption of an individual's personal resources (Grawitch et al., 2010). *Work–life balance support* is distinct from personal resources because it encompasses external resources invested by other people and surrounding social systems (e.g., families, organizations, communities, and the state) aimed at promoting individuals' effective allocation of personal resources to fulfil work and non-work demands.

In summary, drawing on a *process-oriented* perspective from the *COR theory* (Hobfoll et al., 2018) and the *PRA framework* (Grawitch et al., 2010), we frame work–life balance support as a virtuous cycle of resource investment and return. Individuals invest *personal resources* to fulfil demands, achieve positive work–life outcomes, and replenish personal resources. Meanwhile, higher-level social systems invest in *work–life balance support*, generating positive family, organizational and societal outcomes. In other words, higher-level social systems themselves may also benefit from individuals' work–life balance. We agree with Kossek's (2015, p. 372) claim that work–life balance as an "individual-level phenomenon should be bracketed and understood across multiple levels". The *socio-ecological systems theory* enables us to envision this process of resource investment and return in terms of work–life balance support mechanisms in the context of social systems at different levels.

3.2.2 Socio-ecological systems theory: A multilevel support system for work–life balance

We draw on a *multilevel* and *systematic* approach to addressing individuals' dynamic interactions with broader social environment (Golden and Earp, 2012) from the *socio-ecological systems theory* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and its theoretical extensions to work–life balance research (Pocock et al., 2012; Voydanoff, 2008) because it fits our research purpose of understanding work–life balance as a societal concern rather than an individual-level phenomenon (Brough et al., 2008). This is a useful framework for our review because it addresses individuals' dynamic interactions with broader social environment (Golden and Earp, 2012). The *socio-ecological systems theory* compares human society to natural ecology and underlines the dynamic interplay between individuals and external social systems across multiple levels (Richard et al., 2011).

A *social system* refers to a collective entity of interdependent and interactive individuals and surroundings that share common goals, values and beliefs (Rogers, 2003). Typical examples of social systems include families, organizations, communities, and countries. Crucially, different social systems are related to each other. For example, a *family* intersects with an *organization* when a family member is also an employee; this *family* is also a subset of a *community*.

The *socio-ecological systems theory* (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Pocock et al., 2012; Voydanoff, 2008) postulates that an individual belongs to multiple interactive social systems nested at multiple levels: (1) *microsystems* with which individuals have direct, interpersonal contact (e.g., family and organization); (2) *mesosystems* containing intersections between multiple microsystems (e.g., teleworking); (3) *exosystems* that indirectly influence individuals (e.g., children's school); (4) *macrosystems* of broad cultural and social contexts; and (5) *chronosystems* encompassing environmental changes and transitions across time.

In this paper, we draw on the socio-ecological systems theory to conceptualize *work–life balance support* as a multilevel construct. However, instead of using their classification of social systems, we adopt conceptual levels (i.e., *national*, *workplace*, and *micro* levels) more commonly used in work–life balance support literature. This aligns with Abendroth and den Dulk's (2011) contention that families, organizations, and countries are the most frequently studied units of social systems that provide work–life balance support mechanisms to individuals.

Therefore, we categorize social systems into three broad *conceptual levels*: (1) the *micro* level, comprising family members and personal social networks, such as friends and neighbors, (2) the *workplace* level, including the working environment and professional contacts, such as supervisors and team members, and (3) the *societal* level, defined by geographical and/or psychological boundaries, such as communities and countries. We also adapt the *chronosystem* proposed by the *socio-ecological systems theory* (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) into a *timing* dimension that depicts the temporal or historical aspect of work–life balance support in our multidimensional typology.

3.2.3 Proposed model: A process-oriented and multilevel conceptual framework

Drawing on resource theories and the *socio-ecological systems theory*, we

propose a process-oriented, multilevel conceptual framework of work–life balance support, whereby an individual's work–life experiences interact with the external environment via the process of (1) drawing *work–life balance support* from external social systems to adjust, expand, and/or reallocate *personal resources* to (2) cope with *stressors* from social systems nested at multiple levels, and subsequently, (3) bring about positive *outcomes* to multilevel social systems. These positive *outcomes* may further (4) replenish/expand individuals' *resources* to (5) cope with *stressors* associated with work–life balance, forming a virtuous cycle.

We define *stressors* as objects, events, or environmental conditions that pose actual or potential survival challenges or opportunities for an individual (Deckers, 2016). External *stressors* are internalized as individuals' *personal demands* that necessitate their consumption of *personal resources*. *Outcomes* include *work-related* (e.g., job satisfaction and performance), *life-related* (e.g., family and leisure satisfaction), and *cross-domain* (e.g., physical/mental health and work–life conflict/enrichment/balance) achievements. For example, utilization of teleworking arrangements (*work–life balance support*) provided by the organization (*social system*) allows parents (*individual*) to spend more time (*personal resource*) taking care (*personal demand*) of their children (*stressor*) in their family (*social system*), subsequently enhancing the parent–child relationship (*outcome* and *personal resource*).

We propose a process-oriented, multilevel conceptual framework (see Figure 3.1), which highlights several paths for further investigation:

(1) An individual recognizes *personal demands* in response to *stressors* from external social systems.
(2) An individual draws on *work–life balance support mechanisms* from external social systems to adjust, expand, and/or reallocate *personal resources*.
(3) *Personal demands* deplete an individual's *personal resources*.
(4) *Stressors* and/or *personal demands* pose challenges for survival and hence negatively influence an individual's work-related, life-related, and cross-domain *personal outcomes*.
(5) An individual consumes *personal resources* to fulfil *personal demands* and respond to external *stressors*. Hence, *personal resources* may moderate the influence of *stressors* and/or *personal demands* on an individual's *personal*

outcomes.

(6) In line with the resource accumulation assumption of the *COR theory* (Hobfoll et al., 2018), we propose that an individual's increased *personal resources* can generate positive *personal outcomes*.

(7) The aggregation of *personal resources*, *personal demands*, and *personal outcomes* of individuals nested within a social system (e.g., family, organization, and country) may influence this social system and generate higher-level (e.g., family, organizational, and societal) *outcomes*.

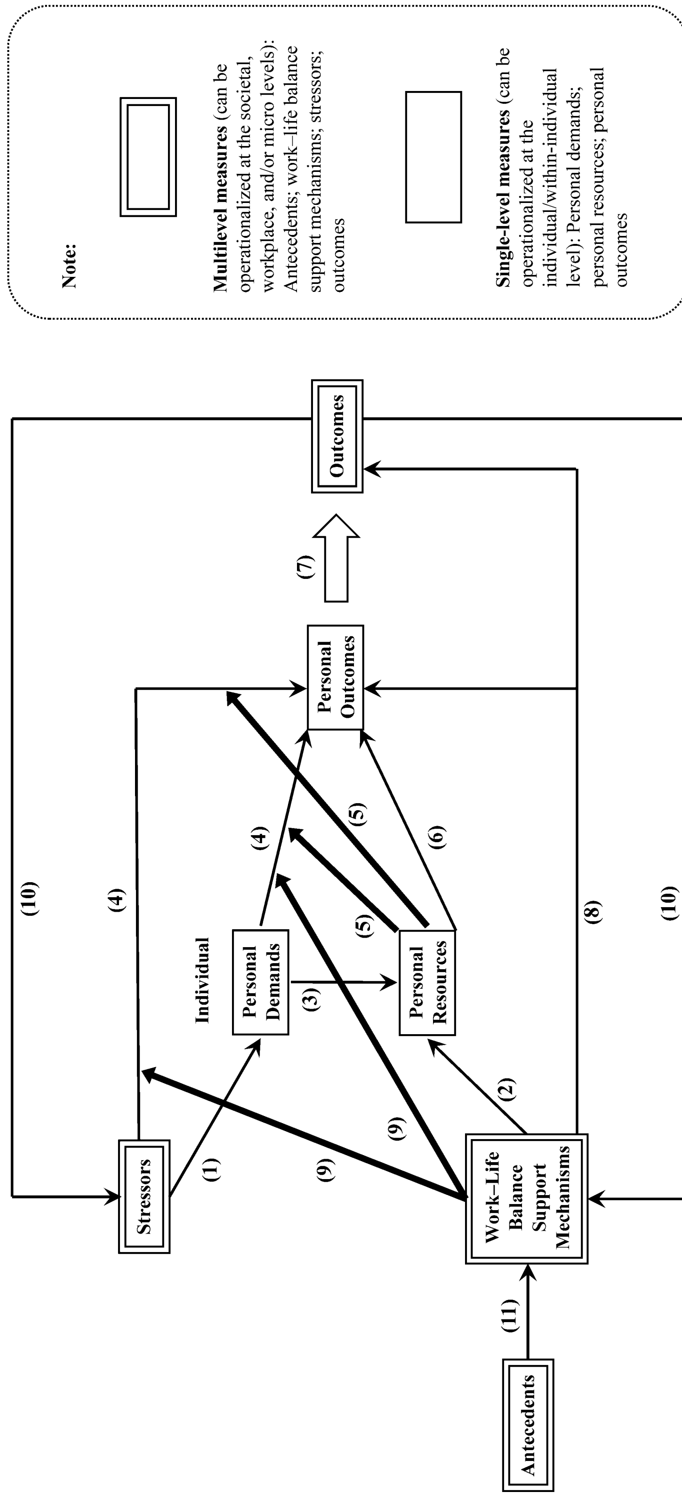
(8) Similar to path (6), *work–life balance support* investments by an external social system may bring positive *outcomes* to that system.

(9) Similar to path (5), *work–life balance support* may moderate the relationship between *stressors* and/or *personal demands* and an individual's *personal outcomes*. *Work–life balance support* may also moderate the influence of *stressors* from a higher-level social system on higher-level *outcomes*.

(10) Positive higher-level family, organizational, and social *outcomes* may become new sources of *work–life balance support* whereas negative higher-level outcomes may become new *stressors*, forming a work–life balance resource cycle.

(11) Some *antecedents* from multilevel social systems may influence an individual's perception, utilization, and provision of *work–life balance support* while other *antecedents* may influence the provision of *work–life balance support* by a certain social system.

Since this review focuses on work–life balance support, we systematically synthesized and organized the findings according to paths (2), (8), (9), (10), and (11) highlighted above. Specifically, we documented the measures and conceptual levels of *work–life balance support mechanisms*, their *antecedents* and *outcomes* and the relationships between these measures. Other paths in this conceptual framework have been well theorized in extant work and are not this review's focus. For instance, relationships between stressors, personal demands, personal resources, and personal outcomes, i.e., paths (1), (3), (4), (5), (6), and (7) have been widely theorized and empirically examined utilizing different occupational stress and coping theories (e.g., Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; ten Brummelhuis and Bakker, 2012).



Conceptual Level	Operational Level	Antecedents	Support Mechanisms	Stressors	Outcomes
Societal	Neighborhood, community/ ethnic group/ religious group, industry/ sector, city/ county, region/ state/ province, country, continent, etc.	National culture, etc.	National family policies, etc.	Economic recessions, etc.	♦ *Efficiency-based*: national economic competitiveness, etc. ♦ *Fairness-based*: gender equality, etc.
Workplace	Team/ work group, department, branch/ division, organization/ establishment/ facility, industry, sector, etc.	Organizational size, etc.	Organizational family-friendly practices, etc.	Work tasks, etc.	♦ *Profitability-oriented*: organizational productivity, etc. ♦ *Social responsibility-oriented*: gender pay gap, etc.
Micro	Time-point measure nested within individual, individual, couple, nuclear/extended family, patriarchal clan, etc.	Family structures, etc.	Partner support, etc.	Childcare responsibilities, etc.	♦ *Work-related*: work performance, etc. ♦ *Life-related*: life satisfaction, etc. ♦ *Cross-domain*: work–family conflict/enrichment, etc.

Figure 3.1: A process-oriented, multilevel conceptual framework of work–life balance support

Furthermore, extant literature suggests that key stakeholders, e.g., the individual, the employer, and the government, may sometimes pursue complementary yet conflicting goals (Leitner & Wroblewski, 2006) whereby: (1) individuals utilize support mechanisms to meet personal *work* and *life* demands; (2) employers provide support mechanisms to maximize *profitability* and fulfil *social responsibility* (Been *et al.*, 2017; Faria and Machado, 2018); and (3) governments offer support mechanisms to achieve *efficiency* (e.g., increasing labor supply) and promote *fairness* (e.g., gender equality) (Brough et al., 2008). The dynamic balance between these varied goals is critical for both short-term prosperity and long-term sustainability of all stakeholders. In order to examine the impact of work–life balance support from a *multi-stakeholder* perspective, we classified *outcomes* in relation to the main goals of key stakeholders at different levels: (1) *work-related* versus *life-related* outcomes at the *micro* level; (2) *profitability-oriented* versus *social responsibility-oriented* outcomes at the *workplace* level; and (3) *efficiency-based* versus *fairness-based* outcomes at the *societal* level.

Our review draws on *multidisciplinary* research to develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of stakeholders' competing pursuits. Specifically, we synthesize literature from five research disciplines: (1) *management* that offers managerial and employee perspectives; (2) *industrial relations* that addresses interrelationships between employees, employers, trade unions, and governments; (3) *applied psychology* that explores interactions between individuals and their work/non-work environment through the psychology lens; (4) *family studies* that focuses on family characteristics, interactions, and policies; and (5) *sociology* that focuses on broader societal concerns.

In summary, from a *process-oriented* perspective, we theorize ongoing interactions between individuals' work–life experiences and surrounding social systems in terms of a virtuous cycle of resource changes. Furthermore, we adopt a *multilevel* approach that unpacks the impact of work–life balance support via the constructive *process* of resource investment and return across multiple levels of social systems. Our *multilevel conceptualization* is based on the level of social system that provides work–life balance support.

3.2.4 Social support literature: A multidimensional typology of work–life balance

Our conceptual framework offers a novel way of unpacking iterative interactions between individuals and their environment whereby individuals make sense of the environmental reality (e.g., actual presence of *stressors* and *work–life balance support*) through cognitive interpretation and these subjective perceptions enable individuals to react to, and transform, the environment. We are particularly interested in how the dichotomy between *actual existence* versus *subjective perception* of work–life balance support influences individuals' work–life balance and generates relevant outcomes. We draw on social support literature to propose a *multidimensional* typology that distinguishes between *actual existence* versus *subjective perception* of work–life balance support.

Social support is defined as actual or perceived, tangible (e.g., money) and intangible (e.g., love) resources for stress management (French *et al.* 2018) within a person's social network comprising personal (e.g., family members) and professional (e.g., co-workers) ties (Muñoz-Laboy *et al.* 2014). Our definition of work–life balance support builds on social support literature given the overlap between social support and work–life balance support addressed in more detail in our findings.

Cohen and Wills (1985, p.315) classified dimensions of social support according to its *structure* (i.e., "the existence of relationships") and *functionality* (i.e., "the extent to which one's interpersonal relationships provide particular resources"). We adapt this classification into a multidimensional typology and propose that *structural* dimensions depict the actual existence and quantity of work–life balance support while *functional* dimensions signify the perceptual and qualitive evaluation of work–life balance support.

Furthermore, we split the broad dimensions of support *structure* and *functionality* into more nuanced sub-dimensions. First, we utilize frequently studied facets of social support, i.e., structural sub-dimensions of *provision*, *utilization*, and *timing* and functional sub-dimensions of *perceived availability*, *perceived necessity*, and *perceived usefulness* from comprehensive reviews on social support measurement (Bruhn & Philips, 1984; Shinn et al., 1984; Tardy, 1985). Second, we adapt *negative career consequences* and *organizational time expectations* from the composite concept of *work–family culture* (see Thompson *et al.*, 1999) into two functional sub-

dimensions, i.e., *perceived consequence* and *expectation*. Third, we propose a new structural sub-dimension—*intervention*, which denotes the treatment of work–life balance support in experimental settings. Operationalized definitions and examples of specific dimensions in our proposed structure–functionality typology of work–life balance support are elaborated in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: The structure–functionality typology of dimensions of work–life balance support

Typology	Dimension	Definition & Example
Structure (i.e., the actual existence and quantity of work–life balance support)	(1) Provision	♦*Definition*: The existence/frequency/number/amount/quantity of a social system or an individual offering support/aid/help to facilitate work–life balance. ♦*Example*: — "Today, I willingly gave my time to help colleagues who had work-related problems." (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*) (Lin *et al.*, 2017) — "Whether an organization offered the following five practices: workplace childcare, childcare allowances, career break schemes, maternity leave, and/or paternity leave." "Whether the organization provided these practices above and beyond the existing statutory requirements." (1 = *yes*; 0 = *no*) (Respondents were human resource managers.) (Giardini & Kabst, 2008)
	(2) Utilization	♦*Definition*: The existence/frequency/number/amount/quantity of using/utilizing/receiving/adopting a support mechanism to achieve work–life balance. ♦*Example*: — "Respondents were asked to choose the work–life balance practices [from a list of practices] that they were currently using." (1 = *yes*; 0 = *no*) (Thakur & Bhatnagar, 2017)
	(3) Intervention	♦*Definition*: The intervention of work–life balance support mechanisms in a laboratory, field, or natural experiment; the process of implementing work–life balance support mechanisms. ♦*Example*: — Vignette experiment: "HR benefits provision was manipulated in the recruitment advertisement presented to the respondents. The company described in the Control Condition provided standard pay benefits (which is common to all versions of the survey); the company in the Condition 1 survey offered health care and insurance benefits in addition to standard pay benefits; and the company in

		Condition 2 offered WLBs in addition to standard pay benefits.” (Firfiray & Mayo, 2017) — Field experiment: “exposure to the STAR intervention [STAR (Support. Transform. Achieve. Results.): a group-randomized field trial of an organizational intervention designed to promote control over work time and supervisor support for employees’ personal and family life]” (1 = *experimental group*; 0 = *control group*) (Moen et al., 2016) — Natural experiment: “Family-friendly law (Act 39/99) approved in Spain in 1999” (de la Rica & Gorjon, 2016)
	(4) Timing	♦*Definition*: The time point or (life/career/historical) stage at which support is offered/received/used; the length of time it takes for the individual to use/offer a support mechanism or the length of time an organization or government takes to implement a support mechanism; the length of time for a support mechanism to take effect or cease to be effective. ♦*Example*: — “We collected a more detailed set of information about the benefits we labelled as family-supportive, including when they had been implemented.” “The way that we do this is to make a distinction between ‘new’ and ‘old’ benefits. ‘Old’ benefits are defined as those that have been offered for five or more years as of the survey date.” (Baughman et al., 2003)
Functionality (i.e., the perceptual and qualitive evaluation of work–life balance support)	(5) Perceived availability	♦*Definition*: The perception that this support mechanism is present/available/accessible/approachable/reliable when the participant needs it to achieve work–life balance. ♦*Example*: — Co-workers/supervisor/spouse “really tries to help me”; “is around when I am in need”; “really cares about my feelings”; “is a real source of comfort to me” (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) (Pluut et al., 2018) — “To what extent can you count on your leader/family and friends to help you when you face difficulties combining work and family?” (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *a great deal*) (Nohe & Sonntag, 2014) — “I have a poor support network of other doctors like me.” “I don’t have many friends or family members in my current work location.” (0 = *strongly agree* to 4 = *strongly disagree*) (Bardoel and Drago, 2016)

(6) Perceived necessity	♦*Definition*: The perception that this support mechanism is necessary/requisite/important for the participant to achieve work–life balance. ♦*Example*: — "Demand for flexible working arrangements" (1 = *very unnecessary* to 5 = *very necessary*) (Kim *et al.*, 2019) — "How valuable is [paid parental leave, flexitime, time off in lieu, childcare subsidy, unpaid special leave and reimbursements] to you?" (1 = *no value* to 5 = *invaluable*) (Haar & Spell, 2004)
(7) Expectation	♦*Definition*: Societal, organizational, and family norms/attitudes about providing/using work–life balance support mechanisms. ♦*Example*: — Societal cultures/norms: "A man's job is to earn the money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family." (1 = *strongly agree* to 5 = *strongly disagree*) (Thebaud & Pedulla, 2016) — Organizational cultures/norms: "I feel that the organization respects my desire to balance work and personal/non-work demands." "In general, supervisors in this organization are quite accommodating of personal needs." (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) (McCarthy et al., 2013) — Work group/team norms: "Members of the work group who put in long hours have better possibilities to advance." "It is more important in the work group to put in long hours than to do a good job." (1 = *disagree completely* to 5 = *agree completely*) (Allard et al., 2011) — Family norms: "I am willing to share household duties with my partner." (own and partner's willingness to share household duties) (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) (Krys et al., 2018) — Perceived responsibility: "Who took primary responsibility for improving work–life balance in your organization?" (1 = *senior business leaders*; 2 = *middle managers*; 3 = *employee network, network leaders or every employee*) (Vyas et al., 2017)
(8) Perceived usefulness	♦*Definition*: The perception that the support mechanism is useful/helpful/effective/satisfying/adequate for achieving work–life balance; the perceived benefits of using/providing this support mechanism. ♦*Example*: — "Work–life balance policies & programs help reduce absenteeism." "Work–life balance policies & programs have a positive impact on recruitment and retention." (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) [human resource

		manager-rated] (McCarthy et al., 2013) — "Parents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with aspects of childcare arrangements including cost, location, and quality." (1 = *very dissatisfied* to 5 = *very satisfied*) (Roberts et al., 2004)
	(9) Perceived consequence	♦*Definition*: The perceived negative outcomes of using/providing the support mechanism. ♦*Example*: — "Using family-friendly programs would harm my status at work." "Using family-friendly programs would hurt my career progress." (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) (Butler et al., 2004) — "Supervisors/co-workers make negative comments if someone benefits from tools aimed at supporting work–family balance." (1 = *disagree* to 4 = *agree*) (Ghislieri et al., 2017)

In summary, our proposed structure–functionality multidimensional typology highlights the importance of synthesizing the widely studied yet fragmented issue of differential impacts of actual existence (i.e., structure) versus subjective interpretation (i.e., functionality) of work–life balance support. Specifically, *structural* dimensions include (1) provision, (2) utilization, (3) intervention, and (4) timing. *Functional* dimensions cover (1) perceived availability, (2) perceived necessity, (3) expectation, (4) perceived usefulness, and (5) perceived consequence.

3.3 Methods

Our *systematic literature review* involved an exhaustive literature search, comprehensive synthesis, and critical appraisal of extant studies according to pre-defined research questions "by adopting a replicable, scientific and transparent process" (Tranfield *et al.* 2003, p. 209). We did not conduct a quantitative meta-analysis that extracts and analyzes data statistically from reviewed studies for two reasons. First, a third of the papers used qualitative and mixed methods, rendering a quantitative meta-analysis impossible. Second, extant quantitative studies encompass a wide variety of support mechanisms, antecedents, and outcomes rather than concentrating on a few frequently-used indicators. Therefore, our systematic review offers a qualitative synthesis of extant findings.

Inclusion Criteria	Details
Publication date	From 1st of January, 1960 to 3rd of December, 2019
Keywords (in titles only)	(“work–life” OR “work–family” OR “work–home” OR “family friendly”) AND (“support” OR “practice” OR “initiative” OR “policy” OR “benefit” OR “arrangement” OR “flexib*”)
Database	Web of Science Core Collection
Language	English
Document type	Peer-reviewed journal articles & scholarly book chapters
Research type (design)	Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods), theoretical papers, and literature reviews
Research discipline (Web of Science category)	Management, industrial relations, applied psychology, family studies, and sociology

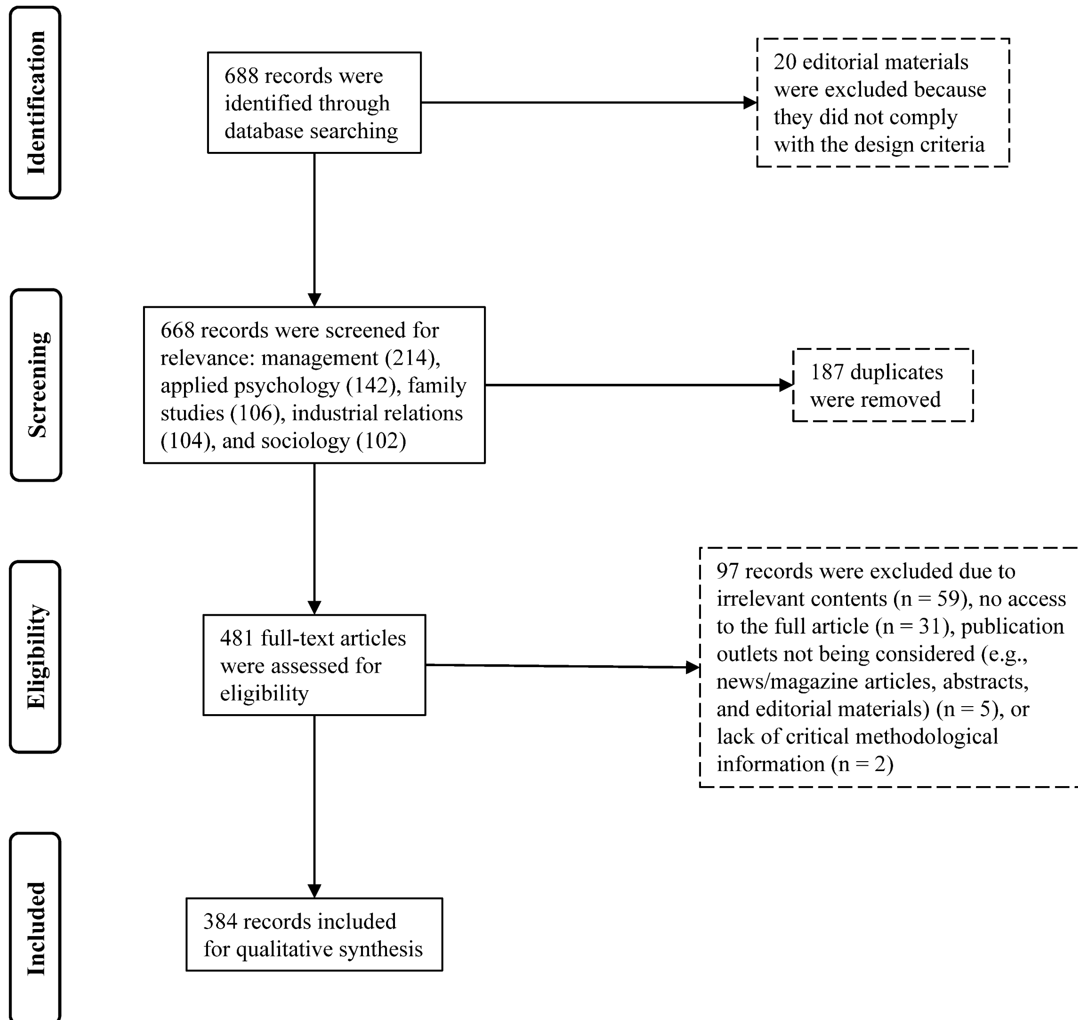


Figure 3.2: Literature inclusion criteria and the PRISMA flow chart

3.3.1 Literature search and selection

The literature search was conducted between 12th of June, 2018 and 3rd of December, 2019. At the outset, all authors agreed on key search terms and the inclusion criteria, using the *SPIDER* protocol given its applicability for a narrative synthesis of quantitative, qualitative, *and* mixed methods research (Cooke et al., 2012). The following inclusion criteria were applied: (1) *sample* (S): people involved in both paid work and personal/family lives; (2) *phenomenon of interest* (PI): work–life balance support; (3) *design* (D): theoretical work, literature reviews, and empirical studies; (4) *evaluation* (E): concepts, antecedents, outcomes, contexts, and other aspects of work–life balance support; and (5) *research type* (R): quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.

Additional inclusion criteria included: (1) restricting the *publication outlet* to peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly book chapters given that rigorous and valuable scholarly work is often published in these outlets (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009); (2) confining to English as the commonly used *language* in academia; (3) limiting the range of *publication dates* from 1st of January, 1960 (when work–life balance emerged as an academic discourse) (Naithani, 2010) to 3rd of December, 2019 (the final day of our literature search) to capture relevant sources; and (4) focusing on five *research disciplines* encompassing different stakeholder perspectives at multiple levels (e.g., individuals, employers, and policymakers) in line with our proposed conceptual framework (see Figure 3.1), including management, industrial relations, applied psychology, family studies, and sociology.

Combining the inclusion criteria of *sample* "AND" *phenomenon of interest*, we ran the search on paper titles in the database of the *Web of Science Core Collection* using different combinations of search strings (see Figure 3.2). We focused on searching paper titles since they usually contain the most crucial information (e.g., key concepts and studied measures) that enabled us to identify studies focused on work–life balance support.

The PRISMA (Moher et al., 2009) flow chart (see Figure 3.2) outlines the selection process in line with our pre-set inclusion criteria. During the *identification* stage, 688 results were generated. 20 editorial materials were excluded for not complying with the *design* criteria while the remaining 668 results were across five

research disciplines of management (214), applied psychology (142), family studies (106), industrial relations (104), and sociology (102). During the *screening* stage, 187 duplicates were removed, while retaining 481 records. In the *eligibility* stage, full texts of these 481 papers were examined and a further 97 records were eliminated—59 records were irrelevant according to the SPIDER protocol, 31 texts could not be accessed, 5 records were in publication outlets not under consideration (e.g., news/magazine articles and editorial materials), and 2 records lacked critical methodological information. A final sample of 384 papers was coded and analyzed.

3.3.2 Literature coding and analysis

The selected papers were coded in an Excel spreadsheet according to the following pre-determined coding scheme: bibliographic information, research methods, concepts and measures of work–life balance support, theories, and key findings. Each paper was double-coded by two of the three authors with discrepancies resolved through discussion between all three authors. We documented how each paper conceptualized specific work–life balance *support mechanisms* (e.g., supervisor support) as well as their *antecedents*, *outcomes*, and *contexts*.

As mentioned earlier, work–life balance support is a *multilevel*, *multidimensional* construct. Hence, we documented the *conceptual level* (i.e., source of support or level of the social system that provides support) and the *operational level* (i.e., unit of measurement or level of data analysis) of the measures of work–life balance *support mechanisms* and their *antecedents* and *outcomes* according to our process-oriented, multilevel conceptual framework (see Figure 3.1). We recorded *conceptual levels* for all types of research but documented *operational levels* only for quantitative research or quantitative elements of mixed methods research. *Outcomes* were classified from the perspectives of individuals' (i.e., work-/life-related and cross-domain), employers' (i.e., profitability-/social responsibility-oriented), and governments' (i.e., efficiency-/fairness-based) *major goals*.

Moreover, we coded specific *dimensions* of work–life balance *support mechanisms* for both quantitative and qualitative research according to our proposed operational definitions (see Table 3.1). The dimensions were coded based on the definition of specific work–life balance support mechanisms or the sample

items/measures. For both quantitative and qualitative research, we also explored whether a study examined the *timing* dimension by employing a longitudinal design or adopting a life-course or historical perspective.

In this review, we attempt to systematically synthesize key findings around the (1) *multilevel* and (2) *multidimensional* conceptualization and measurement of work–life balance support, and the (3) *antecedents*, *outcomes*, and *contexts* of work–life balance support in line with our process-oriented, multilevel, and multidimensional conceptual framework.

3.3.3 General description of the sample literature

Table 3.2 captures the overarching characteristics of the literature considered. Figure 3.3 highlights the growing popularity of research on work–life balance support by discipline.

Table 3.2: Characteristics of the sample literature

Characteristics	Details	Number	Percentage
Publication outlet	(1) Peer-reviewed journal article	355	92.45%
	(2) Scholarly book chapter	29	7.55%
Research discipline	(1) Management	131	34.11%
	(2) Applied psychology	115	29.95%
	(3) Sociology	64	16.67%
	(4) Industrial relations	43	11.20%
	(5) Family studies	31	8.07%
Methodology	(1) Quantitative	260	67.71%
	(2) Qualitative	97	25.26%
	(3) Mixed methods	27	7.03%
Research design	(1) Cross-sectional	245	63.80%
	(2) Longitudinal	60	15.63%
	(3) Literature review	29	7.55%
	(4) Theoretical	21	5.47%
	(5) Experimental	14	3.65%
	(6) Case study	11	2.86%
	(7) Meta-analysis	4	1.04%
Geographic area	(1) North America	150	39.06%
	(2) Europe	133	34.64%
	(3) Asia	62	16.15%
	(4) Oceania	36	9.38%
	(5) South America	9	2.34%
	(6) Africa	7	1.82%
	(7) Cross-national but specific countries unknown	6	1.56%
	(8) Unknown	7	1.82%
	(9) Not applicable (e.g., literature review and theoretical paper)	29	7.55%
Number of countries/ regions involved	(1) 1	288	75%
	(2) 2–5	28	7.29%
	(3) 6–10	5	1.30%
	(4) 11–15	5	1.30%
	(5) 16–20	7	1.82%
	(6) 21–25	4	1.04%
	(7) 26–30	3	0.78%
	(8) 31–75	5	1.30%
	(9) Unknown	10	2.60%
	(9) Not applicable (e.g., literature review and theoretical paper)	29	7.55%

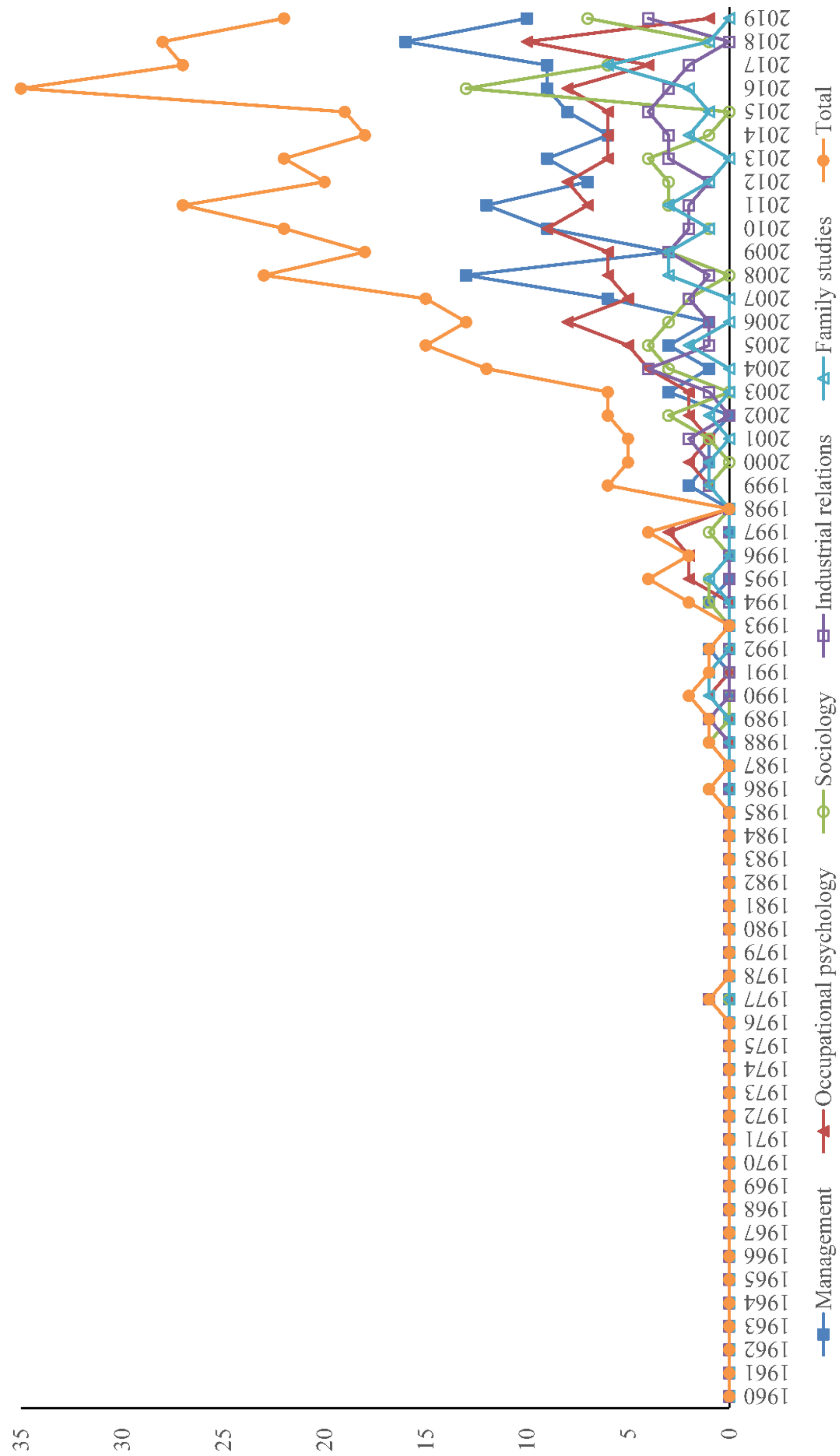


Figure 3.3: Number of publications on work–life balance support (1st January 1960–3rd December 2019)

3.4 Conceptualization, Measurement, and Evaluation of Work–Life Balance Support

Given the lack of a comprehensive definition for *work–life balance support*, we advance a definition for this term (see Introduction) by drawing on the *PRA framework* (Grawitch et al., 2010) and the social support literature (French et al., 2018; Muñoz-Laboy et al., 2014). In this section, we discuss how extant research has conceptualized and measured work–life balance support as a *multilevel*, *multidimensional*, and *process-oriented* construct with reference to our proposed conceptual framework (see Figure 3.1) and structure–functionality typology (see Table 3.1).

3.4.1 Sources of work–life balance support: A multilevel construct

We adopted the *socio-ecological systems theory*'s (Pocock et al., 2012) systematic, multilevel approach to examine the *conceptual* (i.e., source) and *operational* (i.e., unit of measurement/analysis) *levels* of *work–life balance support*.

We identified a discrepancy between the multilevel *conceptualization* versus *operationalization* of work–life balance support (see Table 3.3) whereby most research conceptualizes work–life balance support at the *workplace* level while measuring and analyzing support mechanisms at the *micro* level. Individual-level measures were frequently used to assess a higher-level concept without data aggregation or multilevel analysis. For instance, some studies measured organizational-level concepts such as organizational work–family culture at the employee level without aggregating the data at the organization level (e.g., de Janasz *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, *multilevel* conceptualization and operationalization of work–life balance support is under-considered (e.g., den Dulk *et al.*, 2012, 2013) with most extant work conceptualizing and operationalizing work–life balance support at a single level.

Table 3.3: Multilevel conceptualization and operationalization of work–life balance support

Conceptual level	**Number**	**Percent**	**Operational level**	**Number**	**Percent**
Micro level	68	17.71%	(1) Employee/individual (including within-individual)	242	63.02%
			(2) Couple	3	0.78%
			(3) Family	1	0.26%
Workplace level	333	86.72%	(4) Team/work group	7	1.82%
			(5) Organization/ establishment/facility/ subsidiary/department/manager	46	11.98%
Societal level	86	22.40%	(6) Union	1	0.26%
			(7) Country	14	3.65%
Conceptual level	**Number**	**Percent**	**Operational level**	**Number**	**Percent**
1 Level	294	76.56%	1 Level	232	60.42%
2 Levels	77	20.05%	2 Levels	42	10.94%
3 Levels	13	3.39%	3 Levels	4	1.04%
			4 Levels	1	0.26%

Next, we present how work–life balance support mechanisms have been examined at three conceptual levels and their interplay across levels.

Micro level. *Social support* was the dominant work–life balance support mechanism at this level with a specific focus on spouses/partners (e.g., Pluut *et al.*, 2018), some consideration of extended family members (e.g., children, siblings, parents, and relatives) (e.g., Fan, 2009), and rarely friends and neighbors (e.g., Winston *et al.*, 2019). Both *tangible* (e.g., career/childcare/housework assistance) and *intangible* (e.g., emotional and informational support) forms of social support for both *work-related* and *life-related* demands were frequently examined. Several meta-analyses highlight the positive role of both micro- and workplace-level social support in abating work–family conflict and alleviating work/family stressors (French *et al.*, 2018; Kossek *et al.*, 2011; Michel *et al.*, 2010).

Workplace level. At this level, *formal* and *informal* types of work–life balance support mechanisms emerged. Both *workplace social support* (denoting social support from professional networks) and *organizational culture* (referring to family-supportive or work–family culture) were commonly used for measuring informal organizational support.

We identified four major categories of *formal* support mechanisms at the workplace level: (1) flexible working arrangements that enable adjustment of work demands, such as flexible schedules (T. Fang et al., 2019) and phased retirement (Hill et al., 2011); (2) organizational interventions that help employees achieve their work/career goals, such as career development training (Batt & Valcour, 2003) and virtual office facilities (Kalysh et al., 2016); (3) family-friendly policies that accommodate employees' family demands, such as parenting courses (McDonald *et al.*, 2013), leave arrangements for dependent care/marriage/bereavement (Moon & Roh, 2010), and childcare/eldercare services/facilities/subsidies (Butler *et al.*, 2004; Wang *et al.*, 2011); and (4) employer-sponsored provisions for other personal demands (e.g., health, leisure, and education), such as pensions and life/health/medical insurance, canteens, on-site gyms, tuition reimbursement, travel services and allowances, and recreational and social activities (Kossek *et al.*, 2006; Rajan-Rankin and Tomlinson, 2013).

These *formal* organizational support mechanisms facilitate employees' fulfilment of life demands by rearranging work demands (e.g., time, location, and workload) (Kossek and Lautsch, 2018) through family-friendly or life-friendly services, facilities, and financial benefits (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018). In extant literature, the most frequently studied *formal* support mechanisms were flexible working arrangements and family-friendly policies (especially for childcare). Butts *et al.*'s (2013) meta-analysis indicated that employees' perceived availability and utilization of these organizational policies can improve their work–life balance and generate positive employee outcomes, such as increased job satisfaction and affective commitment. Also, Kossek *et al.* 's (2011) meta-analysis showed that work–life balance-specific supervisor support and organizational support have a stronger positive impact on employees' work–life balance than general support does. However, support mechanisms for other important life demands (e.g., eldercare, health, leisure, education, and networking) were under-explored.

Societal level. At this level, work–life balance support mechanisms can be categorized as (1) public policies, (2) public infrastructures and services, (3) private services, (4) support from communities and social groups/organizations, (5) national cultures or societal norms about work–life balance support, and (6) international/

transnational organizations and legislation. The most frequently studied measures were *public policies* addressing (a) dependent care assistance (e.g., maternity/ paternity leave and child benefits), (b) work/employment flexibility (e.g., part-time employment and statutory flexible working requests), and (c) social security (e.g., health/unemployment insurance, housing benefits, and pension). Research often presented Nordic examples as good practice where it is easier to maintain good work–life balance than in other countries on account of their gender egalitarian norms and abundant state support for childcare/eldercare, employment, and health care that encourage both genders to share work and domestic responsibilities (Leitner & Wroblewski, 2006).

Scholars repeatedly highlighted public childcare services (e.g., Misra *et al.*, 2007; Riva, 2016) but ignored other *public infrastructures and services*, such as public eldercare services (Martin, 2017), public education systems (Barsoum, 2019), information technology infrastructures (Ladkin et al., 2016), and public transportation (Cook, 1989). Also, public health services, sports facilities, and recreation infrastructures are indispensable elements of life but remain blind spots in existing literature. A handful of studies (e.g., Boye, 2011; Gronlund and Magnusson, 2016) discussed *welfare state regime* typologies that categorize countries according to their *government ideology/disposition* of market liberalism/efficiency *versus* state interventionism/fairness and/or the primary target of their *public policies and infrastructures* for promoting gender equality *versus* reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Several studies considered private/marketized childcare (Crompton, 2002) and domestic services (Husu, 2005) but overall, the role of *private services* in promoting work–life balance was neglected. *Support from communities and social groups/ organizations* was under-examined, barring some work on support from religious communities (Shai, 2002), trade unions (Berg et al., 2014), staff associations (Hyman & Summers, 2004), and works councils (Heywood & Jirjahn, 2009). *National cultures or societal norms about work–life balance support* were sparingly addressed in terms of gender egalitarianism (Cogin et al., 2018), familism (Riva, 2016), and work centrality (den Dulk et al., 2013). With respect to *international/transnational organizations and legislation*, only Oliver (2012) discussed the need for transnational

policies aimed at facilitating scientists' work–life mobility across the European Union.

Cross-level interplay. Research on the interplay between different levels of work–life balance support mechanisms was limited and thus, we lack a systematic understanding of how work–life balance support is influenced by interactions between multilevel social systems.

Lin *et al.* (2017) illustrated the interplay between support mechanisms at the *workplace* and *micro* levels by highlighting how the amount of support individuals offered to their colleagues influenced their provision of support to their spouses. Several qualitative studies explored the interplay between the *societal* and *micro* levels, underlining that people relied more on family social support given a national culture of familism and the lack of governmental support and formal childcare (Annink, 2017; Grönlund & Javornik, 2014).

Scholars paid relatively more attention to the interplay between the *national* and *organizational* levels. Key findings highlight that employers are more likely to provide family-friendly initiatives given limited state support, a societal norm of considering work–life balance as an organizational responsibility, and high union representation (Been *et al.*, 2017; Budd and Mumford, 2006). Also, employees are more likely to utilize organizational initiatives in the context of gender egalitarian cultures, extensive national legislation, high unionization levels, and advanced information technology infrastructure (Berg et al., 2013, 2014; Ladkin et al., 2016; Thebaud & Pedulla, 2016).

Some scholars offered a more holistic view of the cross-level interplay, indicating a complementary relationship between these three levels of work–life balance support mechanisms in society (e.g., Leitner and Wroblewski, 2006; Xiao and Cooke, 2012). For example, British and American employees seek more work–life balance support from their social networks due to the "limited and piecemeal" provision of national and organizational support (Warren *et al.*, 2009, p. 126). In contrast, Swedish employees enjoy more generous state and employer support and rely less on their personal networks (Crompton, 2006).

In summary, there was a discrepancy between multilevel conceptualization *versus* operationalization whereby most research conceptualized work–life balance

support mechanisms at the *workplace* level but measured and analyzed the mechanisms at the *micro* level. However, effective *societal*- and *workplace*-level support mechanisms are indispensable for individuals to cope with challenging macro-level stressors given low individual control over macro contexts (e.g., economic recessions). This conceptualization–operationalization discrepancy may bias research findings, which cannot guide practice because key stakeholders (e.g., individuals, employers, and governments) in multilevel environment hold common yet competing interests around work–life balance support which individual-level analysis fails to capture. Hence, we advocate investigations on support mechanisms at the *societal* and *workplace* levels as well as the interplay across levels and our conceptual framework adapted from Bronfenbrenner's (1986) socio-ecological systems theory can be particularly useful in supporting such endeavors.

3.4.2 Structure and functionality of work–life balance support: A multidimensional construct

Based on our proposed structure–functionality typology (see Table 3.1), we found that *utilization* (39.58%) and *provision* (28.91%) were the most frequently studied *structural* dimensions of work–life balance support, followed by *timing* (22.66%) and *intervention* (5.47%). Investigation of *functional* dimensions focused on *perceived availability* (57.29%), *expectation* (38.28%), *perceived usefulness* (22.14%), *perceived consequence* (19.27%), and *perceived necessity* (10.94%).

Structural dimensions. *Structural* dimensions were primarily captured in quantitative research with a focus on individuals' *utilization* of organizational initiatives, national policies, and childcare services *as well as* the *provision* of these support mechanisms by employers and governments. The *provision* and *utilization* of social support from personal networks (e.g., family members and co-workers) were seldom addressed.

Among studies that explored the *intervention* dimension, half used a vignette experimental design to examine jobseekers', employees', or managers' reactions to the provision of organizational (e.g., family-friendly policies) or societal (e.g., public opinion support) support mechanisms in hypothetical scenarios (e.g., den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2008; Firfiray and Mayo, 2017; van Steenbergen *et al.*, 2008). Four

theoretical papers (e.g., Poelmans *et al.*, 2008), three field experiments (e.g., Moen *et al.*, 2016), and three case studies (e.g., Gentilesco-Giue and Petrescu, 2008) conceptualized the implementation of support initiatives in organizational settings. Only one study examined the impact of family-friendly policies enforced by the Spanish government over the economic cycle through a natural experiment (de la Rica & Gorjon, 2016). This stream of studies underlines the importance of sustaining investments, long-term follow-ups, and timely adjustments in implementing work–life balance support initiatives to ensure their effectiveness and avoid backfires.

A few experimental studies considered the *timing* dimension by tracking how national or organizational support interventions take effect over time (e.g., de la Rica and Gorjon, 2016; Moen *et al.*, 2016). Considerable longitudinal qualitative and quantitative research investigated support mechanisms from other individuals (e.g., Kim and Hollensbe, 2018), organizations (e.g., Cheng *et al.*, 2014), and governments (e.g., Bünning and Pollmann-Schult, 2016) over a period of time (from several days to multiple years). The long-term evaluation of organizational and societal support mechanisms is important because it may take five or more years for employers to enjoy returns (e.g., cost reduction in wage and lower turnover) on their provision of family-friendly benefits (Baughman et al., 2003). The daily diary or experience sampling method that collects longitudinal data at one or multiple time points per day over several weeks (e.g., Pluut *et al.*, 2018) recently gained popularity. It helps capture the subtle, ongoing changes in the impact of family/workplace social support on individuals' work–life experiences within a short timeframe (Shockley & Allen, 2013). Limited but important qualitative work addressed the variation in the utilization and the effect of support mechanisms across individuals' life/career stages (e.g., Loretto and Vickerstaff, 2015), between different generations (e.g., Brandth, 2017), or over a period of history (e.g., Thörnqvist, 2006), highlighting that individuals' work–life experiences are constantly shaped by time-varying contexts.

Functional dimensions. *Functional* dimensions were explored primarily in qualitative studies, partially because qualitative work often reflects more nuanced subjective evaluation on support mechanisms. The majority of extant research focused on employees' *perceived availability* of organizational initiatives and family/workplace social support. The *expectation* dimension was addressed

predominantly by perceived organizational support (Gurbuz et al., 2013) and organizational cultures such as family-supportive culture (Bayazit & Bayazit, 2019) and ideal worker image (Mescher et al., 2010), occasionally by national/societal norms such as work centrality (den Dulk et al., 2013) and familism (Riva, 2016), and very rarely by family norms around domestic labor division (Krys et al., 2018). An underexamined but critical indicator of the *expectation* dimension was the perceived shared responsibility between individuals and surrounding social systems (e.g., families, organizations, and the state) for achieving work–life balance, which likely influenced decisions of governments' and organizations' provision and employees' utilization of support mechanisms (Peper et al., 2009; Remery et al., 2003). This indicator also remains central to our proposition that we need to examine and provide work–life balance support in a systematic, multilevel framework (see Figure 3.1) as suggested by the *socio-ecological systems theory* (Pocock et al., 2012).

The *perceived usefulness* dimension was primarily operationalized as employees' perceived benefits before or after using organizational support initiatives (e.g., Vyas *et al.*, 2017) *and* occasionally, as managers' or employers' perceived returns on support provision (e.g., McCarthy *et al.*, 2010; Morris *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, the *perceived consequence* dimension was largely examined as employees' perceived career consequences (e.g., lower chance of promotion) after using organizational support mechanisms (e.g., Cannizzo *et al.*, 2019) *and* occasionally, as managers' or employers' perceived negative outcomes (e.g., Been *et al.*, 2016). Some theoretical papers offered a comprehensive overview of the *perceived usefulness* and *perceived consequence* dimensions in relation to employee use of organizational support (e.g., Bardoel and de Cieri, 2008; Beauregard, 2011; Perrigino *et al.*, 2018).

The *perceived necessity* dimension was examined mainly in terms of employees' perceived demand for or jobseekers' anticipation of organizational support initiatives (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2004; Mansour & Tremblay, 2018) and less often childcare services and public policies (Winston et al., 2019). Some scholars also conceptualized the importance of employers' provision of work–life benefits in response to societal changes in legislation, business environments, labor markets, and employees' personal demands (e.g., Abbott and de Cieri, 2008; Bretherton, 2008; Kossek, 2006; Roberts *et al.*, 2004). Only Oliver (2012) underlined

mobile researchers' demands for European-level legislation against the international context of flexible employment across borders.

Interplay between dimensions. Some quantitative research explored the interplay between different dimensions of work–life balance support. One research stream focused on the impact of employers' and governments' *provision* and *intervention* as well as individuals' *perceived necessity*, *perceived availability*, *expectation*, *perceived usefulness*, and *perceived consequence*, respectively, on individuals' *utilization* of support mechanisms (e.g., Asiedu-Appiah and Zoogah, 2019; Dikkers *et al.*, 2007). Another research stream concentrated on the impact of employers' and employees' *perceived necessity*, *expectation*, *perceived usefulness*, *perceived consequence*, respectively, on employers' *provision* of support mechanisms (e.g., Adame-Sánchez *et al.*, 2018; Remery *et al.*, 2003). Some research touched upon how employers' and governments' *provision* and individuals' *perceived availability* and *utilization* of support mechanisms, respectively, framed the *expectation* (e.g., organizational cultures) around support mechanisms (e.g., Butts *et al.*, 2013; Parker and Allen, 2001). Only a handful of quantitative studies compared the differential impacts of the *provision, perceived availability*, *utilization*, and *perceived usefulness* of support mechanisms on individuals' work and lives (e.g., Jones *et al.*, 2008; Rajan-Rankin and Tomlinson, 2013).

Two key findings emerged. First, there is a provision–utilization gap whereby organizational or governmental provision of support mechanisms does not necessarily lead to individuals' effective utilization (Rajan-Rankin & Tomlinson, 2013). Second, individuals' perceived availability and perceived usefulness may be more important than their actual utilization of support mechanisms for generating positive work and life outcomes (Jones *et al.*, 2008; Muse *et al.*, 2008).

Furthermore, some qualitative studies (e.g., Daverth *et al.*, 2016; McKee *et al.*, 2000), literature reviews (e.g., Dengate, 2016; Thörnqvist, 2006), and theoretical papers (e.g., Martin, 2017; Poelmans and Beham, 2008) theorized the multidimensional interplay in a more nuanced and comprehensive way, formulating a series of *unidirectional* and *bidirectional* relationships between multiple *structural* and *functional* dimensions of work–life balance support mechanisms. Based on their findings and our objective of providing new insights into the interactions between

individuals' subjective perception and the physical reality of their environment, we conceptualize the interplay between multiple dimensions of work–life balance support mechanisms via three iterative processes—*decision-making*, *realization*, and *subjective feedback* (see Figure 3.4).

Extant research has identified three major processes. *Decision-making* denotes the process of employers'/managers' or policymakers' policy design, planning, and provision based on their subjective interpretation of the environment (Abbott & de Cieri, 2008; Adame-Sánchez et al., 2018); while for employees, it is the process by which they judge whether to use specific support mechanisms (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002). *Realizatio*n refers to the process whereby plans of support mechanisms are translated into the reality (Nord *et al.*, 2002; Poelmans *et al.*, 2008). *Subjective feedback* depicts the process of how the provision or utilization of support mechanisms reshapes people's subjective perception (McCarthy et al., 2010; Ryan & Kossek, 2008). We summarize the interplay between multiple dimensions and the connection between these three processes below.

First, there is a *unidirectional* causal chain of dimensions, i.e., the *realization process*, flowing from organizations' or governments' *provision* and subsequent *intervention* of support mechanisms to employees' *perceived availability* and following *utilization* of support mechanisms (Poelmans *et al.*, 2008).

Second, some *bidirectional* relationships have been identified between elements of this causal chain (i.e., provision, intervention, perceived availability, and utilization) and multiple *functional* dimensions (i.e., expectation and perceived necessity/usefulness/consequence).

On the one hand, research has articulated the *decision-making process* of employers' or policymakers' *provision* as well as employees' *utilization* of support mechanisms based on their subjective perception (i.e., expectation and perceived necessity/usefulness/consequence) tied to the environmental reality (Been *et al.*, 2016; McCarthy *et al.*, 2010) prior to the *realization process*.

On the other hand, studies have conceptualized the *subjective feedback process* through which employers' and governments' *provision* and *intervention*, as well as individuals' *perceived availability* and *utilization* of support mechanisms, transform people's subjective perception (i.e., expectation and perceived necessity/usefulness/

consequence) of work–life balance support (Brumley, 2014; Ryan & Kossek, 2008; Thörnqvist, 2006) after the *realization process*.

Third, *subjective feedback* reshapes people's subjective perception (i.e., expectation and perceived necessity/usefulness/consequence) of work–life balance support and social environment and can further improve employers'/managers' and governments' *decision-making* and subsequent *realization* of support mechanisms (Bardoel and de Cieri, 2008; Nord *et al.*, 2002; Ryan and Kossek, 2008; Thörnqvist, 2006). Hence, the sequential processes of *decision-making*, *realization*, and *subjective feedback* form an iterative spiral with the *timing* dimension embodied across all these iterative processes.

In summary, we use *structural* dimensions versus *functional* dimensions to conceptualize the objective reality versus subjective interpretation of work–life balance support. Building on extant literature, we theorize the multidimensional interplay of work–life balance support in terms of three iterative major processes, i.e., decision-making, realization, and subjective feedback (see Figure 3.4), providing a comprehensive framework for evaluating the effectiveness of the design, implementation, and appraisal of support mechanisms.

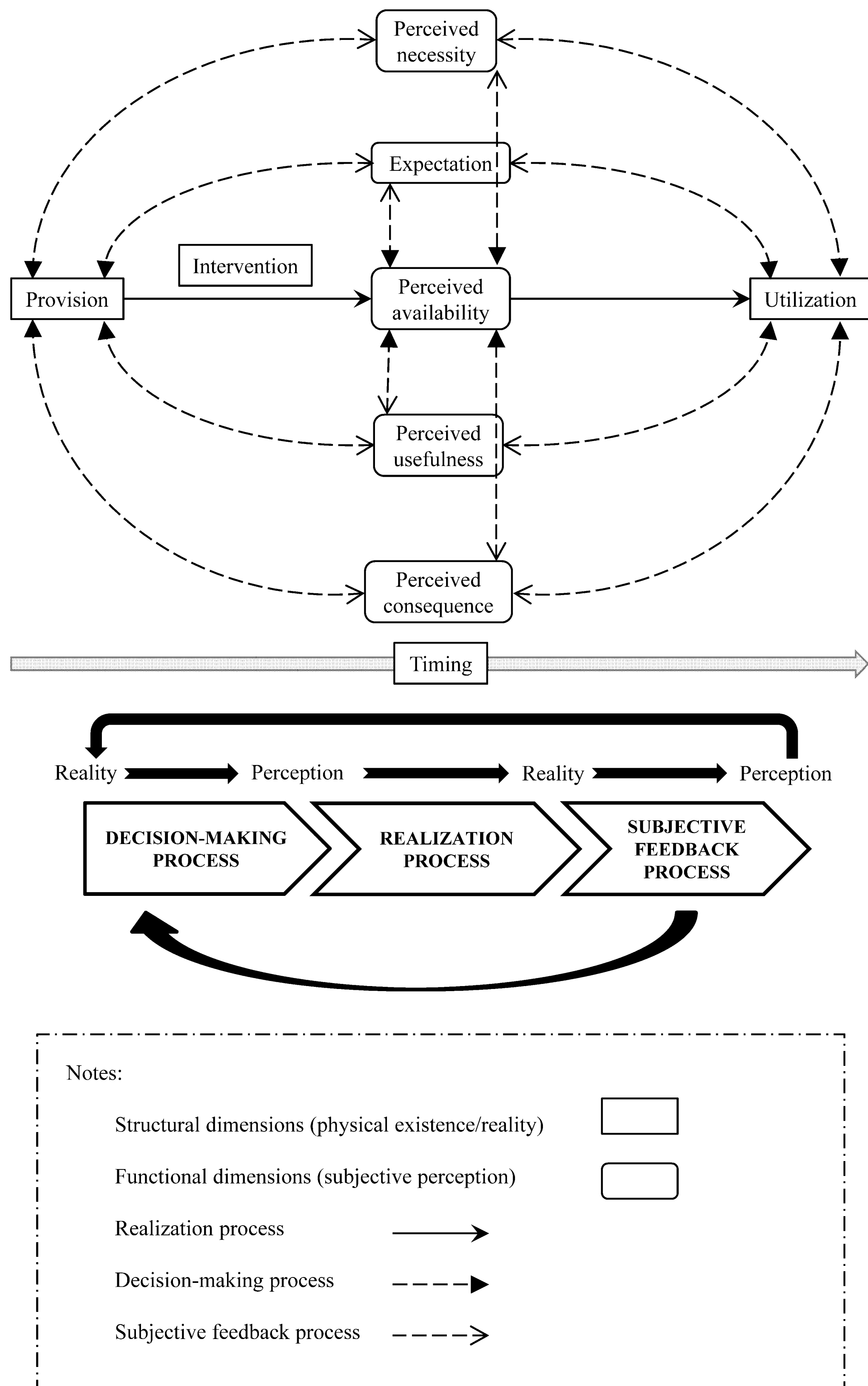


Figure 3.4: A process-oriented overview of the interplay between multiple dimensions of work–life balance support

3.4.3 Antecedents, outcomes, and contexts of work–life balance support: A process-oriented and multi-stakeholder perspective

In line with our conceptual framework (see Figure 3.1), we synthesized the antecedents, outcomes, and contexts in consideration of (1) the process of resource changes, (2) multilevel environment, (3) multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary perspectives, and (4) multiple dimensions of work–life balance support.

Antecedents. Limited research examined the antecedents of work–life balance support, resulting in limited knowledge about important societal, organizational, and personal factors that shape decisions of employees' utilization and governments'/ employers' provision of specific support mechanisms, which are also important for effective policy design and implementation. Scholars mainly studied the *antecedents* of employees' *perceived availability* and *utilization* of support mechanisms in terms of governments'/employers' provision of support mechanisms and *individual* and *family* characteristics, such as genders, occupations, income levels, and family structures (e.g., single/couple, one-/two-parent, and with/without children) (e.g., Ollier-Malaterre and Andrade, 2016; Wharton *et al.*, 2008).

Extant research on the *antecedents* of employers'/managers' *provision* of support mechanisms focused primarily on *organizational* attributes (e.g., size, industry, location, culture, board representation, and workforce composition) (e.g., Jenkins *et al.*, 2016; Mullins and Holmes, 2018) and occasionally on *societal* factors (e.g., societal norms, national legislation, works councils, trade unions, and labor market tightness) (Heywood & Jirjahn, 2009; Remery et al., 2003).

The *antecedents* of the state's *provision* were investigated or conceptualized in terms of *national* characteristics such as a country's culture (e.g., gender egalitarianism, paternalism, and individualism/collectivism), level of industrialization and urbanization, ideology (e.g., neoliberalism, capitalism, and socialism), and governmental/party affiliation, and *international* factors such as globalization and European Union legislation (e.g., Barsoum, 2019; Craig *et al.*, 2010; Dona, 2012; Rajan-Rankin and Tomlinson, 2013).

Outcomes. Different research disciplines emphasized different *outcomes* of work–life balance *support mechanisms*. *Management* literature primarily focused on the impact of organizational policies on employees' work-related outcomes and

sometimes on organizational outcomes. *Applied psychology* literature mainly addressed the impact of workplace and family social support on employees' wellbeing. *Industrial relations* literature stressed the societal outcomes of national policies and unions as well as the impact of organizational policies on organizations and employees. *Family studies* literature showed a broader interest in the impact of national and organizational policies and workplace/family social support on societal outcomes and working parents' wellbeing and parenting outcomes. These themes were also evident in *sociology* literature, albeit involving broader social contexts such as the cross-national comparison or historical development.

Most research across these disciplines examined *micro*-level outcomes. Support mechanisms generally generated positive micro-level outcomes, with very few studies highlighting the mixed impact of organizational family-friendly policies on individuals' *personal resources* for achieving work–life balance, such as the length and sovereignty of working time (e.g., Hildebrandt, 2006; Hill *et al.*, 2010), parenting time (e.g., Reimer, 2015), and wages (e.g., Fang *et al.*, 2019). Scholars focused primarily on *cross-domain outcomes* associated with individuals' wellbeing (e.g., work–family conflict/enrichment, depression, and cardiovascular health) (e.g., Berkman *et al.*, 2010) and *work-related outcomes* conducive to achieving organizational profitability, such as work performance, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions (e.g., Cook, 2009; Moon and Roh, 2010). Less attention was paid to *life-related outcomes* for individuals (e.g., family performance and parenting activities) (Estes, 2005; Las Heras et al., 2017) and their significant others (e.g., children's wellbeing and partner's parental satisfaction) (Matias et al., 2017; Millar et al., 2012). *Life-related outcomes* beyond family lives, such as leisure (Lin *et al.*, 2013) and friendship (Pedersen & Lewis, 2012), were also ignored.

Workplace-level outcomes were examined less frequently and findings were mixed. Scholars paid more attention to *profitability-oriented* outcomes, principally: (1) *economic returns* such as organizational/team performance/profitability/ efficiency/productivity, share price, and wage reduction (Arthur, 2003; Baughman et al., 2003; Morris et al., 2011); and (2) *human capital* such as customer satisfaction, service quality, and employee retention/turnover/motivation/morale/absenteeism/ commitment (Cogin et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2011; Okechukwu et al., 2016).

However, *social responsibility-oriented outcomes*, such as gender/motherhood pay gap (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019), perceived fairness/backlash of family-friendly benefits (Beauregard, 2011; K. Wilkinson et al., 2018), and public image (Morris et al., 2011) remained under-explored. Furthermore, limited research assessed the actual/ estimated costs of employer-sponsored support, such as healthcare costs (Morris et al., 2011). No cost–benefit or cost-effectiveness analysis was conducted on organizational support initiatives with the exception of Baughman *et al.*'s (2003) and Drago *et al.*'s (2001) implication that employers could potentially offset partial costs of family-friendly benefits through wage reduction.

Very few studies examined *societal*-level outcomes and revealed intricate results. Emphasis was placed on *fairness-based outcomes*. The state and workplace support promoted the awareness of gender equality but controversially reinforced gendered division of domestic labor and occupational segregation (Gronlund & Magnusson, 2016; Singley & Hynes, 2005). National family policies bridged the happiness gap between parents and non-parents (Glass *et al.*, 2016) but might be ineffective to alleviate child poverty (van Mechelen & Bradshaw, 2013), gender/motherhood-related pay gap (Budig et al., 2016), and the gender, educational, and urban–rural inequalities in policy use and work–life experiences (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Glauber & Young, 2015) due to problematic policy design. Scholars also revealed generally positive *efficiency-based outcomes* associated with the national economic competitiveness (Earle et al., 2011) and the maximization of current or future labor supply (Brough et al., 2008), such as maternal employment rates (Turki, 2017), mothers' labor force persistence (Baird & Burge, 2018), unemployment rates (Earle et al., 2011), fertility rates, and childbearing intentions (Fahlen, 2013). However, the costs of the state support such as public spending on family benefits (Turki, 2017) were rarely documented, rendering a cost-effectiveness evaluation impossible.

Extant research underplayed *mutual* and/or *competing* interests between multiple stakeholders and failed to align its stance (i.e., employer/employee/ policymaker perspective) with key stakeholders' actual interests or demands, distancing research from the practice. Such research–practice gap may result in inefficient national and organizational investments in work–life balance support, rendering a lose–lose situation for employees, families, employers, governments, and

other stakeholders. Very few researchers explicitly highlighted that employee-led organizational support mechanisms are more effective than employer-driven ones (e.g., Ollier-Malaterre and Andrade, 2016). Most work is underpinned by the tacit assumption that organizational provision of support mechanisms is for the benefit of employees; but in fact, employers usually prioritize their business goals, labor market pressures, and legal forces over employees' actual demands and preferences for support mechanisms (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011; den Dulk, 2005; McDonald et al., 2013). Similarly, public policies such as maternity protection and child benefits are designed to facilitate individuals' work–life balance and thereby promote gender equality, increase labor supply, and sustain long-term economic prosperity (Brough et al., 2008; Bünning & Pollmann-Schult, 2016) but problematic policy design and implementation may backfire.

Generally, *outcomes* were frequently measured as self-reported subjective perceptions (e.g., work–family conflict and job satisfaction) rather than objective or multisource assessments (e.g., share price and supervisor-rated performance). Scholars also focused more on *individual* experiences rather than *organizational* and *societal* outcomes. Specifically, researchers considered more: (1) *work-related* than *life-related* outcomes at the *micro* level; (2) *profitability-oriented* than *social responsibility-oriented* at the *workplace* level; and (3) *fairness-based* than *efficiency-based* outcomes at the *societal* level. Due to a lack of workplace- and societal-level examination and objective and multisource assessments, the extant research evidence on the effectiveness of work–life balance support mechanism may be inaccurate, biased, and incomprehensive to provide useful and feasible guidance for practice, particularly at the workplace and societal levels.

Contexts. Extant research was largely conducted in industrialized or post-industrialized, economically developed, capitalist countries in Europe and North America. Therefore, populations subsisting in diverse cultural, economic, and political contexts in Global South were largely under-represented. This narrow focus of extant work on research contexts limited its theoretical implications and practical impacts for broad and diverse populations.

Social and historical contexts were under-explored and the international level was considered mainly with respect to globalization, economic recessions, and

international migration (e.g., Been *et al.*, 2016; Krys *et al.*, 2018). Political stability was the default *societal* setting in the existing work. However, large swathes of the global population do not live in affluent and peaceful societies. Hence, more research is needed to understand how to better support people's work and lives, particularly their recovery from turbulent and complicated *societal contexts*, such as wars, political and social unrest, economic uncertainty, disease outbreaks, and natural disasters.

Extant literature on *organizational, family, and personal contexts* primarily studied the impact of national and organizational support for juggling working and parenting on middle-class, heterosexual, dual-earner parents in managerial or professional jobs. Limited research attention was paid to low-income workers (Kossek and Lautsch, 2018), elderly employees (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2015), immigrants (Rudolph et al., 2014), single parents (Konrad & Yang, 2012), single and/or childless people (Skinner & Pocock, 2011), disabled people, LGBTQ+ groups, and religious groups. Also, research primarily focused on childcare support but downplayed support for other important components of *life*, such as dependent care for the elderly/disabled/sick, housework, healthcare, education, recreation, networking, and philanthropy.

3.5 A Research Agenda for Work–Life Balance Support

Based on extant literature, our conceptual framework highlights two major research avenues in work–life balance support:

First, a **multilevel and process-oriented investigation** of the spiral *process* of interactions between individuals and their environment through resource changes, specifically highlighting the: (1) influence of *stressors* and *work–life balance support* from multilevel social environment on individuals' *personal resources*; (2) impact of individuals' investment of *personal resources* and employers' and governments' investment in *work–life balance support* on multilevel environments, i.e., *personal, family, organizational, and societal outcomes*; and (3) effect of these *personal, family, organizational, and societal outcomes* on *resource* expansion, accumulation, or replenishment. For example, following Bronfenbrenner's (1986) socio-ecological systems framework, scholars can explore how the level of industrialization (societal

contexts) shapes work and family demands and public/private childcare/eldercare services (support mechanisms), which in turn influence individuals' time allocation for work, family, and leisure (personal resources) and subsequent personal, family, organizational, and societal outcomes longitudinally in one country or horizontally across multiple countries.

Second, a **multidimensional and process-oriented investigation** of three iterative *processes* of interactions between individuals' subjective perception (i.e., *functional* dimensions) and physical environment (i.e., *structural* dimensions) of work–life balance support, as follows: (1) the *decision-making process* of evaluating the environment (e.g., analyzing environmental *stressors* and individuals' corresponding *personal demands*) and planning subsequent utilization or provision of *work–life balance support* mechanisms; (2) the *realization process* of translating plans of support mechanisms into the environmental reality (i.e., provision → intervention → perceived availability → utilization); and (3) the *subjective feedback process* of reshaping individuals' subjective perception of the environment and providing new information for the next iteration of *decision-making* process. For instance, researchers can compare the similarities and differences in the decision-making, implementation, and effectiveness evaluation processes of national and organizational work–life balance support provision in liberal (e.g., the US) versus socialist (e.g., China) economies.

Our review identifies some major gaps in the extant work–life balance support literature. From a *multilevel* perspective as recommended by Bronfenbrenner's (1986) socio-ecological systems theory, there is limited examination on higher-level factors, such as societal- and workplace-level support mechanisms and their family, organizational, and societal antecedents and outcomes. Also, little attention has been paid to broader societal and historical contexts. From a *multi-stakeholder* perspective, there is a lack of systematic consideration of different stakeholders' (i.e., individuals, employers, and the state) shared and competing interests. The narrow focus of the extant research on micro-/individual-level analysis limits its scope and capacity for guiding societal and organizational practice concerning broad, diverse populations holding vastly different interests.

From a *process-oriented* perspective, there is insufficient understanding of the

long-term impact and sustainability of work–life balance support mechanisms. From a *multidimensional* perspective, limited research has addressed the iterative, bidirectional interactions between individuals' objective and subjective work–life experiences and their social environment. The predominance of static, one-off analysis using cross-sectional designs fails to capture how the iterative interactions between the reality and the perception shape the effectiveness of work–life balance support mechanisms from perspectives of different stakeholders in a long term, which holds critical implications for governments' and organizations' effective design, implementation, and improvement of their support mechanisms.

We propose three major research directions in terms of (1) cost-effectiveness analysis, (2) pluralist thinking, and (3) context specification to address these gaps.

Cost-effectiveness analysis. Extant literature rarely compared the *costs* and *returns* of work–life balance support mechanisms and hence, we have limited insight on their cost-effectiveness. Therefore, we recommend a cost-effectiveness, or equivalent, assessment of key stakeholder interests in future research.

Scholars should consider individuals' *costs* in terms of their investment of *personal resources* (e.g., time and money) and *returns* in terms of the degree of fulfilment of work/life demands and other work-/life-related and cross-domain *personal outcomes*. Additionally, employers' and policymakers' interests should capture their *costs* (i.e., investments) of providing and implementing work–life balance support mechanisms (e.g., expenditures and human resources) and *returns* encompassing profitability- and social responsibility-oriented *organizational outcomes* and efficiency- and fairness-based *societal outcomes*. However, it should be noted that not all *costs* and *returns* can be quantified or monetized on a comparable scale and hence, some functional dimensions of work–life balance support mechanisms (i.e., perceived usefulness/consequence) can be used as proxy measures to estimate their cost-effectiveness.

Moreover, cost-effectiveness concerns remain central to the interactions between individuals' objective and subjective work–life experiences characterized by three iterative processes—decision-making, realization, and subjective feedback. By incorporating sensemaking, decision-making, and stress and coping literature into work–life balance support research (e.g., Golden, 2009; Powell and Greenhaus,

2006; Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2012), scholars can investigate whether employers' and policymakers' needs assessment, policy design, implementation, and subsequent outcomes are aligned with their business and societal goals, and whether individuals' needs assessment, utilization, and associated personal outcomes of work–life balance support mechanisms successfully meet their work–life demands. More investigation on the iterative processes is needed, particularly on how employers/policymakers adjust and refine their decisions and subsequent implementation of support mechanisms when their intervention is not aligned with their goals and/or employees'/citizens' needs.

Pluralist thinking. We recommend a pluralist approach to work–life balance support that not only acknowledges the diversity of goals and interests across different stakeholders but also emphasizes the synergy of shared goals and reconciliation of competing interests in order to maximize the overall benefits for all stakeholders involved (Gomez et al., 2004).

As previously mentioned, each stakeholder seeks long-term sustainability by balancing competing goals (e.g., individuals' balancing *work* versus *life* demands). Therefore, we suggest that scholars bridge the research–practice gap by aligning their investigation of the impact and effectiveness of work–life balance support with stakeholders' actual demands, interests, and/or goals. Following our recommended *pluralist* approach, scholars should also recognize that shared and competing interests *within* and *between* stakeholders across different levels of social environment systematically influence the effectiveness of work–life balance support mechanisms. Two typical scenarios and relevant examples are given below.

Some support mechanisms may enable a win-win situation by achieving the *mutual interests* of multiple stakeholders. For instance, family-friendly practices may allow employers to strengthen employer branding, improve productivity, and reduce costs (e.g., lower entry-level wages and fewer labor conflicts), and facilitate individuals' work–life reconciliation (Baughman et al., 2003; Faria & Machado, 2018).

However, other support mechanisms may fail to reconcile the *conflicting interests* of multiple stakeholders by achieving partial goals or one-sided interests. For example, the government legislates delayed retirement to increase current labor

supply and reduce social welfare expenditures (e.g., pensions) which can decrease grandparental childcare and maternal labor force participation (Belan et al., 2010; Du et al., 2019).

Context specification. Consistent with previous literature reviews (Gatrell et al., 2013; Ozbilgin et al., 2011), we found that current work largely focused on working parents through a Western lens, especially professional mothers situated in economically developed and industrialized countries. However, a majority of the global population works and lives in vastly different contexts. Scholars need to carefully consider the extent to which work–life balance support themes studied in Western countries can be applied in other countries and contexts. European countries enforce generous family benefits and delayed retirement to increase female and elderly people's workforce participation and secure future labor supply given the aging crisis. However, these public policies are not applicable in many Global South countries with large, predominantly young, unemployed, and under-educated populations. The policy priorities of these countries may be improving the quality rather than the quantity of labor supply by offering better educational and job opportunities.

Work–life balance support scholars need to explicitly consider the different priorities and objectives of stakeholders in specific contexts (accounting for variations in populations and associated family, organizational, and societal/national dynamics), with cautious generalization across contexts. Below we give specific recommendations to achieve context specificity with respect to individuals, organizations, and countries.

First, *individuals* have different work and/or life priorities and demands at different stages of life/career and in different family and community contexts. More research is needed on support mechanisms aimed at helping individuals from non-traditional families (e.g., singles, homosexual couples, and dual-earners without children), at the early/middle/late stage of their life/career, and situated in social/religious/ethnical communities with unique cultural norms, traditions, and rituals.

Second, employers' provision and employees' utilization of support mechanisms vary substantially across different *organizational* contexts. These differentials in organizational contexts need to be unpacked in terms of the size, workforce

composition (e.g., gender and age), industry (e.g., manufacturing and technology), sector (i.e., public/private), degree of unionization, and business/industry life cycle.

Finally, the provision and utilization of work–life balance support mechanisms are also influenced by a *country*'s social, economic, political, cultural, and historical contexts. Some important contextual factors are the level of industrialization and urbanization, the level of economic development, political ideologies and regimes, cultures, infrastructures, and public security. National contexts are also shaped by a country's role in the global economy, relative national power and geopolitical influence, and the idiosyncrasies of international environment (e.g., economic recessions and wars). More importantly, a country's national context needs to be considered longitudinally along its own historical development and horizontally in comparison to other countries. Future research can utilize a series of recommended national-level structural, economic, social, and cultural measures (e.g., den Dulk *et al.*, 2013; Kossek, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre *et al.*, 2013; Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault, 2017; Trefalt *et al.*, 2013).

The *temporal* context (i.e., *timing* dimension) is also critical for the effectiveness of work–life balance support mechanisms because key stakeholders prioritize different interests and goals over time. We have a series of recommendations for addressing temporal contexts.

First, we recommend a short-term longitudinal design (i.e., daily diary method) to examine the impact of social support from professional and personal networks on individuals' fluctuant personal resources (e.g., energy) and personal outcomes (e.g., health).

Second, a long-term longitudinal design (e.g., natural/field experiments lasting several months/years) is recommended to track the impact of organizational and national support mechanisms that may take longer to generate a return.

Third, the psychological life-span theory and the sociological life-course theory (Shanahan & Porfelli, 2002) as well as life history interviews (Jessee, 2019) can be applied to capture changes in individuals' work–life experiences across different life stages and across generations.

Fourth, life history interviews and ethnographic approaches (Singh & Dickson, 2002) can help track systematic changes of work–life balance support (e.g., both

institutional and cultural changes) in organizational settings over business life cycle or in national/societal settings across different periods of history.

3.6 Conclusion

We synthesized the extant findings in line with our proposed conceptual framework that unpacks the critical role of work–life balance support in iterative interactions between individuals' objective and subjective work–life experiences and their multilevel social environment through resource changes and reality–perception transformation drawing on multidisciplinary literature from management, industrial relations, applied psychology, family studies, and sociology.

Our review contributes to work–life balance research by providing a multilevel, multidimensional, and process-oriented framework for systematically analyzing how (1) the interplay between individuals and multilevel social environment, (2) the interactions between individuals' objective and subjective work–life experiences, and (3) multiple stakeholders' shared and competing interests shape the effectiveness of work–life balance support mechanisms. As such, we challenge and expand the traditional understanding of work–life balance as an individual-level phenomenon into a societal concern that necessitates systematic support from a wider range of stakeholders, such as families, organizations, trade unions, governments, communities, and public and private services. To conclude, our conceptual framework and research agenda pave the way for multilevel, multidimensional, and process-oriented investigation of work–life balance support in the future.

Finally, we would like to note that we only included rigorous academic publications in this review. Consequently, our review may omit practice-based evidence on the effectiveness of state and organizational support mechanisms for work–life balance due to the exclusion of other sources of relevant knowledge, such as government reports and company documents. Another limitation is that we have restricted the scope of our literature search within five most salient research disciplines that could best capture key stakeholders' (i.e., employees, employers, and governments) diverse goals and interests of using or providing work–life balance support mechanisms. However, we might have neglected diversified evidence,

scattered over a wide range of research disciplines that entail investigation on occupation-, industry-, or sector-based experiences and practices, such as nursing, hospitality, tourism, and higher education research. We have also overlooked some multidisciplinary studies that highlight promising but under-explored research directions and illuminate obscure connections between the work–life balance support literature and other relevant disciplines, such as demography, urban planning, and communication studies. For future research, we recommend scholars to absorb highly dispersed evidence from a broader range of disciplines to develop an even more comprehensive and insightful understanding of work–life balance support.

CHAPTER 4[b]

The Impact of the Depletion, Accumulation, and Investment of Personal Resources on Work–Life Balance Satisfaction and Job Retention: A Longitudinal Study on Working Mothers

Abstract

Drawing on the *conservation of resources* (COR) *theory* and the *personal resource allocation* (PRA) *framework*, we examined the resource depletion, accumulation, and investment mechanisms through which multiple work and non-work contextual demands and resources impact working mothers' work–life balance (WLB) satisfaction and long-term job retention via changes in personal resources of time spent with children and family financial management capacity. We tested our hypotheses on a nationally representative British sample of 10,983 working mothers who participated in a longitudinal study. Our results showed that the perceptions of *both* adequate childcare time *and* good family financial management capacity enhanced working mothers' WLB satisfaction and positively predicted their long-term job retention over six years of their children's primary school education. We found that working mothers may trade their childcare time for better family finances when they undertake a managerial role. Thus, undertaking a managerial role serves as both a time-based demand and a financial-based resource for sustaining WLB, which points to the specific rather than generic nature of contextual demands and resources. We also found

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nuanced differences in terms of between- and within-individual effects of some contextual demands and resources. We discuss theoretical implications for the COR theory and the WLB literature more broadly as well as practical recommendations for employees, employers, and policymakers.

Keywords

Work–life balance, employee retention, conservation of resources theory, personal resource allocation framework, resource accumulation, resource depletion, resource investment

4.1 Introduction

Today, work–life balance (WLB) profoundly shapes women's employment and childrearing decisions, which in turn, influences a country's female workforce participation rates, fertility rates, and parenting quality (Brough et al., 2008; Gatrell et al., 2013). Hence, working mothers' WLB has critical implications for a country to increase and sustain its global competitiveness by guaranteeing both, quality and scale, of current and future labor supply (Ahmad, 2012). Higher female employment rate might not only boost national productivity and drive economic growth (Bustelo et al., 2019) but also enhance women's socio-economic status and promote gender equality (OECD, 2016). Moreover, employers could retain their female talents more effectively and save recruitment and training costs by offering necessary organizational WLB support initiatives (Brough et al., 2008; Shockley et al., 2017). Therefore, employers and policymakers should be concerned about improving women's employment and retention rates. This is particularly important given that women are more likely to leave full-time employment to care for their preschool and school-age children (Stone & Lovejoy, 2004).

The existing literature has not yet established robust causal links between working mothers' time and financial resources, WLB, and retention. In fact, most of the retention research has disproportionally focused on the fit between individual and

job/organizational characteristics (e.g., Donohue, 2006; March & Simon, 1958) but downplayed the role of non-work factors, such as childcare demands (Holtom et al., 2008). In our study, we argue that exploring such non-work factors alongside the work ones might deepen our understanding of the retention of female employees as predominant caregivers. Although Shockley et al. (2017) identified studies that explored job retention through the WLB lens, this literature suffers from a number of limitations, such as focusing largely on the perceived availability rather than the actual utilization of support mechanisms and mainly studying turnover intentions rather than the actual job retention. This research has either adopted cross-sectional or short-term longitudinal designs based on relatively small samples (e.g., Nohe & Sonntag, 2014; Watanabe & Falci, 2016), which prevents us from drawing robust causal inferences about the role of demands and resources in WLB and retention.

Therefore, a study of WLB and actual job retention of women with childcare responsibilities is both, theoretically and practically relevant in order to enhance our understating of the underlying processes of how working mothers juggle their multiple work and non-work demands to stay in the workforce. Utilizing a nationally representative British sample of working mothers of primary school-age children, we aim to explore how multiple work and non-work demands and resources simultaneously influence working mothers' personal resources of time and finances and how changes in these personal resources shape their WLB satisfaction and subsequent job retention.

The WLB literature has conventionally categorized a contextual factor as either a contextual demand or resource without explicit explanations. A closer inspection of the literature reveals that scholars have predominantly explored the work–life outcomes of the (1) time-based *contextual demands* which are the environmental factors that deplete people's time, such as long working hours; and the (2) time-based *contextual resources* which are the environmental factors that help people allocate their time more efficiently and/or in line with their preferences, such as flexible working arrangements (Grawitch et al., 2010). However, limited attention has been paid to the critical role of finances in fulfilling WLB (Warren, 2015) although finances serve *both* as a strong incentive that motivates people to work for, stay with, or leave an employer (Rubenstein et al., 2018) *and* as a fundamental personal resource to

sustain their family and personal lives (Barber, 2008). Hence, we chose to examine the impact of a number of frequently examined contextual demands and resources on both, working mothers' time and financial resources, both of which are in turn expected to impact WLB and job retention.

As typical liberal regimes, the UK and the US governments offer limited state benefits and affordable public services for combining employment and childcare, making working parents struggle with their time constraints and soaring childcare expenditures while relying heavily on the workplace and family support (Hirsch, 2019; Steinour, 2019). Hence, in this study we are especially interested in exploring the supportive role of employers, home-based childcare, and personal support networks in facilitating working mothers' WLB and subsequent retention in the face of intense work and childcare demands.

Our research makes several contributions. First, drawing on the *conservation of resources (COR) theory* (Hobfoll, 1989), our research strengthens the causal link between WLB and job retention by explicating how multiple work and non-work contextual demands and resources shape British working mothers' WLB satisfaction and job retention via depleting, expanding, and trading their personal resources in terms of childcare time and family finances over six years of children's primary school education. Second, by highlighting the critical role of both time and finances in promoting working mothers' WLB satisfaction and job retention, our research contributes to the extant work–life balance literature that emphasizes time-based but neglects financial-based constraints and resources.

Third, building on the *personal resource allocation (PRA) framework* (Grawitch et al., 2010), we advance the conceptualization of contextual demands and resources. We propose that a contextual factor should be conceptualized as a specific demand or resource given its depletion or accumulation effect on a specific personal resource. This is because a contextual factor might simultaneously deplete one personal resource (e.g., serve as time-based demand), whilst expanding another personal resource (e.g., serve as financial-based resource). This finding echoes the resource investment mechanism of the COR theory and implies that working mothers might trade their time for financial incentives. Fourth, we highlight the differential impact of the between-individual and within-individual differences in contextual demands and resources on

WLB satisfaction and job retention, offering more nuanced implications for improving working mothers' WLB satisfaction and retention.

4.2 Theoretical Foundation and Hypotheses Development

In order to explore the mediating role of personal resources in bridging the contextual factors and individuals' WLB satisfaction, we purposefully adopted the definition of WLB from the PRA framework (Grawitch et al., 2010) as a positive appraisal of perceived adequacy and effective allocation of personal resources in line with personal preferences for fulfilling work and life demands. *Personal resources* are valuable personal attributes such as time and finances. *Contextual demands* refer to responsibilities that necessitate investment or depletion of personal resources. *Contextual resources* pertain to external resources that enlarge the quantity or quality or optimize the allocation of such personal resources.

Given the crucial impact of personal time allocation on WLB (Grawitch et al., 2010), our research focuses on a series of time-based contextual demands and resources that may impede or promote effective allocation of personal time. According to Warren (2015, 2017), both time and money are indispensable personal resources for maintaining a satisfactory WLB but the current literature predominantly adopts a middle-class view that emphasizes time-based work–family conflict but neglects the financial strain which is a more imperative concern for the working class. Hence, we chose to also explore the impact of these *time-based* contextual demands and resources on the indispensable but under-studied personal resource of *finances* for achieving satisfactory WLB.

Specifically, we operationalize the personal resource of time in terms of the *perceived adequacy of childcare time* because the perception of spending sufficient time with children is found to be a strong predictor for working parents' WLB satisfaction (Milkie et al., 2010). The personal resource of finances is assessed in terms of the *family financial management capacity* because financial strain is a major source of dissatisfaction with WLB (Wilkinson et al., 2017). We purposefully use subjective rather than objective indicators of personal resources because the appraisal of the sufficiency and effectiveness of personal resources, rather than the absolute value of

time and money, is often more critical to an individual's perceived WLB satisfaction (Grawitch et al., 2010).

The *COR theory* (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018) and the *PRA framework* (Grawitch et al., 2010) posit that rather than being static, WLB is achieved through spiral interactions between demands and resources from work and non-work environments and individuals' personal resources. The *resource investment* principal from the COR theory indicates that individuals have to constantly invest personal resources to meet their demands, acquire future resources, and/or achieve positive work and life outcomes for survival in an ongoing spiral process. The *COR theory* highlights the accumulation tendency of resources in terms of the *resource gain spiral*, whereby individuals with more personal resources tend to have larger investments and generate greater returns in terms of future resource gain and positive work–life outcomes. In contrast, in a *resource loss spiral*, the depletion of personal resources may provoke stressful reactions to potential/actual survival challenges and subsequent resource losses because people have fewer personal resources available to fulfil their work/life demands and invest for future gains. The *resource caravan passageways principle* further contends that supportive environments with abundant resources promote the resource accumulation whereas demanding, unsupportive environments accelerate the spiral process of resource depletion.

In line with the *COR theory* (Hobfoll et al., 2018) and the PRA framework (Grawitch et al., 2010), we examine three mechanisms that could potentially explain how changes in personal resources may influence working mothers' WLB satisfaction and job retention: resource investment, resource depletion, and resource accumulation hypotheses.

4.2.1 Resource investment hypothesis

The *COR theory* (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018) proposes the *resource investment* principal that individuals have to constantly invest personal resources to meet their demands, acquire future resources, and/or achieve positive work and life outcomes for survival in an ongoing spiral process. In other words, individuals may trade one personal resource (e.g., time) for another (e.g., money) to reconcile their work and non-work demands in order to maintain a satisfactory WLB (Grawitch et al.,

2010). Empirical evidence indicates that time and financial investments serve as substitutes in parenting so that working parents may face the work–life balance dilemma in terms of trading parental time for family income or vice versa (Agostinelli & Sorrent, 2021). Thus, we argue that:

Hypothesis A: Two personal resources—perceived adequacy of childcare time and family financial management capacity—may have a substitution effect on WLB satisfaction.

4.2.2 Resource accumulation hypothesis

In line with the *resource accumulation* mechanism, the *PRA framework* (Grawitch et al., 2010) suggests that individuals' positive appraisal of having sufficient personal resources for accommodating work and life demands is associated with higher satisfaction with WLB. Warren (2015, 2017) argue that both time and money are indispensable personal resources for maintaining a satisfactory WLB. Previous studies substantiated that having enough time to spend with children is a strong predictor of parents' WLB (Milkie et al., 2010), whilst financial strain is a major source of dissatisfaction with WLB (Wilkinson et al., 2017). Moreover, the *mood maintenance theory* suggests that people are more likely to sustain the status quo that enables their positive moods or satisfaction with the current state (Isen & Labroo, 2003; Isen & Patrick, 1983). In line with this theoretical argument, some empirical findings reveal that higher WLB and/or lower work–life conflict predict higher propensity of retention (Noor, 2011; Shockley et al., 2017). Based on the theoretical argument and empirical evidence, we expect that:

Hypothesis B1: The positive appraisal of personal resources (i.e., perceived adequacy of childcare time and family financial management capacity, respectively) has a positive indirect effect on working mothers' future job retention through enhancing their WLB satisfaction.

The *COR theory* (Hobfoll et al., 2018) and the *PRA framework* (Grawitch et al., 2010) also theorize that external sources of work and non-work support can facilitate individuals' WLB and generate positive work–life outcomes by enriching or promoting effective allocation of their personal resources for dealing with contextual demands. Empirical studies have highlighted multiple sources of work and non-work

support that may expand key personal resources. Flexible working arrangements (e.g., part-time working and home-based working) constitute supportive work resources that enable people, particularly women, to spend more time with their children and earn money simultaneously (Craig & Powell, 2012; Genadek & Hill, 2017; Poduval & Poduval, 2009), leading to reduced work–family conflict (Buehler & O'Brien, 2011; Dizaho et al., 2017). Similarly, parents have more time available for paid work to enhance their socio-economic status by outsourcing parental activities to paid (e.g., nanny) and unpaid (e.g., grandparents) home-based childcare support (Cox, 2011; Posadas & Vidal-Fernandez, 2013). Moreover, multiple caregivers (e.g., grandmother and nanny) in household can provide children with all-day quality care (C. Zhang et al., 2018), and thus parents may worry less about insufficient time to spend with children. Previous research also suggests that single mothers are more likely to have insufficient parental time and fall into poverty than their counterparts in dual-parent households (Bulanda, 2009; Stack & Meredith, 2018); therefore, a working partner may be an important source of family support. A local social support network may also promote individuals' perceived adequacy of time and money and facilitate their work–life balance because they can turn to their extended families and friends for help in emergency (Annink, 2017; Bojarczuk & Mühlau, 2018; Campbell & Pearlman, 2019; Gomes et al., 2019). Based on this evidence and in line with the *resource accumulation* hypothesis, we propose that:

> **Hypothesis B2:** Contextual resources may improve working mothers' WLB satisfaction by expanding or promoting effective allocation of personal resources in terms of childcare time and family finances, respectively.

4.2.3 Resource depletion hypothesis

According to the *COR theory* (Hobfoll et al., 2018) and the *PRA framework* (Grawitch et al., 2010), demands from work and/or non-work environments deplete individuals' personal resources and restrain their capability of managing subsequent demands and acquiring future resources, and hence provoke negative attitudinal and behavioral responses due to potential threats against resource gain and maintenance. Given that multiple work and non-work demands may simultaneously compete for finite personal resources, fulfilling one demand deprives individuals of personal

resources (e.g., time and energy) for handling other demands at the same time (Grawitch et al., 2010). According to the *PRA framework* (Grawitch et al., 2010), worries about insufficient personal resources for coping with work and non-work demands are likely to inflict greater work–life conflict and lower satisfaction with WLB. Both time-related pressures and financial strain are important sources of conflict and dissatisfaction with WLB (de Guzmán Padrón et al., 2020; McGinnity & Russell, 2015; Syrek et al., 2013).

Past research has found that heavy work demands, such as long working hours, managerial roles, and non-standard work schedules, squeeze out individuals' personal resources (e.g., time) for managing non-work demands (e.g., childcare) and likely result in a lack of personal resources and work–family conflict (e.g., Adkins & Premeaux, 2012; Ford & Collinson, 2011; Karhula et al., 2018; Roeters, van der Lippe, & Kluwer, 2010). Also, these heavy work demands not only reduce family time but also require alternative childcare arrangements outside school hours, such as after-school programs, which may pose greater financial challenges for caregivers (Avery et al., 2000; Carrillo et al., 2017; Connelly & Kimmel, 2007).

As the *COR theory* (Hobfoll et al., 2018) indicates, a demand of greater magnitude depletes more personal resources in a short period and makes individuals harder to fulfil subsequent demands in a long run because the depletion can be quicker than the replenishment or expansion of personal resources. For instance, having younger children, having children with longstanding illness, or having more dependent children in household may pose greater pressures on parents' sustained investments of personal resources (e.g., time, energy, and money) for childcare in a long term, negatively affecting their perception of having enough personal resources for childcare, resulting in poorer WLB (Brown et al., 2008; Craig & Bittman, 2008; Kornrich & Furstenberg, 2013). Based on the above theoretical arguments and empirical findings, we expect that:

> **Hypothesis C:** Contextual demands may worsen working mothers' WLB satisfaction by depleting or impairing effective allocation of personal resources in terms of childcare time and family finances, respectively.

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 Sample and procedure

We used secondary data from the *Millennium Cohort Study* (Centre for Longitudinal Studies, 2017), a British national longitudinal survey on families with a cohort of children born between 2000–2002. Data was collected when the children were 9 months, 3, 5, 7, 11, 14, and 17 years old. The total sample consists of 19,517 cohort children, including a handful of twins and triplets living in 19,244 families.

We constructed our research sample as follows. First, we excluded families with twins and triplets in the cohort to make the variables of childcare demands and resources more comparable across the sample. Second, male caregivers were excluded because we were particularly interested in exploring the effects of demands and resources on WLB and retention of women who accounted for 97% of primary caregivers (i.e., main respondents) in this dataset and faced the most intense daily competition between work and non-work demands. Also, there was a considerable amount of missing data on partners of primary caregivers (i.e., partner respondents) on our key research variables. Therefore, we excluded male caregivers and partner respondents and alternatively, included the availability of a (non-)working partner as a non-work source of contextual resource in our analyses. Third, unemployed female caregivers were omitted because they did not have the experience of juggling work and non-work roles, which was inherent to our research aims about WLB satisfaction and job retention. We include all female primary caregivers in paid employment and refer to them as "working mothers", regardless of their specific relationships to the cohort child (e.g., step or adoptive mother), because they all provided invaluable data on women's work–life experiences when undertaking significant childcare responsibilities.

Fourth, our key research variable of WLB satisfaction was measured only in Age 5, 7, and 11 Surveys (at time *t*), and therefore we used the data for all variables, expect for the job retention, from these three waves of data collection. The job retention measure was obtained from the Age 7, 11, and 14 Surveys (at time *t*+1), because we aimed to examine the lagged effects of our variables on job retention over time. We would like to note that, in the UK, the primary education is statutory for children aged

5–11 and comprising two key stages split by the age of 7 (UK Department for Education, 2014). Therefore, our data captures the key years in children's education when childcare responsibilities are particularly high. Following these steps, we achieved a nationally representative sample of 10,983 British working mothers covering 24,378 observations across the selected waves of data collection. Appendix A displays the sample characteristics in more detail.

Finally, we adjusted the research sample to the UK population by applying a *survey weight* variable accounting for both the sample design and the non-response from the dataset (Ketende & Jones, 2011). The missing data in job retention was managed by computing *attrition weight* that accounts for the attrition of the lagged dependent variable of *job retention* (at time t+1) using the inverse probability weighting (IPW) method (Weuve et al., 2012). We used IPW method because it enables less biased estimates dealing with missing values due to the attrition compared to complete case analysis (Moore et al., 2009). Although multiple imputation is more efficient in many cases, the IPW method is preferred over multiple imputation in the context of monotone missing or non-monotone ignorable missing data, namely when the missingness is mainly due to participant attrition (Seaman & White, 2013). This is the case in our research because job retention was a lagged dependent variable and its missingness was largely attributed to participant attrition. First, we fitted a two-level binary logistic model using all the research variables and *job retention* information at time t (1 = *missing*; 2 = *retention*; 3 = *turnover*) to predict the probability of *job retention* at time t+1 being observed/non-missing. The Hosmer–Lemeshow test indicated that the attrition model was properly specified ($\chi^2 = 4.83$, $p = .78$). Second, the *attrition weight* was calculated as the inverse of the predicted conditional probability of *job retention* at time t+1 being observed. Last, we applied the *overall weight*, which was the product of the *survey weight* and the *attrition weight*, to our models at the within-individual level. No systematic demographic differences were identified between participants who answered and those who did not answer the job retention question in the subsequent wave of data collection and hence, we could generalize our research findings to the UK population.

4.3.2 Measures

Table 4.1 shows the coding and wording of our measures. In Table 4.2, we can see that the ICC(1) values of our research variables were all above the threshold of .10, except for the cohort child's age. This indicates that group membership (i.e., individual-level characteristics) had a medium to large effect on these time-varying observations, which justified our decision to take a multilevel approach to data analysis (Lebreton & Senter, 2008). The extremely low ICC(1) value of the cohort child's age can be attributed to the cohort longitudinal design of the *Millennium Cohort Study*, whereby all the participants were interviewed when their children as cohort members were of a similar age (Joshi & Fitzsimons, 2016). We aggregated all the work/life demands and resources except for the cohort child's age at the individual/person level (i.e., Level 2) using grand-mean centering. All the time-varying work/life demands and resources were group-mean centered at the within-individual level (i.e., Level 1). Personal resources, WLB satisfaction, and job retention were measured at Level 1 and were not centered, because we were interested in how between- and within-individual differences of contextual demands and resources influenced these outcomes over time.

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Preliminary analyses and an overview of our analytical strategy

Table 4.2 shows the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations between the studied variables. We tested our hypotheses by means of multilevel logistic regression models using Stata. Specifically, we constructed two-level models whereby the observations (i.e., at the within-individual level/ Level 1) across three time points (Age 5, 7, and 11 Surveys) were nested within individuals (i.e., at the between-individual level/ Level 2). The multilevel modeling was also particularly appropriate in our case, because it can accommodate longitudinal data with unequally spaced time intervals by controlling for variables that specify each measurement time point (i.e., the cohort child's age) (Kwok et al., 2008).

Table 4.1: The coding and wording of research measures

Category	Variable	Coding	Survey wording and response options
Work demands	Weekly working hours	Continuous variable: Number of working hours per week in the main job (range from 1 to 168)	About how many hours a week do you usually work in your main job, excluding meal breaks but including any usual paid overtime? / How many hours a week do you usually work, including doing the books, VAT and so on?
	Managerial role	Dummy variable: 1 = *yes* (a manager, foreman, or supervisor) 0 = *no* (not a manager or supervisor)	Do you have any managerial duties or are you supervising any other employees? (1 = *manager*; 2 = *foreman or supervisor*; 3 = *not a manager or supervisor*)
	Frequency of working in the evening	1-item scale: 1 = *never* 2 = *less than once per month* 3 = *at least once a month* 4 = *every week* 5 = *every day*	In your job or jobs how often do you work in the evening after 6 p.m. and up to 10 p.m.? (1 = *every day*; 2 = *every week*; 3 = *at least once a month*; 4 = *less than once per month*; 5 = *never*)
Life demands	Number of children in household	Continuous variable: Number of dependent children in household, including the cohort child and his/her siblings (range from 1 to 9)	
	Cohort child's age	Continuous variable: cohort child's age	Range: 4.42–6.08 years in Age 5 Survey; 6.34–8.15 years in Age 7 Survey; and 10.25–12.33 years in Age 11 Survey
	Cohort child having longstanding illness	Dummy variable: 1 = *yes* 0 = *no*	Does the cohort child have any longstanding illness, disability or infirmity? By longstanding I mean anything that has troubled the child for a period of time or is likely to affect him/her over a period of time. (1 = *yes*; 2 = *no*)

Table 4.1 (continued)

Category	Variable	Coding	Survey wording and response options
Work resources	Utilization of part-time working	Dummy variable: 1 = *yes* 0 = *no*	Are you working part-time? (1 = *yes, weekly working hours* ≥ *30*; 2 = *no, weekly working hours* < *30*)
	Utilization of home-based working	Dummy variable: 1 = *yes* 0 = *no*	Do you work mainly at home or from home in your main job? (1 = *yes*; 2 = *no*)
Life resources	Availability of a partner	Nominal variable: 1 (reference) = *single* 2 = *having a working partner* 3 = *having a non-working partner*	(a) Is the cohort child living in a two-parent family or a lone-parent family? (1 = *two-parent*; 2 = *lone-parent*) (b) Can I just check, did your partner do any paid work last week (that is the 7 days ending last Sunday) as either an employee or self-employed? (1 = *yes*; 2 = *no*) (c) Even though your partner were not working did your partner have a job that you were away from last week? (1 = *yes*; 2 = *no*)
	Availability of a local social support network	Dummy variable: 1 = *yes* (having family and/or friends in this area) 0 = *no* (not having family or friends in this area)	Do you have any other friends or family living in this area? (1 = *yes, friends*; 2 = *yes, family*; 3 = *yes, both*; 4 = *no*)
	Weekly hours of home-based childcare support utilization	Continuous variable: The sum of weekly hours of home-based childcare support from different sources (range from 0 to 125)	About how many hours a week (in a typical week in school term-time) is the cohort child looked after by the childminder/nanny/au pair/grandparents/other relatives/ friends/neighbors on weekdays?

Table 4.1 (continued)

Category	Variable	Coding	Survey wording and response options
Personal resources	Perceived adequacy of childcare time	1-item scale: 1 = *nowhere near enough* 2 = *not quite enough* 3 = *just enough* 4 = *more than enough* 5 = *too much time*	How do you feel about the amount of time you have to spend with the cohort child? (1 = *too much time*; 2 = *more than enough*; 3 = *just enough*; 4 = *not quite enough*; 5 = *nowhere near enough*)
	Family financial management capacity	1-item scale: 1 = *finding it very difficult* 2 = *finding it quite difficult* 3 = *just about getting by* 4 = *doing alright* 5 = *living comfortably*	How well would you say you (and your partner) are managing financially these days? You are ... (1 = *living comfortably*; 2 = *doing alright*; 3 = *just about getting by*; 4 = *finding it quite difficult*; 5 = *finding it very difficult*)
Outcomes	Work–life balance satisfaction	1-item scale: 1 = *very dissatisfied* 2 = *fairly dissatisfied* 3 = *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* 4 = *fairly satisfied* 5 = *very satisfied*	How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the balance between the amount of time you spend with your family and the amount of time you spend at work? (1 = *very satisfied*; 2 = *fairly satisfied*; 3 = *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*; 4 = *fairly dissatisfied*; 5 = *very dissatisfied*)
	Job retention (time t+1)	Dummy variable: retention with the same employer 1 = *yes* 0 = *no*	(a) Are you still employed by the same employer? (1 = *yes*; 2 = *no*) (b) Can I just check have you been doing this job/ employed by this employer continuously since we last interviewed you? (1 = *yes*; 2 = *no*)

Table 4.1 (continued)

Category	Variable	Coding	Survey wording and response options
Control variables	Age	Continuous variable: respondent's age (range from 19 to 61)	
	Social class	Nominal variable: 1 (reference) = *working class* (routine and manual occupations) 2 = *middle class* (intermediate occupations) 3 = *upper class* (higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations)	NS-SEC (National Statistics Socio-economic Classification) occupation-based social class
	Household income quintile	Ordinal variable: 1 = *lowest quintile* 2 = *second quintile* 3 = *third quintile* 4 = *fourth quintile* 5 = *highest quintile*	OECD equivalized weekly family income quintiles weighted to the whole UK population

Table 4.2: The descriptive statistics and Spearman's rho correlations of research variables

Variables	***M***	***SD***	***N***	**ICC(1)**	1	2	3	4
1. Age	37.59	6.01	24378	.71*	1	.18**	.01	.34**
2. Social class: upper class	.38	.49	23897	.67*	.17**	1	–.49**	.43**
3. Social class: middle class	.31	.46	23897	.57*	.02**	–.53**	1	–.03**
4. Household income quintile	.52	1.20	24332	.58*	.30**	.35**	–.01	1
5. Weekly working hours	25.11	11.55	24143	.61*	.06**	.28**	–.04**	.16**
6. Managerial role	.30	.46	24189	.50*	.09**	.44**	–.22**	.19**
7. Frequency of working in the evening	2.26	1.48	24205	.51*	.02**	.19**	–.14**	.08**
8. Number of children in household	2.25	.88	24377	.84*	.11**	–.04**	.00	–.17**
9. Cohort child's age	7.90	2.49	24378	.00	.38**	.01*	.02**	.03**
10. Cohort child having longstanding illness	.16	.37	24251	.37*	–.03**	–.01*	–.01	–.03**
11. Utilization of part-time working	.62	.48	24143	.58*	–.05**	–.24**	.05**	–.13**
12. Utilization of home-based working	.10	.31	24213	.51*	.07**	–.05**	.23**	.05**
13. Availability of a working partner	.79	.41	24378	.58*	.10**	.09**	.03**	.46**
14. Availability of a non-working partner	.04	.19	24378	.31*	–.02**	–.04**	–.03**	–.20**
15. Availability of a local social support network	.92	.28	24175	.17*	.01	.01	–.00	.02*
16. Weekly hours of home-based childcare support utilization	4.21	7.20	24258	.36*	–.11**	.13**	–.09**	–.00
17. Perceived adequacy of childcare time	2.72	.87	24162	.42*	–.00	–.17**	.06**	–.07**
18. Family financial management capacity	3.78	.97	24198	.48*	.04**	.16**	–.01	.36**
19. Work–life balance satisfaction	3.84	1.13	24015	.37*	.05**	–.17**	.09**	–.03**
20. Job retention (time t+1)	.77	.42	19573	.13*	.13**	.05**	.03**	.08**

Table 4.2 (continued)

Variables	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	.01	.10**	.02**	.10**	/	–.01	–.01	.09**
2. Social class: upper class	.32**	.51**	.24**	–.05**	/	–.00	–.29**	–.03**
3. Social class: middle class	–.06**	–.25**	–.19**	–.01	/	–.00	.06**	.23**
4. Household income quintile	.16**	.25**	.12**	–.19**	/	–.02**	–.14**	.08**
5. Weekly working hours	1	.36**	.22**	–.13**	/	.00	–.88**	–.02*
6. Managerial role	.30**	1	.20**	–.05**	/	.02**	–.32**	–.05**
7. Frequency of working in the evening	.18**	.15**	1	.03**	/	.02**	–.20**	.15**
8. Number of children in household	–.12**	–.04**	.03**	1	/	–.03**	.10**	.06**
9. Cohort child's age	.09**	–.00	–.01	.08**	1	/	/	/
10. Cohort child having longstanding illness	–.02*	.00	.01	–.03**	–.06**	1	–.02**	.01*
11. Utilization of part-time working	–.84**	–.27**	–.17**	.09**	–.07**	.00	1	–.02**
12. Utilization of home-based working	–.03**	–.07**	.14**	.07**	.00	.01	–.01	1
13. Availability of a working partner	–.04**	.05**	.04**	.12**	–.08**	–.03**	.04**	.05**
14. Availability of a non-working partner	.03**	–.01	.01	.06**	.02*	.01	–.03**	–.01
15. Availability of a local social support network	–.03**	.00	–.02**	.01*	.05**	–.01	.04**	.00
16. Weekly hours of home-based childcare support utilization	.25**	.12**	.09**	–.11**	–.04**	.01	–.22**	–.15**
17. Perceived adequacy of childcare time	–.33**	–.16**	–.14**	.01	.01*	–.02**	.31**	.06**
18. Family financial management capacity	.03**	.10**	.02**	–.06**	–.10**	–.03**	–.03**	.06**
19. Work–life balance satisfaction	–.43**	–.18**	–.20**	.07**	.09**	–.03**	.38**	.09**
20. Job retention (time t+1)	.04**	.01	–.01	.03**	.06**	–.00	–.02**	.01

Table 4.2 (continued)

Variables	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1. Age	.15**	–.04**	–.01	–.13**	/	/	/	/
2. Social class: upper class	.10**	–.05**	–.02**	.16**	/	/	/	/
3. Social class: middle class	.04**	–.03**	–.00	–.11**	/	/	/	/
4. Household income quintile	.50**	–.22**	–.01	–.02**	/	/	/	/
5. Weekly working hours	–.06**	.04**	–.07**	.32**	/	/	/	/
6. Managerial role	.06**	–.00	–.02**	.16**	/	/	/	/
7. Frequency of working in the evening	.04**	.01	–.03**	.12**	/	/	/	/
8. Number of children in household	.11**	.06**	.03**	–.12**	/	/	/	/
9. Cohort child's age	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
10. Cohort child having longstanding illness	–.04**	.02**	–.02*	.03**	/	/	/	/
11. Utilization of part-time working	.05**	–.05**	.06**	–.28**	/	/	/	/
12. Utilization of home-based working	.06**	–.02**	–.01	–.17**	/	/	/	/
13. Availability of a working partner	1	–.39**	.03**	–.16**	/	/	/	/
14. Availability of a non-working partner	–.39**	1	–.02**	–.07**	/	/	/	/
15. Availability of a local social support network	.02**	–.02**	1	.04**	/	/	/	/
16. Weekly hours of home-based childcare support utilization	–.12**	–.09**	.05**	1	/	/	/	/
17. Perceived adequacy of childcare time	.03**	–.02*	.04**	–.20**	1	/	/	/
18. Family financial management capacity	.25**	–.11**	.03**	–.01	.07**	1	/	/
19. Work–life balance satisfaction	.05**	–.02**	.07**	–.24**	.50**	.11**	1	/
20. Job retention (time t+1)	.05**	.00	.02*	.00	.02*	.07**	.05**	1

Note. The descriptive statistics and correlations are unweighted and uncentered. All the variables were measured at time t except that job retention was measured at time (t+1). The above-diagonal correlations are based on uncentered Level-1 data (non-averaged data). The below-diagonal correlations are based on uncentered Level-2 data (within-individual averages). ICC(1) refers to the intraclass correlation coefficient calculated by one-way random analysis of variance (ANOVA) model based on single measurement.

**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Following previous work on mediation analyses in multilevel settings (e.g., Haar et al., 2018; Z. Zhang et al., 2009), we adapted the stepwise method (Baron & Kenny, 1986) to test our mediational hypotheses based on a series of multilevel binary or ordinal logistic regression models as elaborated in Table 4.3. First, we ran the Full Models 1 and 2 to obtain the direct effect (*a*) of each predictor on each of the two personal resources. Second, we ran the Full Models 3a and 4 to obtain the direct effect (*b*) of each mediator on the dependent variable and the direct effect (*c*') of each predictor on the dependent variable controlling for mediators. In Full Model 3a, two personal resources were concurrently entered as mediators whereas WLB satisfaction served as the dependent variable. In Full Model 4, two personal resources and WLB satisfaction were entered as mediators while the dependent variable was job retention. Third, we used the Monte Carlo method (MacKinnon et al., 2004) with 300,000 replications to calculate the indirect effect as the product (*ab*) of the coefficients of the path (*a*) between each predictor and each mediator and the path (*b*) between each mediator and each outcome.

Regarding model fit, the values of fit statistics in terms of pseudo *BIC* and deviance of Full Models 1, 2, 3a, and 4 were much smaller than those of Null Models 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively, demonstrating their better fit to the data compared to their corresponding Null Models. Langer (2017) also recommended a generalized version of McKelvey and Zavoina's pseudo-R^2 (1975) as the best model fit index for assessing multilevel ordinal and binary logistic models because it best approximates the R^2 in the ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression models. The McKelvey and Zavoina's pseudo-R^2 values of four Full Models were all above the threshold of .10, indicating acceptable model fit (Chiozza & Goemans, 2011). It is worth pointing out that our Full Models 3a and 4, respectively, explained 60% of the variance in WLB satisfaction, and 37% of the variance in future job retention (see Table 4.3).

Finally, we would like to note that we tested the Hypothesis A of the substitution effect between two personal resources on WLB satisfaction in a separate model (see Full Model 3b in Table 4.3). Namely, in the stepwise mediation analysis, we included uncentered data of both personal resources which served *both* as dependent variables (i.e., in Full Models 1 and 2) *and* as independent variables (i.e., in Full Models 3a and 4). In this analysis, group-mean centering would largely remove the between-

individual variation in both personal resources, which would prevent us from running multilevel models using both personal resources as dependent variables (i.e., Full Models 1 and 2). However, when testing Hypothesis A, we had to include group-mean centered data for two personal resources and their interaction term in Full Model 3b to avoid issues of multicollinearity. Therefore, we tested Hypothesis A in Full Model 3b regressing WLB satisfaction on all Level-1 and Level-2 predictors, both personal resources, and their interaction term.

Table 4.4 shows the direct effects and Table 4.5 displays the indirect effects. Level-1 effects denote the within-individual changes whereas Level-2 effects represent the between-individual differences. For instance, the Level-1 effect of utilizing part-time working arrangements refers to the effect of a within-individual change from full-time to part-time working; while the Level-2 effect pertains to the between-individual difference comparing part-time employees to their full-time counterparts. We should also note that the impact of the cohort child's age should be interpreted as opposed to the sign of its coefficient because we hypothesized that having a younger cohort child would place greater demands on caregivers.

Table 4.3: Model specification of the stepwise mediation analysis

Model	**Null Model 1**	**Full Model 1**	**Null Model 2**	**Full Model 2**
Variables				
Demands and support	/	IVs (*/**)	/	IVs (*/**)
Two personal resources	Time as DV (#)	Time as DV (#)	Finances as DV (#)	Finances as DV (#)
Interaction term	/	/	/	/
WLB	/	/	/	/
Retention	/	/	/	/
Estimates	Variance component model for time	Direct effects of specific demands and support on time	Variance component model for finances	Direct effects of specific demands and support on finances
Model fit statistics				
df	5	36	5	36
Deviance	50201.68	47932.73	51154.96	48695.28
Pseudo *BIC*	50250.94	48287.38	51204.21	49049.93
R^2_{MZ}	/	.54	/	.62

Model	**Null Model 3**	**Full Model 3a**	**Full Model 3b**	**Null Model 4**	**Full Model 4**
Variables					
Demands and support	/	IVs (*/**)	IVs (*/**)	/	IVs (*/**)
Two personal resources	/	Mediators (#)	Mediators (*)	/	Mediators (#)
Interaction term	/	/	Mediator (*)	/	/
WLB	DV (#)	DV (#)	DV (#)	/	Mediator (#)
Retention	/	/	/	DV (#)	DV (#)
Estimates	Variance component model for WLB	Direct effects of (1) specific demands and support, (2) time, and (3) finances on WLB	Interaction effect between two personal resources on WLB	Variance component model for retention	Direct effects of (1) specific demands and support, (2) time, (3) finances, and (4) WLB on retention
Model fit statistics					
df	5	38	39	2	36
Deviance	55184.18	47736.76	49691.13	23489.94	22615.29
Pseudo *BIC*	55233.44	48111.11	50075.33	23509.64	22969.94
R^2_{MZ}	/	.61	.60	/	.37

Note. The number of observations is 18,983 and the number of groups is 8,778 in each model. All the variables were measured at time *t* except that job retention was measured at time (*t*+1). R^2_{MZ} = McKelvey & Zavoina's pseudo-R^2. IV = independent variable. DV = dependent variable. Demands and support = work–life demands and support mechanisms (15 level-2 variables and 16 level-1 variables). Personal resources = time & finances. Time = perceived adequacy of childcare time. Finances = family financial management capacity. Interaction term = time × finances. WLB = work–life balance satisfaction. Retention = job retention.

* Person-mean centered Level-1 data. ** Grand-mean centered Level-2 data.

\# Uncentered data.

Table 4.4: A summary of direct effects from full models

	Childcare time	Family finances	WLB	Retention
	B	*B*	*B*	*B*
Level 1: Within-Individual Effect				
Control variables				
Age	.24*	.00	–.10	–.01
Social class: upper class	–.11	.12	.01	.36*
Social class: middle class	.09	.02	.24*	.29
Household income quintile	–.01	.32**	–.03	.07
Work demands				
Weekly working hours	–.04**	.01	–.05**	.07**
Managerial role	–.21*	.14	–.21**	–.35**
Frequency of working in the evening	–.14**	–.01	–.21**	–.06
Life demands				
Number of children in household	–.36**	–.10	.13	–.20
Cohort child's age	–.18*	–.13	.24*	.09
Cohort child having longstanding illness	–.14	–.00	–.02	.24
Work resources				
Utilization of part-time working	.70**	–.24*	.48**	.07
Utilization of home-based working	.58**	.18	.54**	.08
Life resources				
Availability of a working partner	.17	.70**	–.11	.26
Availability of a non-working partner	–.44	–.28	.02	.35
Availability of a local social support network	.20	.01	.60**	.15
Weekly hours of home-based childcare support utilization	–.02**	.01	–.01*	–.00
Personal resources & outcome (mediators)				
Perceived adequacy of childcare time [a]			1.34**	–.06
Family financial management capacity [a]			.30**	.09*
Interaction term [b] (childcare time × family finances)			.08	
Work–life balance satisfaction [a]				.26**

Table 4.4 (continued)

	Childcare time	**Family finances**	**WLB**	**Retention**
	B	*B*	*B*	*B*
Level 2: Between-Individual Effect				
Fixed effect				
Control variables				
Age	.01	$-.05^{**}$	–.00	$.06^{**}$
Social class: upper class	$-.43^{**}$	$.31^{**}$	$-.33^{**}$	$.35^{**}$
Social class: middle class	$-.25^{**}$	.16	–.02	$.51^{**}$
Household income quintile	$-.11^{*}$	1.20^{**}	$.14^{**}$	.01
Work demands				
Weekly working hours	$-.04^{**}$	–.00	$-.06^{**}$	.01
Managerial role	$-.25^{**}$	$.31^{**}$	–.12	.08
Frequency of working in the evening	$-.13^{**}$	$-.08^{**}$	$-.21^{**}$	–.01
Life demands				
Number of children in household	$-.19^{**}$	.04	$.18^{**}$	.08
Cohort child having longstanding illness	$-.30^{**}$	$-.27^{*}$	$-.16^{*}$	.07
Work resources				
Utilization of part-time working	$.82^{**}$	$.32^{*}$	$.48^{**}$	$.33^{*}$
Utilization of home-based working	$.77^{**}$	$.67^{**}$	$.81^{**}$	–.16
Life resources				
Availability of a working partner	.12	$.41^{**}$	–.07	$.45^{**}$
Availability of a non-working partner	–.07	.22	.20	$.60^{*}$
Availability of a local social support network	.29	$.63^{**}$	$.46^{**}$	.12
Weekly hours of home-based childcare support utilization	$-.06^{**}$	–.00	$-.03^{**}$	$.02^{*}$
Random effect				
Level-2 variance of intercept	4.16^{**}	5.32^{**}	2.41^{**}	3.54^{**}
Model Fit				
Number of observations	18983	18983	18983	18983
Number of groups	8778	8778	8778	8778
df	36	36	38	36
Pseudo-likelihood deviance	47932.73	48695.28	47736.76	22615.29
Pseudo *BIC*	48287.38	49049.93	48111.11	22969.94
McKelvey & Zavoina's pseudo R^2	.54	.62	.61	.37

Note. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. [a] Coefficient of uncentered data. [b] Coefficient of person-mean centered data. Level-1 intercepts or thresholds in each model were suppressed. All the variables were measured at time *t* except that job retention was measured at time (*t*+1). Childcare time = perceived adequacy of childcare time. Family finances = family financial management capacity. WLB = work–life balance satisfaction. Retention = job retention.

Table 4.5: The indirect effects of work and life demands and support mechanisms on work–life balance satisfaction and on job retention

Dependent variable **Mediator** **Predictor**	**WLB** Childcare time *B*	**WLB** Family finances *B*	**Retention** Childcare time → WLB *B*	**Retention** Family finances → WLB *B*
Level 1: Within-Individual Effect				
Control variables				
Age	.32*	.00	.08*	.00
Social class: upper class	–.14	.04	–.04	.01
Social class: middle class	.12	.01	.03	.00
Household income quintile	–.02	.10*	–.00	.03*
Work demands				
Weekly working hours	–.06*	.00	–.01*	.00
Managerial role	–.28*	.04	–.07*	.01
Frequency of working in the evening	–.18*	–.00	–.05*	–.00
Life demands				
Number of children in household	–.49*	–.03	–.13*	–.01
Cohort child's age	–.25	–.04	–.06	–.01
Cohort child having longstanding illness	–.19	–.00	–.05	–.00
Work resources				
Utilization of part-time working	.93*	–.07*	.24*	–.02*
Utilization of home-based working	.78*	.05	.20*	.01
Life resources				
Availability of a working partner	.23	.21*	.06	.06*
Availability of a non-working partner	–.59	–.09	–.15	–.02
Availability of a local social support network	.27	.00	.07	.00
Weekly hours of home-based childcare support utilization	–.02*	.00	–.01*	.00
Dependent variable **Mediator** **Predictor**			**Retention** WLB Childcare time	**Retention** WLB Family finances
B			.35*	.08*

Table 4.5 (continued)

Dependent variable	**WLB**	**WLB**	**Retention**	**Retention**
Mediator	Childcare time	Family finances	Childcare time → WLB	Family finances → WLB
Predictor	*B*	*B*	*B*	*B*
Level 2: Between-Individual Effect				
Control variables				
Age	.01	–.02*	.00	–.004*
Social class: upper class	–.58*	.10*	–.15*	.03*
Social class: middle class	–.34*	.05	–.09*	.01
Household income quintile	–.14*	.36*	–.04*	.09*
Work demands				
Weekly working hours	–.06*	–.00	–.02*	–.00
Managerial role	–.33*	.10*	–.09*	.03*
Frequency of working in the evening	–.18*	–.02*	–.05*	–.01*
Life demands				
Number of children in household	–.26*	.01	–.07*	.00
Cohort child having longstanding illness	–.40*	–.08*	–.11*	–.02*
Work resources				
Utilization of part-time working	1.10*	.10*	.29*	.03*
Utilization of home-based working	1.03*	.20*	.27*	.05*
Life resources				
Availability of a working partner	.16	.12*	.04	.03*
Availability of a non-working partner	–.09	.07	–.02	.02
Availability of a local social support network	.39	.19*	.10	.05*
Weekly hours of home-based childcare support utilization	–.08*	–.00	–.02*	–.00

Note. * $p < .05$. All the variables were measured at time *t* except that job retention was measured at time (*t*+1). Childcare time = perceived adequacy of childcare time. Family finances = family financial management capacity. WLB = work–life balance satisfaction. Retention = job retention.

4.4.2 Resource investment hypothesis testing

The resource investment hypothesis (Hypothesis A) contends that two personal resources—perceived adequacy of childcare time and family financial management capacity may have a substitution effect on working mothers' WLB satisfaction. However, we rejected Hypothesis A as the interaction effect between both personal resources on WLB satisfaction was not significant ($B = .08$, $p > .05$).

4.4.3 Resource accumulation hypotheses testing

In line with the resource accumulation mechanism, we hypothesized that positive appraisal of two personal resources, respectively, may positively predict working mothers' job retention through enhancing their WLB satisfaction (Hypothesis B1). We found empirical support for Hypothesis B1 in that the improvement in perceived adequacy of childcare time ($B = .35$, $p < .05$) and family financial management capacity ($B = .08$, $p < .05$), respectively, had a positive indirect effect on working mothers' job retention via enhanced WLB satisfaction.

Hypothesis B2 proposes that contextual resources may enhance working mothers' WLB satisfaction by expanding or promoting effective allocation of personal resources in terms of childcare time and family finances, respectively. Hypothesis B2 was partially supported by our findings.

In line with Hypothesis B2, we found that utilizing part-time working arrangements at Level 1 ($B = .93$, $p < .05$) and Level 2 ($B = 1.10$, $p < .05$) and utilizing home-based working arrangements at Level 1 ($B = .78$, $p < .05$) and Level 2 ($B = 1.03$, $p < .05$) had positive indirect effects on working mothers' WLB satisfaction by improving their perceived adequacy of childcare time. Also, utilizing home-based working arrangements at Level 2 ($B = .20$, $p < .05$), having a working partner at Level 1 ($B = .21$, $p < .05$) and Level 2 ($B = .12$, $p < .05$), and having a local social support network at Level 2 ($B = .19$, $p < .05$), respectively, had a positive indirect effect on WLB satisfaction via enhanced family financial management capacity, supporting Hypotheses B2.

However, contrary to Hypothesis B2, longer weekly hours of utilizing home-based childcare support at Level 1 ($B = -.02$, $p < .05$) and Level 2 ($B = -.08$, $p < .05$)

had negative indirect effects on WLB satisfaction via decreased perceived adequacy of childcare time. Also, inconsistent with Hypothesis B2, neither having a working or non-working partner nor having a local social support network had a significant indirect effect on working mothers' WLB satisfaction via perceived adequacy of childcare time. In addition, we revealed contradictory results in that utilizing part-time working arrangements at Level 1 had a negative indirect effect ($B = -.07$, $p < .05$) but at Level 2 it had a positive indirect effect ($B = .10$, $p < .05$) on WLB satisfaction via family financial management capacity. Moreover, we found that having a non-working partner and weekly hours of utilizing home-based childcare support had no significant indirect effects on working mothers' WLB via family financial management capacity.

4.4.4 Resource depletion hypothesis testing

The resource depletion hypothesis contends that contextual demands may worsen working mothers' WLB satisfaction by depleting or impairing effective allocation of personal resources in terms of childcare time and family finances, respectively (Hypothesis C). Our findings partially supported Hypothesis C.

In line with our hypothesis, we found that long weekly working hours at Level 1 ($B = -.06$, $p < .05$) and Level 2 ($B = -.06$, $p < .05$), undertaking a managerial role at Level 1 ($B = -.28$, $p < .05$) and Level 2 ($B = -.33$, $p < .05$), frequently working in the evening at Level 1 ($B = -.18$, $p < .05$) and Level 2 ($B = -.18$, $p < .05$), having more children in household at both Level 1 ($B = -.49$, $p < .05$) and Level 2 ($B = -.26$, $p < .05$), and having a cohort child with longstanding illness at Level 2 ($B = -.40$, $p < .05$) had negative indirect effects on working mothers' WLB satisfaction by reducing their perceived adequacy of childcare time. We also found that frequently working in the evening at Level 2 ($B = -.02$, $p < .05$) and having a cohort child with longstanding illness at Level 2 ($B = -.08$, $p < .05$), respectively, had a negative indirect effect on WLB satisfaction via reduced family financial management capacity.

Inconsistent with our hypothesis, the cohort child's age at Level 1 had no significant indirect effect on WLB satisfaction via either personal resource. We also found that weekly working hours and the number of children in household showed no indirect effects on working mothers' WLB satisfaction via family financial management capacity. Contrary to Hypothesis C, undertaking a managerial role at

Level 2 had a positive indirect effect ($B = .10, p < .05$) on WLB satisfaction via family financial management capacity.

After controlling for the mediation effects, some contextual factors still had significant direct effects at Level 1 and/or Level 2 on WLB satisfaction. Also, we performed additional analyses to examine the direct and indirect effects of each contextual factor on job retention via two personal resources and WLB satisfaction. We elaborated on these results in the Appendix B.

4.5 Discussion

The main aim of our study was to explore the effects of multiple work and non-work contextual demands and resources on working mothers' WLB satisfaction and job retention over six years of their children's primary school education using multilevel analysis to account for both within- and between-individual effects. We hypothesized that these contextual demands and resources would affect WLB satisfaction and job retention via investment, accumulation, and depletion mechanisms of two personal resources: childcare time and family finances, respectively.

4.5.1 Theoretical implications

Our research has a number of theoretical implications for the COR theory and WLB research. First, we have simultaneously analyzed the role of two indispensable personal resources, i.e., adequate childcare time *and* good family financial management capacity, that working mothers rely on for managing their WLB, which complements previous WLB studies focusing primarily on time-based work–life conflict but neglecting financial constraints and resources (Warren, 2017). Although working mothers were not found to substitute time for money to achieve WLB satisfaction, we observed that both personal resources improved their retention via enhanced WLB satisfaction over six years of their children's primary education when they shouldered heavy childcare duties.

Second, by using a longitudinal design and a large, nationally representative sample and drawing on the *COR theory* (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018) and the *PRA framework* (Grawitch et al., 2010), we have strengthened the causal inferences

between a number of work and non-work contextual factors, WLB satisfaction, and time-lagged job retention of working mothers who faced significant childcare responsibilities. In line with the *COR theory* (Hobfoll et al., 2018), we confirmed the importance of *resource depletion* and *resource accumulation* as the underlying mechanisms that explicitly explain the person–environment interplay around WLB by elucidating how different contextual demands and resources either deplete or expand personal resources for hindering or improving WLB.

In terms of the *resource depletion* mechanism, our findings showed that longer working hours, undertaking a managerial role, frequently working in the evening, having more children in household, having a child with longstanding illness, and longer hours of using home-based childcare support served as *time-based demands* as they hindered effective allocation of personal time for childcare, which in turn resulted in poorer WLB satisfaction and job retention. Similarly, frequently working in the evening and having a child with longstanding illness served as *financial-based demands* as they impeded family financial management capacity for achieving WLB.

In contrast, utilizing part-time and home-based working arrangements promoted WLB satisfaction via *resource accumulation* mechanism in terms of expanding or eliciting effective allocation of both personal resources of childcare time and family finances, functioning as both *time-* and *financial-based resources*. Also, undertaking a managerial role, having a working partner, and establishing a local social support network served as *financial-based resources* as they enhanced working mothers' family financial management capacity. Therefore, our study makes a unique and significant contribution to the COR theory in terms of elucidating how working mothers manage their work and life demands by expending and accumulating time and money to achieve WLB and as a result remain in the workforce via resource depletion and accumulation mechanisms.

Third, we advance the conceptualization of contextual demands and resources by proposing that a contextual factor should be conceptualized either as a demand or resource according to its depletion or accumulation effect on a specific personal resource rather than be categorized as a generic demand or resource. This is because the impact of a contextual factor may yield differential effects on different personal resources. Although undertaking a managerial role has often been framed as a generic

work demand in the extant literature (Ford & Collinson, 2011; K. Wilkinson et al., 2017), we found that it actually served both as a *time-based demand* and a *financial-based resource*, implying that female managers may trade time for money to spend on their children for achieving WLB. This finding on working mothers' time–money conundrum offers empirical support for the *resource investment* mechanism proposed in the COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018). One Danish study also revealed similar findings in that higher-income parents usually work longer hours and compensate for less time spent with children by spending more money on their children whereas lower-income parents spend less money but more time on direct care of their children (Rockwool Foundation Research Unit, 2010).

In relation to the conceptualization of demands and resources, we also extend the argument that WLB support initiatives are not universally effective for boosting all kinds of personal resources in hope to improve WLB (Perrigino et al., 2018). An effective support initiative for managing WLB pertains to a contextual resource that helps individuals focus on boosting, prioritizing, and optimizing the most needed personal resources to fulfil a preferred or required contextual demand.

For instance, having enough parental time is one of top priorities for working mothers to achieve a satisfactory WLB (Milkie et al., 2010). We found that the utilization of home-based childcare support exacerbated female caregivers' perceived lack of time to spend with children, which in turn negatively affected their WLB satisfaction and subsequent job retention. This finding is in line with previous research that suggests parents prefer taking care of their children by themselves and childcare providers are "not chosen as a substitute for own time with children" (Hallberg & Klevmarken, 2003, p. 205). Parents who have more high quality and supportive interaction with their children cultivate a more intimate and secure parent–child relationship, which is beneficial to children's psycho-social wellbeing and academic performance (Wong et al., 2018) but these benefits can hardly be generated by outsourcing childcare responsibilities. Since school-age children spend most of their weekdays at school, possible reasons for parents to utilize home-based childcare support can be that parents work unsociable hours (Lero et al., 2019) or children have short school days (Ruppanner et al., 2019). Either of these may trigger perceptions of having inadequate time for childcare; only providing home-based childcare support

might not be enough for working mothers to juggle both employment and childcare responsibilities in such situations; supplementary WLB support initiatives from governments and employers are needed.

Last but not least, we highlight the differential impact of the between-individual differences and within-individual changes in contextual demands and resources on working mothers' WLB satisfaction and job retention. For instance, our research revealed that utilizing part-time working arrangements positively impacted WLB satisfaction and job retention via family financial management capacity, whereas in women who changed from full-time to part-time working arrangements over the period of six years, this effect was negative. These results are consistent with Shaefer (2009) who suggested that women as part-time secondary earners were slightly less likely to fall into poverty than their full-time peers. This is possibly because the majority of female part-time employees could rely on other sources of household income and hence, part-time working allows them to supplement household income and expand their family financial management capacity (Shaefer, 2009). In contrast, working mothers who changed from full-time to part-time employment were likely to have increased difficulties in managing family finances given their immediate wage reduction (Shaefer, 2009).

We also identified nuanced differences between the Level-1 and Level-2 effects of undertaking a managerial role. Female managers and non-managers were found to have similar level of WLB satisfaction and job retention although female managers had less time but more money to spend on children while the non-managers were in the opposite situation. However, both WLB satisfaction and job retention were likely at risk immediately after a working mother was promoted to a managerial position. This is likely because she suddenly had less time for children and was not yet observing higher financial returns; in other words, it might take some time for the financial benefits of managerial roles to be manifested. These results suggest that we should separate the within- and between-effects of a contextual factor on WLB or work–life outcomes so as to offer better practical recommendations on WLB and retention for *both* those who share a specific time-invariant personal attribute *and* those who change a particular attribute over time. Also, we advocate a *holistic* approach to consider the mediating role of *multiple* key personal resources simultaneously to better explain how

a contextual factor might influence WLB or other work–life outcomes because satisfactory WLB often necessitates effective allocation of multiple (rather than a single) key personal resources.

4.5.2 Practical implications

Our study reveals that both sufficient childcare time and financial security can improve working mothers' WLB and job retention during the period of undertaking intense childcare responsibilities. Our research findings have practical implications for different stakeholders.

For working mothers, having a working partner increases family financial security and women can choose part-time working arrangements that enable longer and more flexible time to care for children with little worries about financial difficulties. A local social support network comprising family members and friends can also provide financial aid in emergency and function as a financial safety net. Furthermore, a negotiation with partner for an equal share of childcare and housework would alleviate working mothers' time pressure for juggling childcare and employment, promoting their WLB and retention in employment.

For employers, both attractive financial incentives and part-time and home-based working arrangements that increase the time to spend with primary school-age children can improve working mothers' WLB and job retention. However, part-time employment may be more suitable for female employees who are not the only or primary source of family income because otherwise, part-time employment may cause financial insecurity and hence impair WLB. Our findings also suggest that delegating childcare responsibilities may not be an optimal choice for women to improve their WLB. Instead, it may be better for employers to offer working arrangements that allow working mothers to work fewer hours to accommodate their childcare demands and improve parenting quality (Chandola et al., 2019). Moreover, we found that family financial management capacity was predictive of job retention even after accounting for all the other variables, which highlights the critical role of competitive pay in retaining female caregivers (Ali et al., 2018) even when their pursuit of WLB has been addressed by their employers and especially if they have family financial difficulties.

Although our study shows that female managers do not have a higher turnover

rate than non-managers given their higher financial compensation for less time spent with children, the short period immediately after their promotion to a managerial position deserves special attention. This is because during this period female managers might encounter a sudden increase of time-based conflict to juggle work and maternal roles and hence, increase their propensity to leave the current employer. In order to enhance the retention of female managerial talent, employers should be aware of female managers' family needs and provide necessary support such as on-site childcare for helping them adapt to a new position.

For policymakers, we recommend the governments to adapt compulsory school hours to standard working hours and increase affordable public and private childcare in unsociable hours so that most parents can resort to childcare support when necessary. Moreover, it is the government's responsibility to promote a gender egalitarian culture and initiate societal changes towards equal sharing of domestic responsibilities between both genders so as to alleviate women's heavy family burdens and enhance their job retention. Recent research indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has hit women more severely than men, not only because women work in sectors that have been more adversely affected, but also because women undertake disproportionally more childcare and homeschooling responsibilities than men (Gromada et al., 2020). Hence, we recommend the policymakers to promote more gender egalitarian division of household labor both during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

4.5.3 Strengths, limitations, and recommendations for future research

Our study has a number of strengths, however our findings have to be interpreted in light of certain limitations. Although we utilized nationally representative data that covered a wide range of occupations and shed light upon different household structures (i.e., single-parent versus dual-parent), the generalizability of our findings was limited to working mothers being predominant primary caregivers. Future research should explore the resource depletion, accumulation, and investment mechanisms in other populations, such as fathers or people without children who have life demands other than childcare.

Furthermore, some researchers might argue that such a large sample size and the inclusion of a large number of predictors in the model may increase the possibility that

the statistical significance of regression coefficients in this study is mainly due to random chance (Sherman & Funder, 2009; Sullivan & Feinn, 2012). However, our research findings were very unlikely to be merely results of random chance because (a) our research was backed up by strong theoretical assumptions and empirical evidence; (b) around 64% of regression coefficients were significant at the .0015 level, which was a relatively conservative significance level adjusted by the Bonferroni correction. In order to verify the robustness of our research findings, we suggest for the future research to do a replication of our study with a focus on those statistically significant results by using primary data and robust multilevel structural equation modelling techniques.

Another major limitation was the use of single-item measures for most of our variables, although this is common in longitudinal, large-scale, nationally representative surveys to shorten their length and reduce the non-response and attrition biases (Gnambs & Buntins, 2017; Lucas & Donnellan, 2011). Compared to multi-item measures, the use of single-item measures prevents us from calculating the reliability estimates. Such measures may also fail to capture the complexity of multi-dimensional constructs and yield lower sensitivity among particular groups of people (Bowling, 2005). Future research should validate the causal link between contextual factors, WLB, and job retention using multi-item or objective measures.

Future research could also explore how changes in personal resources can be used as an indicator for evaluating the effectiveness of WLB support mechanisms, such as family-friendly policies and childcare support. Although we rejected the hypothesis of a substitution effect between time and financial resources on WLB satisfaction, our findings imply that female managers potentially trade time for money to spend on their children and this could be explained by the resource investment mechanism (Hobfoll et al., 2018). We recommend researchers to further explore this time–money conundrum with regard to different contextual demands for sustaining WLB, such as eldercare, leisure, and social activities. This research could draw from Whillans et al. (2016) and use their resource orientation measure to ascertain to what extent individuals prioritize time over money and what effects this has on their WLB. We also recommend the use of more objective measures to assess personal resources, such as physical health (Rocco et al., 2019). Future research could also adopt field or natural

experimental designs to provide evidence of policy effectiveness in real-life settings (Leatherdale, 2019). Such studies could test whether the introduction of WLB support mechanisms, such as national and organizational family-friendly policies, has an impact on different types of personal resources, which in turn improve employees' WLB.

Finally, we observed nuanced differences in between-person and within-person effects of some contextual variables. Hence, we recommend future research to apply multilevel analyses to longitudinal data so as to capture these nuanced differences and simultaneously explain WLB in those who share a specific time-invariant personal attribute *and* for those who change a particular attribute over time. For fluctuated (e.g., energy) rather than relatively stable (e.g., family financial security) personal resources, we suggest latent change score modeling to examine the resource accumulation, depletion, and investment effects by capturing how the cumulative changes in an individual's specific personal resources shape WLB and other outcomes over time (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015).

CHAPTER 5

Contextualizing Work–Life Balance Through the Lens of Modernization Theory: Evidence from China

Abstract

Work–life balance has been predominantly theorized and studied in highly industrialized and economically advanced Western societies, whereby its current conceptualization may be highly contingent on the Western socio-institutional contexts. This research aims to reconceptualize work–life balance by applying the lens of modernization theory in a non-Western context. Drawing on interview data, my research explored individuals' perceptions and lived experiences of China's multi-faceted modernization process. Specifically, I explored how societal changes in terms of economic development, industrialization, social inequality, and social solidarity transformed individuals' experiences and perceptions of work–life balance during 1949–2019.

This exploratory qualitative study contributes to work–life balance literature by (a) advancing a context-specific and integration-oriented (re)conceptualization of work–life balance beyond the extant Western segmentation-oriented narrative; (b) offering a novel conceptualization of work–life balance as a demand–resource fit underlining the interplay between individuals and their embedded multilevel social systems which is particularly useful for systematic and multilevel analysis; and (c) providing a systematic analytical framework to disentangle the intricate contextualized relationships between the societal development and individuals' work–life experiences via four dimensions adapted from the modernization theory.

Keywords

Work–life balance, societal development, modernization theory, exploratory qualitative research, China

5.1 Introduction

The concept of work–life balance is historically constructed (Connell, 2005) and therefore, subject to change in response to significant societal flux. Dating back to the 1960s, the emergence and rapid growth of work–life balance research was embedded in the particular Western contexts of Industrial Revolutions (Naithani, 2010), postwar economic boom (Baily & Kirkegaard, 2004), labor movement (Owen, 1976; Whaples, 1990), welfare state expansion (Obinger & Schmitt, 2011), and women's liberation movement (Raja & Stein, 2014). This socio-historical lens in extant work–life balance literature has resulted in empirical research that tends to focus on middle-class professionals living and working in economically advanced, industrialized, and individualistic Western contexts (Y. Fan et al., 2021; Warren, 2015).

First, work–life balance research originated from the academic debate in the 1960s about how Industrial Revolutions segregated work from family through creating temporal boundaries of fixed work schedules and spatial boundaries of fixed workspaces (Naithani, 2010). As a result of this historic backdrop and Western analytic thinking, a segmentation-oriented perspective has prevailed in the work–life balance literature, whereby scholars tend to treat work and life as two distinct segments and focus on the impact of one segment on the other (Grawitch et al., 2010; Le et al., 2020) rather than explore potential synergies *between* both. Second, researchers largely frame work–life balance as an "individual right" (G. A. Maxwell & McDougall, 2004, p. 379) or "necessity" (Bennis & Thomas, 2002, p. 174), tacitly premising that all individuals have the freedom to organize their work and personal lives and are not limited by resource constraints other than time and energy, such as financial strain (Warren, 2015, 2017). Third, work–life balance literature is characterized by a tendency of "non-work resource protectionism" that emphasizes pursuing a higher quality of life but devalues the meaning of work (Grawitch et al., 2010, p. 136). Fourth,

extant research has predominantly focused on organizational-level antecedents and individual-level outcomes of work–life balance but largely ignored the role of societal-level factors in shaping organizational environments and individuals' work–life experiences (G. A. Maxwell & McDougall, 2004). Finally, the limited research that does explicitly address the macro socio-institutional environment, tends to offer a relatively static overview of the impact of societal contexts on individuals' work–life experiences without unravelling the historical changes that differentially impact intergenerational experience of work–life balance over time.

Crucially, extant work–life balance theories and practices may not even apply in contemporary Western societies given (but not limited to) the following drastic societal changes in recent years. First, the widespread use of information technology has blurred the temporal–spatial boundaries between work and personal lives, swaying the deep-rooted ideology of work–life segmentation and urging for alternative coping strategies, such as work–life integration (Amah & Ogah, 2021; Nam, 2014). Second, societal changes such as ageing populations, economic growth slowdown, and cyclical economic crises have adversely affected labor market conditions and the fiscal sustainability of generous welfare states (Baily & Kirkegaard, 2004; Barta, 2015; Meier & Werding, 2010). Such changes inevitably challenge the dominant neoliberal perspective that frames work–life balance as a personal responsibility but underplays its interactions with societal-, workplace-, and micro-level environments (Perreault & Power, 2021). Third, Western governments' and citizens' differential reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic have generated diverse socio-economic consequences that have unevenly impacted people's work–life experiences, which has challenged individualistic and neoliberal ideologies and renewed research interests in social inequality, social solidarity, and work–life balance (e.g., Kossek & Lee, 2020; Pérez-Nebra et al., 2021; Rodríguez-Rivero et al., 2020).

Western-born theories and practices have also heavily underpinned but potentially misfitted work–life balance research in non-Western societies which are characterized by vastly different levels of economic development, industrialization, social inequality, and social solidarity, generating a significant theory–practice gap (Y. Fan et al., 2021; Le et al., 2020). I utilized the *modernization theory* as the theoretical foundation given its relevance in capturing multifaceted dynamics of societal

development such as technological, economic, social, and cultural changes associated with industrialization processes (K. Kumar, 2020). Since the modernization theory is a macroscopic theory, I intentionally complemented it with Y. Fan et al.'s (2021) *systematic and multilevel analytical framework of work–life balance support* in order to map connections between macro-level societal dynamics and micro-level work–life experiences. This in turn enabled the contextualization of interactions *between* individuals' personal demands and resources *and* environmental demands and resources from societal-, workplace-, and micro-level social systems.

Our research aims to bridge existing gaps in work–life balance literature by exploring how people's demands, resources, and work–life experiences transform as a (non-Western) society develops over time. China serves as an ideal research context given its rapid industrialization process driven by state-led economic, technological, social, and cultural societal changes in the past seven decades (1) developing from an agrarian to industrial and information society and (2) transforming from a state-planned economy to a socialist market economy that embraces marketization and globalization (Lu et al., 2008; Wen, 2012).

Our research makes three key contributions to the work–life balance literature. First, I propose a holistic perspective of work–life balance, whereby people (a) emphasize the harmony of work–life interdependence and synergy, (b) attach positive values to both work and non-work aspects, and (c) pursue an overall satisfactory life journey encompassing desirable work and non-work accomplishments throughout lifetime. Different from the dominant segmentation-oriented perspective of work–life balance (Grawitch et al., 2010) grounded in a short period of postwar prosperity from the 1940s to 1970s in Western societies (Baily & Kirkegaard, 2004; Naithani, 2010), my proposed holistic perspective considers China's modernization process, evolving from an agrarian to an industrial and information society.

Second, following this holistic perspective, I advance a systematic and multilevel conceptualization of work–life balance as a demand–resource fit in the interplay between individuals and their embedded multilevel social systems. In contrast to Western theories focusing primarily on the competing relationships *between* work *and* non-work roles (McGinnity, 2020), my conceptualization contends that conflict arises from the misfit *between* individuals' available resources *and* their desired outcomes of

fulfilling work and life demands, whereby both demands and resources might come from individuals per se and their embedded social systems.

Third, by incorporating the *modernization theory* into work–life balance research, I offer a systematic framework to disentangle the intricate contextualized relationships between societal development and individuals' work–life experiences via four key dimensions of modernization (i.e., economic development, industrialization, social inequality, and social solidarity). I contextualize the growing salience of work–life balance concerns as a by-product of modernization, which not only boosts the quantity and variety of resources but also upgrades people's demands from subsistence and survival to better quality of life, and raises their expectations for desirable work–life outcomes.

This paper begins with a review of the work–life balance literature and the modernization theory, followed by an articulation of my research methods. Based on findings from in-depth interviews, I discuss how China's modernization process via four dimensions transformed the society and shaped people's demands, resources, and work–life experiences in 1949–2019.

5.2 Contextualizing Research on Work–Life Balance

In this section, I first probe into how the emergence of work–life balance research might be circumstanced by unique Western contexts. Then I situate the work–life balance research in the Chinese context. Finally, I introduce the multilevel and systematic theoretical framework which I use to contextualize the conceptualization of work–life balance in the current study.

5.2.1 Revisiting and challenging the Western-dominated discourse of work–life balance

Since its burgeoning in the United States in the 1960s, work–life balance research has been flourishing worldwide and has increasingly incurred criticism for its predominant focus on economically advanced and industrialized Western societies (Chandra, 2012; Y. Fan et al., 2021; Rajan-Rankin, 2016). In line with this critique, I revisit the historical contexts in which work–life balance research emerged and I

challenge that work–life balance is not universally essential for all humankind; rather, it is a luxury granted by economically advanced and industrialized societies in recent decades.

Regardless of work–family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), spillover (Pleck, 1977; Staines, 1980; Zedeck & Mosier, 1990), crossover (Bakker et al., 2009), or boundary (Ashforth et al., 2000; Bulger et al., 2007; Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996) theories, Western scholars are inclined to conceptualize work–life balance under the conventional premise of the explicit segmentation between work and non-work roles and focus on the positive or negative impact of one segment on the other (Grawitch et al., 2010; S. Lewis et al., 2007). This deep-seated premise embodies *analytic* style of thinking that dominates Western societies and emphasizes the deconstruction of a complex whole into multiple relatively isolated and simplified segments (de Oliveira & Nisbett, 2017). Despite the growing salience of positive perspectives of work–life interface (e.g., work–life enrichment) as a recent trend of work–life balance research (Field & Chan, 2018; Ellen Ernst Kossek, Baltes, et al., 2011), the assumption of a zero-sum game (i.e., dichotomy) between work and non-work roles still prevails and persists in the extant literature (Friedman et al., 1998; McGinnity, 2020; ten Brummelhuis & van der Lippe, 2010). Consequently, empirical studies have largely focused on seeking solutions to reduce conflict caused by work–life integration (particularly work-to-life spillover) (Chang et al., 2010; Greenblatt, 2002; McGinnity, 2020) under the tacit assumption that "work is a necessary evil to support non-work activities" and personal lives should not be compromised for work (Grawitch et al., 2010, p. 129).

This persistent and prevalent preference for work–life segmentation in both research and practice among Western societies can be traced back to the historical contexts from which work–life balance research originated in the 1960s (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1965). In fact, a clear-cut circumscription between work and non-work lives was a by-product of the early stage of industrialization and could only be maintained for a relatively short period, starting from when (1) manufacturing jobs segregated work from family both temporally (e.g., scheduled working hours) and spatially (e.g., factories) which was vastly different from subsistence farming based on the integration and co-location of work and family lives in an agrarian society (Naithani, 2010;

Rapoport & Rapoport, 1965); and ending when (2) work–life boundaries have largely blurred as a result of the widespread use of information technology in an information society (Nam, 2014).

Moreover, many people had little time for family and leisure as they subsisted on excessive working hours and low wages until recent decades. Against the backdrop of the Industrial Revolutions in the 18th and 19th centuries, manual laborers in the West, including children, were engaged in "sweat work" for up to 12–18 hours daily, six days a week for sheer survival (Hopkins, 1982; Pollard, 1963). Fueled by technological advancements, labor movements, increased female participation in the labor market, and compulsory schooling, Western countries largely reduced child employment during the late 1800s and 1960s (Cunningham, 2000; Cunningham & Viazzo, 1996; Toniolo & Vecchi, 2007) and gradually mandated a week of 40–48 working hours during the 1920s–1960s (Lee et al., 2007; J. C. Messenger, 2004), spurring greater demands for quality time to spend with family and on oneself.

The work–life balance research just emerged in the 1960s when a work–life segmentation approach was feasible and people had more time and money for family and leisure given their augmented productivity and higher wage rates as a result of the postwar economic boom and industrial upgrading among Western societies (Baily & Kirkegaard, 2004; Owen, 1976; Whaples, 1990). Notably, it was also a time when Westerners benefited greatly from massive welfare state expansion (i.e., increased state support for work–life balance) driven by escalated regime competition between the capitalist and socialist camps during the Cold War (Obinger & Schmitt, 2011). Although relevant research sprouted in the 1960s, the concept of work–life balance had not been popularized in the West until the women's liberation movement in the 1980s boosted female employment and promoted organizational family-friendly initiatives (Raja & Stein, 2014).

Hence, the growing salience and popularity of work–life balance research and practices in recent decades have largely been circumstanced by given societal-, workplace-, and micro-level changes associated with the Western industrialization process as mentioned above. However, limited research has contextualized the conceptualization of work–life balance in relation to the societal development manifested in multilevel contextual changes. Moreover, these Western segmentation-

oriented concepts, theories, and practices of work–life balance initially formed in a prosperous and industrialized society may not apply to the vast populations who work and live in an agrarian, information, or de-industrialized society, or those who are trapped in poverty. Because such societies cannot guarantee a clear-cut boundary between work and non-work issues and/or afford generous state and organizational provisions for promoting work–life balance (Goodman & Kaplan, 2019; Nam, 2014).

5.2.2 Situating the work–life balance research in the Chinese context

In recent years, China has gained increasing attention from work–life balance scholars given its unique economic, social, and cultural contexts. Scholars have found that the traditional Western conceptualization of work–life balance may not apply to China and this variation has largely been attributed to certain cultural differences between Chinese and Western societies (e.g., Russell, 2008; Xiao and Cooke, 2012; Zhang et al., 2014).

Distinct from the Western conceptualization of work–life balance as the boundary management (particularly the segmentation) of work and life (Grawitch et al., 2010), Chinese people conventionally adopt an integration approach that reflects their holistic and dialectical Taoism culture (M.-J. Chen, 2001; M. Zhang et al., 2014). Taoism culture comprehends interdependent and balanced opposites as a whole (M.-J. Chen, 2001). Therefore, contrasting with the Western perspective of work and life as conflicting and incompatible rivals, Chinese tend to view work and life as harmony opposites that complement and facilitate each other (Russell, 2008) and hence they are more tolerant of conflict caused by work–life spillover (M. Zhang et al., 2014). Influenced by their holistic culture and long-term orientation, Chinese people regard work as an imperative means to realize their ultimate goal of enhancing their families' wealth, status, and welfare (N. Yang et al., 2000). Hence, Chinese employees "prioritize work for family" since they believe their temporary sacrifice of family involvement to their increased work commitment will bring about greater benefits to their families in a long term (Zhang et al., 2014, p. 15).

The extant literature stresses the enduring and imperceptible impact of Confucianism on Chinese people's work and lives. Confucian collectivism does not go against individuals' self-interests. Rather, it relies on the shared belief that

individuals' survival and personal interests are maximized through collective efforts towards collective goals, generating greater benefits to all the members; such benefits cannot be achieved by isolated individuals without collaboration. The temporary constraint on individuals' partial self-interests towards collective goals is deemed to produce better outcomes for all the members in a long term (L. Yang et al., 2018). For instance, Chinese soldiers and civilians' devotion or even self-sacrifice during wars against invasion and colonization laid the foundation for China's long-term independence, peace, and economic growth as well as better living standards for younger generations. Therefore, Chinese people's work–life decisions and experiences should be comprehended and interpreted given their membership in surrounding social systems, such as their families and organizations, rather than be framed and constructed as a matter of independent personal choice and responsibility which prevails in Western research (Chandra, 2012; S. Lewis et al., 2007). In line with this argument, M. Zhang et al. (2014) found that Chinese people are more likely to make work–life decisions at the family rather than the individual level.

Furthermore, Confucian paternalism reinforces this collectivist social norm that individuals prioritize collective goals of their families, organizations, and countries over their individual self-interest (M. Zhang et al., 2014). Drawing on a parallel between the patriarchal family and higher-level social collectives (e.g., the state), Confucian paternalism embodies reciprocal obligations between individuals and collectives in that individuals respect and obey the leaders of their families, clans, organizations, and the state on the condition that these leaders are committed to taking good care of their followers' interests and wellbeing (Farh et al., 2008). A good illustration is that under the planned economy, state-owned enterprises offered lifelong employment and employee welfare covering almost all the aspects and stages of life, such as housing, healthcare, childcare, and schools within a few minutes' walk from the workplace and maternity leave and pension. In return, employees were highly committed to their organizations throughout their lifetime (Russell, 2008).

Although the anti-feudal revolution and the feminist movement throughout the 20th century have undercut these patriarchal traditions and transformed Chinese culture, Confucian paternalism and collectivism still have an extensive impact on contemporary China's supervisor–subordinate relationship, gender ideology, and

eldercare responsibilities. For example, employees may hesitate to decline overtime work imposed by their supervisors. Male breadwinners and female caregivers are still a typical Chinese family model. Elder people depend largely on their own offspring because of the legislation of filial piety by the Chinese Constitution, insufficient state and organizational support, and expensive private services for eldercare (Russell, 2008; Xiao & Cooke, 2012). However, some researchers argued that China's younger generations may hold work–life values distinctively different from their older generations, such as a stronger focus on self-actualization and *joie de vivre*, on account of modernization and Western cultural infiltration (J. Sun & Wang, 2010). It is reasonable to expect that China's rapid development from an impoverished, agrarian, semi-feudal, and semi-colonial society to an industrial, information, and modern society within 70 years (Cai, 2019) might significantly change Chinese people's demands, resources, and work–life experiences.

Our research purpose of exploring work–life dynamics given individuals' lived experiences of China's societal development over time was grounded in the *holistic thinking* from Chinese culture that stresses the importance of analyzing the interrelationships, changes, and development of specific parts in relation to the whole on account of both historical and contemporary contexts (de Oliveira & Nisbett, 2017; Lian, 2002). Despite the growing popularity of studying non-Western contexts and perspectives, I noticed that a multilevel and systematic consideration of both contemporary context and historical development has been rare. Scholars have predominantly applied Western concepts and used cross-sectional or short-term longitudinal designs in the context of contemporary China and focused on organizational or personal antecedents or outcomes of individuals' work–life conflict or enrichment. An exception is Xiao and Cooke's (2012) qualitative study, which provided a comprehensive but relatively static sketch of how the state, the employer, and the individual employee deal with work–life balance issues in contemporary China without tracing the historical development. Although Russell (2008) showed how China's economic transition from a state-planned economy to a socialist market economy potentially changed some governmental and organizational support for work–life balance, this study focused primarily on China's economic development but overlooked other important dimensions of societal development, such as

industrialization, social inequality, and social solidarity.

To address these gaps, my research aims to build on their findings and contribute to the literature by contextualizing the work–life dynamics on account of individuals' lived experiences about China's societal development via four dimensions and offering a more holistic view of work–life balance. Next, I elaborate on how Y. Fan et al.'s (2021) multilevel and systematic framework can be used to disentangle work–life dynamics encompassing people's demands, resources, and work–life experiences.

5.2.3 A systematic and multilevel framework for contextualizing work–life dynamics

Since people's work–life experiences change significantly as society develops over time, we need to keep our knowledge of work–life interface up to date by recognizing the important role of societal development in shaping people's demands, resources, and work–life experiences over time, which has not yet been sufficiently captured by the extant literature. I draw on Y. Fan et al.'s (2021) socio-ecological systems framework of work–life balance support because it serves as a good systematic and multilevel analytical tool for situating individuals' demands, resources, and work–life experiences in interaction with the broader social environment encompassing societal-, workplace-, and micro-level social systems, fitting my research purpose of contextualizing work–life balance well.

By integrating the socio-ecological systems perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the social support literature, and the resource theories (Grawitch et al., 2010; Hobfoll, 1989), Y. Fan et al. (2021) contended that individuals' work–life experiences interact with their multilevel environment as individuals utilize their personal and environmental resources to cope with their personal and environmental demands. *Work–life balance* is achieved when individuals perceive that they have sufficient resources to fulfil work and non-work demands up to their expectations. In contrast, insufficient resources or ineffective resource allocation for resolving demands as expected would cause work–life conflict. *Demands* cover personal demands and environmental demands. Environmental demands (e.g., key performance indicators and children) can be internalized as personal demands (e.g., work and childcare tasks) that require individuals' resource investments. *Resources* include personal resources (e.g., time, energy, and finances) and environmental resources (e.g., family-friendly

policies and domestic help). Environmental resources may facilitate effective personal resource allocation for coping with their demands.

According to Schmidt (2014), modernization spurs systemic and multilevel changes that are embedded in the ongoing interactions between demands and resources across multiple levels of interdependent social systems, which may shape and transform individuals' work–life experiences over time (Y. Fan et al., 2021). For instance, as a result of rapid industrialization and market-oriented reforms, China's high-speed economic growth over the last four decades (i.e., societal-level demand and resource) has on the one hand, augmented individuals' disposable income (i.e., personal resource) (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020a) but on the other hand, resulted in fierce market competition (i.e., workplace-level demand) (Morrison, 2019) and work intensification (i.e., personal demand) (H. Zhao & Wang, 2019).

Specifically, the *micro-level* systems include individuals and their interpersonal networks such as family members, friends, and neighbors. The *workplace-level* systems comprise individuals (e.g., supervisors, team members, and customers) and environments (e.g., offices, organizations, and industries) related to paid labor. The *societal-level* systems encompass broader physical, institutional, economic, political, and cultural contexts of social entities outside the interpersonal networks and the workplace, such as communities, markets, schools, trade unions, and governments. There are intersections between the micro- and workplace-level systems (e.g., family business); both the micro- and workplace-level systems are nested within larger societal-level systems.

Y. Fan et al. (2021) guided the data coding and analytical processes because they offered a good analytical framework for systematically synthesizing dispersed and piecemeal evidence about the demand–resource and person–environment interactions around work–life interface across multilevel social systems. From this perspective, I can provide a more holistic understanding of how societal development transforms demands and resources from multilevel environment and reshapes individuals' work–life experiences over time. Next, I articulate the theoretical foundation for disentangling the relationships between societal development and work–life balance.

5.3 Linking Modernization Theory to Work–Life Balance Research

In addition to Y. Fan et al.'s (2021) multilevel and systematic framework, I integrate key insights from the *modernization theory* (e.g., Durkheim, 1893; Parsons, 1964; Wen, 2012) to interpret how the societal development over time impacts work–life dynamics via four dimensions of modernization (i.e., economic development, industrialization, social inequality, and social solidarity). Then I briefly revisit how China progressed in these four dimensions of modernization during 1949–2019, setting the context in which my research on individuals' lived experiences of work–life balance and societal development is grounded in.

5.3.1 Probing into work–life dynamics via four dimensions of modernization

Modernization can be defined as the process of societal development from an agrarian to industrial society with evolutionary, systematic, and long-term changes in economic, technological, social, and cultural aspects (K. Kumar, 2020; Tipps, 1973). I integrate key insights from different perspectives of the modernization theory to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how the modernization process encompassing multifaceted societal changes may trickle down the multilevel social systems and ultimately influence individuals' work–life experiences.

Drawing on lessons from the Global North, the *evolutionary* (e.g., Parsons, 1964) and *structural–functionalist* (e.g., Lerner, 1958) perspectives view modernization as a country's evolutionary progress from a traditional to modern society and contrast characteristics of traditional versus modern societies. Compared to traditional agrarian societies, modern societies are characterized by higher levels of *industrialization* and *economic development* that enable increased productivity, higher value-added production, and improved living standards of overall society. These economic and technological progresses from traditional to modern societies jointly empower individuals to earn more money within shorter working hours and grant more time and financial resources to spend on their families and themselves (J. Messenger, 2018). Historically, the same context laid the empirical ground for the emergence of work–life balance research in the West during the 1960s; however, very limited research has addressed the impact of industrialization and economic development on work–life

balance.

According to the *Marxist* (e.g., Marx, 1887) and *cost-transferring* (e.g., Wen, 2012) perspectives, the modernization process may benefit people's work and lives unevenly due to the prevalent and persistent *social inequality* between genders, regions, social classes, and ethnic groups within a society (K.-D. Kim, 2017; Walby, 2000). Furthermore, the *dependency* (e.g., Frank, 1966) and *world-systems* (e.g., Wallerstein, 1974) perspectives attribute the uneven modernization process between the Global North and Global South countries to the imperial and colonial history and the current international division of labor, whereby the Global North countries focus on and dominate high value-added, capital-, knowledge-, and technology-intensive production, while the Global South societies rely heavily on low value-added, labor-intensive production and raw material extraction. Consequently, employees in the Global South usually work longer hours but have lower income and poorer living standards than their counterparts in the Global North (Bick et al., 2018).

Moreover, the Western mode of modernization via colonization cannot be replicated nowadays and instead, China and many other Global South countries have to accumulate capital for funding industrialization by extracting surplus value from their domestic labor force, selling natural resources, and/or relying heavily on foreign debts (Wen, 2007, 2012; Wen et al., 2011). It is difficult for the Global South countries to catch up with the level of industrialization and economic development of their Global North counterparts given their longstanding barriers in physical and human capital accumulation and technological innovation (Arias & Wen, 2015; J. Y. Lin, 2010). In brief, the social inequality structurally embedded within a society *and* between more and less developed societies, respectively, is likely to engender diversified work–life experiences and perceptions among different sub-populations *and* across different societies. But very few research has captured how changes in social inequality during modernization shape individual perceptions and experiences of work–life interface.

According to Durkheim (1893), modernization also transforms the type of *social solidarity*, namely ties that bind and integrate individuals into a society, which spurs the societal development in terms of cultural and social changes. A traditional society is characterized by *mechanical solidarity*, whereby individuals unite in the close bond

of clan and kindship or other social relationships (e.g., friends, colleagues, and neighbors), share homogenous beliefs, values, and norms, and favor collective efforts to realize common goals and interests. In contrast, a modern society is bond by *organic solidarity*, whereby individuals interdepend on and complement each other through their specialized division of labor rather than strong social relationships; individuals become more atomized (i.e., socially isolated) and diversified, hold heterogeneous beliefs, values, and norms, and prioritize individual pursuits over collective goals. Here I do not recommend a strict dichotomization of social solidarity because most societies hover between the two end points of *mechanical* versus *organic* solidarity. The transformation of social solidarity may also reshape people's work–life experiences in that people seek more support for reconciling work–life demands from their personal networks in a strong familial culture (e.g., Spain), while individuals depend more on public welfare and employer support in an atomized society such as Sweden (Annink, 2017).

Combining multiple perspectives of the modernization theory, I postulate that a country's modernization process may transform people's demands and resources from multilevel social systems and shape individual work–life experiences over time via four major dimensions: (1) economic development; (2) industrialization; (3) social inequality; and (4) social solidarity. Next, I attempt to set up the context of China's modernization progress from these dimensions in the past 70 years so that the readers could have a better understanding of the context of the current study before proceeding to my proposed research question.

5.3.2 Setting the research context of China's modernization progress during 1949–2019

China's modernization process comprised two major stages. In the state-planned economy stage (i.e., Stage 1: 1949–1978), China was an agrarian society characterized by mechanical solidarity and low-level economic development, industrialization, and social inequality. In contrast, China made rapid progress of economic development and industrialization in its socialist market economy stage (i.e., Stage 2: 1979–2019), transforming into a middle-income, industrialized society with increased social inequality and characterized better by organic solidarity. I provide a more detailed

historical overview of China's modernization process during 1949–2019 via the four dimensions of economic development, industrialization, social inequality, and social solidarity in Appendix C. Next, I elaborate on how China progressed in four dimensions of modernization, respectively.

5.3.2.1 Economic development

China emerged as a typical low-income economy in Stage 1 with its GNP per capita "ranked 175th among 188 economies with available statistics" in 1978 (Zhou and Hu, 2021, p. 179). The Stage 1 of 1949–1978 was featured by the state-planned economy, whereby the central government (1) established the state or collective ownership of the means of production (e.g., land and minerals), (2) planned and executed administrative commands about the investment, production, and distribution of goods and services, (3) provided public goods and services to guarantee a subsistence standard of living for rural and urban populations, and (4) extracted surplus value from the entire workforce to accumulate capitals for funding industrialization given China's capital and resource scarcity and labor abundance (J. Y. Lin & Yu, 2015; Wen, 2007, 2012). International trade and economic development were extremely difficult for China given its awful geopolitical environment. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, China joined the socialist camp and was imposed an economic blockade by the West since 1949 until the American president Richard Nixon visited China in 1972 (Wen, 2012). The socialist camp also shut the door for trading with China due to the broken political relations between China and the Soviet Union in the 1960s as a result of their disputes over China's territorial and military sovereignty and ideological differences (Wen, 2012).

In Stage 1, China enforced centralized systems of labor allocation, wage setting, and commodity distribution. The Chinese government assigned jobs to urban people and tertiary education graduates according to national strategic demands while guaranteeing them lifetime employment and a relatively equal distribution of wages, basic commodities, and public welfare at a subsistence level (Lu et al., 2008). Also, China's economy was dominated by public ownership, whereby all the organizations were state- or collective-owned. As required by the state, these organizations provided a wide range of public welfare in their workplace-affiliated residential communities,

such as housing and canteens, to ensure employees could utilize these services and amenities to meet most of their basic personal life demands in the vicinity of their workplace (Lu et al., 2008).

In Stage 2 of the socialist market economy during 1979–2019, China underwent economic reforms of marketization, whereby the market has played a major role in rationalizing resource allocation while the state intervention has been used to correct market failures since the 1978 "reform and opening" economic reforms (Wen, 2012). The socialist market economy is a mixed economy with the dominance of public ownership in conjunction with diverse forms of non-public ownership (Y. Zhang, 2018). Moreover, China seized the opportunity of globalization and achieved economic upgrading as a result of its open-door policy in 1978 and its participation in the World Trade Organization in 2001. As a result of rapid economic growth over three decades, China entered the lower-middle-income group in 1997 and achieved the higher-middle-income status in 2010 (World Bank, 2020b). In 2019, China's GNP per capita ranked 71st among 192 economies with available statistics (World Bank, 2020a).

Chinese citizens widely enjoyed China's explosive economic growth and improved living standards during 1949–2019. Their per capita disposable income had a nearly 60-fold growth from 49.7 CNY (Chinese yuan) in 1949 to 28,200 CNY in 2018, with an average annual growth rate of 6.1% factoring in inflation (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2019b). Moreover, Chinese people's average life expectancy surged from 35 years in 1949 (China's State Council Information Office, 2016) to 77.3 years in 2019 (National Health Commission of China, 2020).

The central government has implemented the marketization reforms in conjunction with many other reforms in different industries in order to level up China's global competitiveness to that of most advanced economies. These reforms have not only improved people's wealth and living conditions but also increased people's work and parenting demands because both competitions at work and at school have been intensified. For instance, academics have been subjected to increased job insecurity as public universities started adopting the US tenure-track system of academic employment in the most recent years (B. Li & Shen, 2020; Xu, 2021). Furthermore, China's ongoing curriculum reforms and rapid expansion of higher education enrolment since the 1999 higher education expansion policy have also increased

academics' workload because the student–teacher ratio of higher education rocketed from 9.7 in 1999 to 16.2 in 2004 and has fluctuated between 16–18 since 2005 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2004, 2007, 2020a). The gross higher education enrollment rate was expanded substantially from 9.8% in 1998 to 51.6% in 2019, rendering a transition from elite to mass higher education in China (Xinhua, 2019a, 2019b, 2020).

Although China has achieved remarkable economic growth at a high speed since 1978, the growth curve has flattened in recent years, rendering incremental improvement in people's wage earnings and living standards in contrast with a leap in the early years of economic reforms. Hence, Chinese people have encountered a stagnation in the improvement of living standards and become disappointed that hard work does not pay as much returns as in the past. Under this context, "involution" (i.e., "内卷", a Chinese word literally meaning "curling inwards")—a jargon grounded in the modernization literature, has become a Chinese internet buzzword to describe the phenomenon of prevalent rat race in parenting, education, and employment with escalating resource investments but diminishing returns, resulting in lower life satisfaction and higher anxiety in recent years (M. Zhou, 2020). The *involution* thesis, which was first proposed by Goldenweiser (1936) and further popularized by Geertz (1963), refers to the stagnation of societal development or failed industrialization as a result of lacking key resources (e.g., land and capital) or breakthroughs in technological, economic, and other aspects (Gilman, 2002; Little, 2010; M. Zhou, 2020). In the Chinese context, the concept of "involution" has been extended to the inefficient complication and intensification of internal competition characterized by escalated resource investments but stable or even diminishing returns (P. C. Huang, 1990; Liu & Qiu, 2004; Yu et al., 2020). An illustration of "educational involution" is that Chinese parents have spent more time and money on parenting and education in order to secure a place for their children at university but the wage returns to higher education and the chance of education-driven upward mobility have diminished in recent years (Kang et al., 2019; Mok & Wu, 2016).

5.3.2.2 Industrialization

China has achieved its modernization primarily through phased industrial

upgrading from lower to higher value-added production. China's expanded industrial production capacity, especially in Stage 2, improved Chinese people's overall working and living conditions by boosting their wealth and bringing about greater quantity, variety, and quality of public infrastructures and private products and services for coping with work–life demands (Wen, 2012).

Q. Huang (2018a) categorized China's industrialization process into four major phases based on a comprehensive evaluation of industrialization indices. Stage 1 as the *pre-industrialization phase* (1949–1978) was characterized by (a) the primitive capital accumulation for funding industrialization by extracting surplus value from the entire workforce (particularly farmers), (b) the Soviet-style state-led development of heavy and defense industries given national security concerns, and (c) the long-term shortage in the market supply of commodities due to the central planning system and underdeveloped light industries (Q. Huang, 2018a; Wen, 2012). Hence, people's living standards remained at subsistence levels in Stage 1.

Stage 2 (1979–2019) can be split into three phases of industrialization which reflects China's orderly industrial upgrading from lower to higher value-added production. The *initial phase of industrialization* (1979–1999) was marked by (a) the adjustment of the imbalanced industrial structure between advanced heavy industry and underdeveloped light industry as well as (b) a surge of labor-intensive industry. The *middle phase of industrialization* (2000–2010) was featured by (a) growing dominance of capital-intensive industry and (b) rapid industrial growth driven by heavy industry and industrial structure upgrading. In the *late phase of industrialization* (2011–present), the industrial sector was gradually dominated by technology-intensive industry with (a) rapid growth in high-technology industries and (b) accelerated informatization of society. China was expected to realize basic industrialization by 2020 and complete full industrialization by 2030 (Q. Huang, 2018b).

Statistics also support that agricultural production and farmers, respectively, dominated China's GDP contribution and workforce composition in Stage 1, whilst the Chinese society underwent rapid industrialization and urbanization in Stage 2. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (1999, 2020a), China's primary, manufacturing, and service sectors, respectively, accounted for 50.5%, 20.9%, and 28.6% of its GDP in 1952 whereas these three sectors took up 27.7%, 47.7%, and

24.6% of GDP in 1978 and 7.1%, 39.0%, and 53.9% of GDP in 2019. However, China's composition of labor force did not undergo significant structural transformation until the 1978 economic reforms. The percentages of economically active population working in the primary, manufacturing, and service sectors, respectively, were 83.5%, 7.4%, and 9.1% in 1952 while accounting for 70.5%, 17.3%, and 12.2% in 1978 and 25.1%, 27.5%, and 47.4% in 2019 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 1999, 2020a).

The use of home appliances gradually gained popularity in the 1980s and became prevalent among Chinese households in the 1990s against the backdrop of China's booming industrial productivity, marketization reforms, and expanding international trade (Lu et al., 2008). The percentage of Chinese households with television(s) rose from 1.9% in 1980 to 53.8% in 1990 and 89.0% in 2004 (World Bank, 2008). In 1999, 2009, and 2019, internet users accounted for 0.7%, 28.9%, and 54.3% of Chinese population, respectively; every hundred Chinese people owned 3.4, 54.9, and 120.4 sets of mobile phones, respectively (World Bank, 2020c). These technological innovations may bring about both convenience—e.g., reduced demands for heavy manual labor in paid employment and household chores—and new challenges to people's work and personal life.

5.3.2.3 Social inequality

The 1950 Land Reform and the state-planned economy in Stage 1 had reconstructed China's semi-feudal and semi-colonial society with huge social inequalities into a more egalitarian modern society (Wen, 2012). In Stage 1, social equality was promoted as a salient socialist ideology and the wealth was concentrated in the hands of the state as the initial investment to commence industrialization whereas a relatively equal amount of basic commodities and public welfare (e.g., housing) were distributed to all the Chinese citizens at a minimum subsistence level (Wen, 2012). In contrast, the market-oriented economic reforms not only widely boosted individuals' wealth but also rapidly expanded the income gaps and inequalities in access to employment, education, and medical resources between urban–rural residents, regions, industries, and genders in Stage 2 (Iwasaki & Ma, 2020; Yuan et al., 2020; W. Zhang, 2016). The Gini coefficient of Chinese residents' disposable income

per capita surged from 0.235 corresponding to relative equality in 1955 (Wroblowský & Yin, 2016) to 0.304 representing a reasonable income gap in 1978 (J. Chen et al., 2019) and 0.465 denoting high income disparity in 2019, with a peak at 0.491 in 2008 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020b).

Meanwhile, China's social mobility differed between the two stages. First, the intergenerational educational mobility was higher in Stage 1 than in Stage 2 because some radical education reforms in Stage 1 largely expanded the access to education for underprivileged people, especially farmers, workers, and soldiers while the restoration of a selective, exam-oriented education system and market mechanisms reinforced intergenerational transmission of education in Stage 2 (Y. Chen et al., 2015). Influenced by traditional values and historical experiences, Chinese people place great emphasis on, and invest substantial time and money in, education in order to improve their own and offspring's socio-economic status (Wu, 2017). Hence, the change in educational mobility may significantly influence people's parenting demands, which account for a great proportion of working parents' non-work demands.

Second, the intergenerational class mobility was high in Stage 1 because all the private properties were nationalized and redistributed to citizens relatively equally under the state-planned economy, removing "both material obstacles to upward mobility for the poor and financial protections against downward mobility for the rich" (Zhou and Xie, 2019, p. 1813). In contrast, the class mobility declined over time in Stage 2 because the market-oriented reforms reinstated the private ownership and heritage, which strengthened the intergenerational transmission of socio-economic resources (X. Zhou & Xie, 2019). Notably, China's class mobility is still higher than that of mature capitalist countries, such as the UK, Germany, and Sweden (X. Zhou & Xie, 2019). The changes in class mobility may also shape Chinese people's parenting demands as they highly value intergenerational transmission via investing time, energy, and money in their children.

Third, the mobility between agricultural and non-agricultural sectors resembled a U-shaped curve with high values at both ends and a bottom value in the early 1960s because the rural-to-urban migration was largely restrained by China's national household registration (i.e., *Huji*) system and strict administration of population flows during 1958–1978 for the purpose of avoiding overpopulated cities and insufficient

agricultural production (Young, 2013; X. Zhou & Xie, 2019). This rural–urban occupational mobility soared sharply in Stage 2 attributed to rapid industrialization and urbanization and relieved administrative control of rural–urban migration (Y. Li, 2020; X. Zhou & Xie, 2019). Moreover, China's remarkable economic growth and industrial upgrading in Stage 2 has also rendered a large-scale occupational upgrading and class advancement among Chinese population, creating greater chances for upward than downward mobility (Y. Li, 2020). This occupational mobility shapes people's decisions around employment, parenting, education, and division of household labor, which are important for work–life balance.

As repeatedly highlighted in the literature, China's unique *Huji* system institutionalizes the intergenerational transmission of socio-economic status and poses a prime barrier to social mobility in both Stage 1 and Stage 2 (e.g., Chen et al., 2015; Li, 2020; Zhou and Xie, 2019). Specifically, the Huji system registers an individual's permanent residence and demographic information, such as immediate family relations, in a legal document called *Hukou* (i.e., registered permanent residence) identification. As an ascribed factor, a person's Hukou usually inherits their parents' or grandparents' place of residence. Individuals' eligibility for local public services and social welfare, such as education and employment opportunities, healthcare, and public housing, are confined to their catchment areas of Hukou and cannot be transferred across locations (Russell, 2008). Since the urban socio-economic resources are much better than those of rural areas and mainly entitle to local Hukou holders, the acquisition of an urban Hukou is a prime driver for rural people to advance their socio-economic status (X. Wang, 2020; J. Zhang et al., 2019). However, one could only change the urban–rural type and/or the catchment area of Hukou through tertiary and technical education attainment, military service, or limited urban employment opportunities in Stage 1 (Lu et al., 2008). In Stage 2, this change can be made by satisfying a wider range of high-standard requirements in employment, education, marriage, housing, investment, and/or other aspects (J. Zhang et al., 2019).

Regarding gender inequality, China has witnessed increased gender wage gap but reduced gender education inequality from Stage 1 to Stage 2. According to large-scale meta-analyses, China had generally low-level but gradually widening gender wage differentials during 1978–2018 as a result of market-oriented reforms (Iwasaki & Ma,

2020), in contrast to most developed countries with a medium-level but slowly narrowing gender pay gap in recent decades (Terada-Hagiwara et al., 2018; Weichselbaumer & Winter-Ebmer, 2005). Also, China's gender wage differentials were greater in the private sector and rural areas than in the public sector and urban areas (Iwasaki & Ma, 2020). However, the educational gap has narrowed over time—specifically, between 1981 and 2019, the percentage of educational attainment of illiteracy, primary, secondary, and tertiary education between male *versus* female populations aged 15 and above, respectively, changed from 7.58% *vs.* 25.51%, 36.76% *vs.* 31.46%, 47.55% *vs.* 37.97%, and 8.11% *vs.* 5.06% in 1981 to 1.93% *vs.* 5.39%, 12.75% *vs.* 15.35%, 47.56% *vs.* 47.93%, and 37.09% *vs.* 31.33% in 2019 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 1999, 2020a).

5.3.2.4 Social solidarity

Applying Durkheim's (1893) concept of social solidarity to the current research context, in Stage 1, China was a traditional, agrarian society typically featured by mechanical solidarity that integrates individuals into the society by close social bonds, homogeneous values and beliefs, and collective goals and shared interests. In Stage 2, rapid industrialization has transformed China into a modern, industrial society which has increasingly exhibited characteristics of organic solidarity, which unifies atomized individuals with weaker social bonds, heterogeneous values and beliefs, and diversified personal interests into the society through specialized division of labor and commonly accepted rules (e.g., laws and contracts). Moreover, the government's implementation of "one-child policy" (that required every household to give birth to one child at most except special cases, such as ethnic minorities) during 1980–2015 downsized extended families to nuclear families, shifted the center of families from parents to children, weakened the paternalist culture, and accelerated the atomization of the Chinese society (Feng et al., 2014; Lam, 2013; F. Wang et al., 2017).

The transformation of social solidarity in China hinges on its unique historical contexts. When China's new regime was founded in 1949, Chinese people shared collective aspirations of living a peaceful and affluent life because they had suffered from Western colonization and imperialist wars for over a century since the 1840s. This new regime gained its legitimacy and mass support because it met Chinese

people's collective aspirations by (1) defending China's sovereignty, (2) enhancing social equality, (3) laying foundation for economic recovery and industrialization, and (4) restoring public order and security (Lu et al., 2008; Wen, 2012). As a result, Chinese citizens generally trusted in and collaborated with the government in order to realize their collective goals of establishing a peaceful and affluent society while narrowing the multi-faceted gaps between China and developed countries (Soonhee Kim, 2016; Lu et al., 2008). These shared aspirations and collective efforts between the Chinese government and citizens persisted and prevailed in the society across multiple generations and throughout the 70-year history of modern China.

This historical background along with Chinese traditional culture of Confucian paternalism and collectivism cultivated China's peculiar individual–state relations. In contrast with the dominant Western perspective that underlines the contesting relationship between the civil society and the state (Woods, 1992), Chinese culture tends to construe them as indispensable parts of the integral society and emphasizes more on win-win collaborations and reciprocal obligations between the state and its citizens, between the organization and its employees, between the community and its members, and between parents and children (Farh et al., 2008; Han, 2020). The paternalist culture advocates that individuals follow the instructions of their leaders and work towards their collective goals on condition that the leaders of this collective are committed to serve the overall interests of their followers. China's integration of paternalist culture and socialist ideology was best illustrated by its state-planned economy in Stage 1, whereby the state (and the state- or collective-owned organizations) provided extensive public goods and services to support individuals and their families' basic life demands and in return, individuals prioritized work and committed themselves to achieving national or organizational goals.

Drawing on these dimensions from the modernization theory and Y. Fan et al.'s (2021) multilevel and systematic framework of work–life balance support, my research aims to address the following question:

> *How did individuals' lived experiences and perceptions about China's modernization process during 1949–2019 transform their demands, resources, and work–life experiences?*

5.4 Methods

This qualitative study is based on 60.87 hours of semi-structured interviews with 51 Chinese intellectuals. As I was interested in tracking and comparing individual perceptions and lived experiences about their micro-, workplace-, and societal-level changes over time, I adopted a purposeful sampling method and recruited participants according to my pre-set criteria of gender, age, and family structure. I contacted interviewees from academic networks and asked them to recommend potential participants who met my research criteria.

I selected 51 intellectuals in Beijing, the capital of China. Among these interviewees, 50.98% were female. In order to examine the *modernization theory* in the context of work–life balance research and cover relevant societal changes throughout 70-year history of People's Republic of China, I chose people from a wide range of age groups: 7 participants were 20–29 years old; 10 were 30–39 years old; 11 were 40–49 years old; 12 were 50–59 years old; and 11 were 60–90 years old. Different family structures were considered, including 30 only-child, 10 multi-children, one adopted, and one DINK (i.e., double income with no kids) families. Also, I covered participants who were married (84.31%), divorced (3.92%), and single with or without a dating partner (11.76%). Appendix D presents the characteristics of each participant in more detail.

I purposively recruited most interviewees from public universities and research institutions, including research, teaching, administrative staff and those who perform multiple roles for several reasons. First, the work demands and performance criteria of the academic institutions worldwide are largely similar (e.g., promotion based on publications in top journals), making my research more comparable to other studies on academics' work–life balance in vastly different national contexts (e.g., Antoshchuk and Gewinner, 2020; Toffoletti and Starr, 2016). Although farmers accounted for the vast majority of the Chinese population for a long time in history, the Chinese farmers' work demands in the Asiatic model of household-based subsistence and simple commodity farming are very different from their counterparts in the Anglo-American pattern of large-scale farming (e.g., the United States and Australia) and the European mode of small- and medium-scale farming due to huge differences in the demographics,

geographical environments, land ownerships, and levels of agricultural modernization (Wen, 2018; Wen et al., 2012; Q. F. Zhang & Donaldson, 2010). Therefore, I did not choose farmers for this study. Second, it is relatively easier to track historical changes of work–life experiences among academic and administrative staff in academic institutions because these occupations existed throughout the history of modern China (1949–2019) while many other occupations in manufacturing and service industries emerged recently (e.g., programmers) or became obsolete (e.g., telegraphers) in the modernization process of Chinese society. Also, my in-depth interviews focusing on a relatively homogenous sample with similar life trajectories can make individuals' work–life experiences more comparable across different generations and historical stages so as to better capture and elucidate the influence of China's modernization process along with its changing multilevel contexts on people's demands, resources, and work–life interface over time (Aurini et al., 2016; Robinson, 2014).

Third, intellectuals came from diverse academic fields, such as education, agriculture, engineering, economics, politics, and social work, and they brought in insightful and recapitulative reflections on their personal experiences and historical changes drawing from different fields. In addition, I also included a few cases of intellectuals working in other types of organizations, such as public middle schools, private education corporations, and internet companies because they had highly similar (e.g., knowledge-intensive work) yet slightly different (e.g., more precarious employment) work settings compared to universities and research institutions so that they could offer supplementary and contrasting information on intellectuals' work–life experiences in different work settings.

5.4.1 Data collection

Empirical data was collected through 43 one-on-one interviews and four focus group interviews. These four focus group interviews were conducted with two pair of couples, one pair of twin sisters, and one pair of friends. The length of an interview ranged from 20 to 240 minutes with an average of 71.61 minutes. Based on the extant literature and theoretical underpinnings, the author discussed with two senior scholars and decided on the English version of the interview protocol together and then the author translated it into Chinese, employing the method of back translation with the

help of a bilingual researcher. Y. Fan et al.'s (2021) multilevel framework of work–life balance support inspired me to ask scenario-based questions about how participants coped with a wide range of specific work and non-work tasks in order to capture their environmental and personal demands and resources from multilevel social systems. A sample interview guide is attached in Appendix E.

The Chinese interview protocol was pilot tested and refined prior to formal interviews. Then the author conducted all the face-to-face interviews in Chinese and asked follow-up questions where necessary via instant messaging software. Thirty-eight interviews were audio recorded upon consent by participants while nine interviews were only documented by written notes as required by interviewees.

All the interviewees were informed about the purpose of this study and their rights and signed an information and consent sheet prior to participation. The process of interview went as follows. First, participants were asked to fill in their demographic information. Second, participants were required to depict their life history by listing their major work and life events in chronological order, such as their birth, marriage, childbearing, job changes, and retirement.

Third, the interviewees were asked scenario-specific questions about their work and life arrangements and work–life interface. Specifically, the interviewer queried the participants how they and their parents took care of family members and did housework in their daily lives for intergenerational comparison between their versus their parents' non-work demands and resources. Also, participants were asked about their work demands, such as overtime work and business trips, as well as workplace resources, such as maternity and parental leave. Besides, participants shared information about their hobbies, leisure, and social activities in their spare time. Participants were also asked about their perceived work–life relationships and changes in their time and energy allocation on work and non-work activities across different life stages.

5.4.2 Data analysis

I took a philosophical stance of dialectical critical realism (Bhaskar, 1986; K. Marx, 1887; J. A. Maxwell, 2012) and contended that individuals' work–life experiences are shaped both by the objective reality of multilevel environment and

through individuals' subjective interpretation of their lived experiences. Hence, I adopted the framework method of thematic analysis (i.e., *framework analysis*) to structure and synthesize my interview data. I chose framework analysis because its matrix format is particularly suitable for: (1) making systematic comparisons within each participant longitudinally and between participants from different age groups; (2) organizing data on work–life demands and resources by applying Y. Fan et al.'s (2021) multilevel framework; (3) mapping connections *between* a priori concepts deductively emerged from the modernization theory *and* codes and themes inductively identified from empirical evidence on participants' lived experiences; and (4) striking a balance between the depth versus breadth of data analysis based on a large volume of rich and in-depth qualitative data from a homogeneous research sample (Gale et al., 2013; Parkinson et al., 2016). Moreover, the transparent, systematic, and replicable process of framework analysis has the advantage of enhancing the robustness of the qualitative data analysis (Kiernan & Hill, 2018).

I went through five stages of framework analysis following instructions from several scholars (Furber, 2010; Gale et al., 2013; Kiernan & Hill, 2018). In the first stage of *familiarization*, the author familiarized with the interview data by fully transcribing all the interviews in Chinese and reading through interview data bearing my research question in mind.

In the second stage of *thematic framework development*, I conducted iterative coding both deductively and inductively on a subset of two interview transcripts randomly selected from each of five age groups and developed a tentative thematic framework for systematic coding and categorization of the whole dataset.

On the one hand, some a priori themes and codes were deductively generated from my theoretical underpinnings. For instance, I drew on four dimensions from the *modernization theory* as key themes, i.e., economic development, industrialization, social inequality, and social solidarity, to decompose participants' perceptions and lived experiences about China's modernization process and associated societal changes based on the literature and the interview data. I also applied Y. Fan et al.'s (2021) analytical framework to the data coding by breaking down major themes of *demands* and *resources* for achieving work–life balance into sub-categories of micro, workplace, and societal levels. On the other hand, some codes emerged inductively

from my interview data. For instance, as I asked scenario-based questions about interviewees' work and life activities, I adapted these answers inductively into descriptive codes, such as overtime work and cooking, and then categorized these codes into higher-level codes or themes, such as micro- and workplace-level demands.

In the third stage of *indexing*, I applied my tentative thematic framework by labelling the whole dataset with existing codes and themes in the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 (QSR International, 2018) so that I could easily retrieve the whole transcript and the context of specific interview quotations (Furber, 2010). Indexing was a nonlinear and iterative process, whereby I modified my thematic framework and recoded previous transcripts accordingly when new codes and categories emerged from additional data (Kiernan & Hill, 2018). The detailed coding index is displayed in Appendix F. The interview quotations were translated from Chinese into English by the author using the back-translation technique in virtue of a bilingual researcher.

In the fourth stage of *charting*, I charted the interview excerpts in Excel (Microsoft Corporation, 2019) spreadsheet cells (matrix format) by codes (columns) and participants (rows), which allowed me to make systematic comparisons across participants, age groups, and levels of social systems and easily refer back to original data (Gale et al., 2013). Then I summarized key findings and organized interview excerpts, data summaries, codes, categories, and themes into the thematic framework matrix in a hierarchical structure, whereby interview excerpts and associated data summaries were linked to existing codes subordinate to higher-level categories and themes (Parkinson et al., 2016). An example fragment of this thematic chart is shown in Table 5.1.

In the final stage of *mapping and interpretation*, I reflected on and illuminated the connections between the four dimensions of modernization and individuals' demands and resources and their perceptions of work–life interface across China's two major historical stages (i.e., the state-planned economy and the socialist market economy). As such, I advanced a theoretical framework (see Table 5.2 in the Discussion section) articulating the link between societal development and individuals' work–life experiences, which may have implications for other societies at different developmental stages.

Table 5.1: An example fragment of the thematic chart

Participant	Theme	Category	Code (summary)	Code (detail)
	2. Demands	2.1 Micro-level demands	2.1.1 Participant's family care demands	2.1.1.2 Transporting child(ren) to and from school/kindergarten
No.22	[Findings] This participant had fixed work schedules and affordable workloads. She paid great attention to her child's education while her parents and parents-in-law helped with childcare and housework. She was relatively family-centered and had little time for social activities.	[Findings] The elderly played a major role in helping this participant accommodate family care and housework demands. This participant paid great attention to her child's education.	[Findings] The elderly played a major role in helping this participant accommodate family care demands. This participant spent a lot of time, energy, and money on her child's education.	[Interview quotes] "*The elderly* [grandparents] *takes my child to and from school. We can't do that. Nowadays, a problem is that you have to spend money if you don't have the elderly who help drop off and pick up your child. Many schools offer free after-school programs but these programs only last till 5 p.m., the time by which many parents are still at work and can't pick up their children. So they have no other option but to spend money on private after-school programs for pickups. This is really a problem.*"

Table 5.2: Summary of findings on societal development and work–life balance: The case of China (1949–2019)

Dimension	Stage and characteristics	Demands	Resources	Work–life interface
Economic development	Stage 1: Low-income, state-planned economy with moderate-speed growth	• Emphasis on basic demands (e.g., food and clothing)	• Homogeneous support from the state and the workplace	• Work centrality
	Stage 2: Middle-income, mixed economy with high-speed growth	• Emphasis on diversified higher-level life demands (e.g., leisure, hobbies, parenting, and self-actualization) • Higher-standard and intensified work and parenting demands • Higher competition and anxiety	• Heterogeneous support from the market and personal networks	• Diversified perspectives (ranging between work centrality to life centrality) • Increased emphasis on family and personal interests
Industrialization	Stage 1: Pre-industrialization phase	• More manual work both in household keeping and at work	• Less worries about complex and dangerous traffic conditions	• Work and life domains were relatively separated and it was easier to adopt a segmentation or integration approach depending on personal preferences
	Stage 2: High-speed industrialization and informatization	• Higher efficiency at work and in household keeping • Increased work and parenting demands related to technology advancement	• Public infrastructure improvement and technology development have offered more convenient resources for addressing life demands	• Boundaries of work and life have been blurring but people have increasingly preferred a segmentation approach

Table 5.2 (continued)

Dimension	Stage and characteristics	Demands	Resources	Work–life interface
Social inequality	Stage 1: Low level	• Homogeneous demands	• Homogeneous support from the state and the workplace	• Easier to be satisfied with work and life
	Stage 2: Higher level	• Heterogeneous demands, intensified competition	• Heterogeneous support from the market and personal networks; differentiated support due to social stratification, rural-urban gap, and occupational differences	• Challenging to feel satisfied with work–life balance due to intensified competition, reduced social mobility, and constantly raising working and living standards
Social solidarity	Stage 1: Mechanical solidarity; a society of acquaintances	• Aligning work demands with the collective goal of national development	• Higher reliance on social support from personal networks • Less worries about public security in the context of "a society of acquaintances"	• Work centrality, altruism, and collectivism • Common adoption of a holistic and integration approach to managing work–life interface given the co-location of the workplace and home and highly intertwined professional and personal social networks in a society presenting mechanical solidarity
	Stage 2: Organic solidarity; a society of strangers	• Pursuing diversified demands, more emphasis on personal life • More worries about public security in the context of "a society of strangers", leading to increased parenting demands	• Higher reliance on specialized and personalized paid services	• Increased emphasis on family and personal interests • Increased preference for adopting work–life segmentation approach given the increased impact of organic solidarity and Western culture infiltration

5.5 Findings

In this section, I synthesize and organize my findings by illustrating individuals' lived experiences and perceptions about how China's modernization process shaped and transformed their demands, resources, and work–life experiences via four dimensions of modernization by contrasting these changes between two major historical stages. Table 5.2 summarizes the key themes that emerged from my findings.

In brief, China's modernization process comprised two major stages. In Stage 1 (i.e., the state-planning economy stage during 1949–1978), China was an agrarian society characterized by mechanical solidarity and low-level economic development, industrialization, and social inequality. These societal contexts jointly shaped people's homogenous demands, resources, and work–life experiences, whereby most people prioritized work over family and personal interests, pursued subsistence livelihoods, sought work–life balance support from state-owned organizations and personal networks, and worked hard towards the collective goals of establishing an independent, peaceful, and prosperous country. In Stage 2 (i.e., the socialist market economy stage during 1979–2019), China has made rapid progress of economic development and industrialization, transforming to a middle-income, industrialized society with increased income inequality and characterized better by organic solidarity. As a result, people have diversified perspectives of work–life interface and utilize personalized support mechanisms to address their heterogeneous work and life demands.

5.5.1 Economic development

Chinese citizens have widely enjoyed the improvement of their working and living conditions with greater resources brought by China's explosive economic growth during 1949–2019. As Participant No.48 (male, 1952) commented, "*China's economic development has brought about enormous benefits to ordinary people and significantly improved our lives. Only liars would deny these facts.*" However, this high-speed economic growth has also induced many social problems such as "*rat race in employment and education*" (Participant No.40, male, 1964), "*increased overwork-related health problems*", "*loopholes in legislation and regulation*" (Participant No.25, female, 1964), and "*a laggard paradigm shift in mindsets and values*" compared to the

rapidly changing reality (Participant No.47, female, 1949). In brief, China's rapid economic development was found to have complex impacts on people's demands, resources, and work–life experiences.

5.5.1.1 Upgrading of life demands driven by rapid economic growth

Given China's widespread poverty, commodity shortages, extensive public welfare, and collective goals of achieving modernization under its state-planned economy (Lu et al., 2008; Wen, 2012), people largely lived from hand to mouth and organized their personal lives around work commitments in order to contribute to their country's progress and satisfy their basic life demands, such as food and clothing. Just as Participant No.15 (female, 1982) illustrated, "I *think it* [one's satisfaction with work and life] *primarily hinges on economic factors. In the old days when people earned low wages and had limited food and clothing options, we felt happy easily if we could get some oil, apples, or candy because they were scarce. You need to satisfy your basic needs of food and warm clothes before addressing higher-level pursuits.*"

Participant No.7 (female, 1940) described the financial hardship at both family and national levels, "*My husband earned 92 CNY per month and usually gave her mother 20 CNY, paid 20 CNY for our daughter's kindergarten fees, and left 52 CNY for himself. I earned 30+ CNY per month for many years until a pay increase in 1978. Our family really had a tough budget at that time, often running out of money by the end of each month. The whole country was poor and the state had difficulties in raising salaries but* [luckily,] *the commodity price was also fairly low.* [Note: The state centralized the wage setting and distribution and the control of commodity prices in Stage 1.]"

In Stage 2, rapid economic development over the last four decades significantly improved Chinese people's working and living standards, enabling people to attach greater importance to diverse higher-level life demands, such as the quality of life and personal development. Participant No.28 (male, 1965) commented, "*Young people's values have changed and instilled the idea of 'carpe diem' and 'joie de vivre' as the economic level rises, which are distinctly different from values of our generation*." This comment was substantiated by my finding that interviewees engaged a wider variety of hobbies leisure, and social activities compared to Stage 1, such as the fitness, dinner

gathering, film and drama appreciation, and overseas travel.

5.5.1.2 Intensified work demands squeezed out time and energy for personal lives after economic reforms

In Stage 2, people were facing escalated work and life demands because marketization reforms have increased job insecurity, intensified competition both at work and at school, and upgraded working and parenting standards. Moreover, the marketization and consequently rocketing prices of previously free or cheap public goods and services (e.g., housing, education, and healthcare) has placed additional life demands and greater economic burdens on young people.

Constant reforms have been carried out in academic institutions to level up China's global competitiveness in research and higher education to that of developed countries, imposing greater work demands on higher education employees. According to Participant No.1 (male, 1964), universities have upgraded education requirements for entry-level jobs. A bachelor degree was acceptable for university lecturers until the mid-1990s; while in the 2010s, many universities raised their bar for academic jobs to a doctoral degree with overseas research experiences and for administrative positions to a master's degree. Consequently, many older academic and administrative university staff with a bachelor degree or lower academic qualifications encountered an extra work demand of pursuing postgraduate degrees via part-time programs while working.

The marketization and education reforms have intensified competitions *both* between individual staffs within a university *and* between different universities, resulting in increased workloads for university staffs. As Participant No.40 (male, 1964) warned, "*Chinese universities now compete against each other at an extreme and unhealthy level because universities with higher global and domestic rankings based on research outputs can attract more government funding and support.*"

Work demands have also increased as a result of ongoing reforms in other fields. For instance, China has constantly reformed its accounting system since 1978 to make it compatible with the international standards. As a university lecturer in accounting, Participant No.47 (female, 1949) usually had to "*spend half of summer and winter vacations and almost entire term-time weekends*" learning new accounting systems on

her own, preparing new syllabuses for students, and delivering training courses to practitioners for about five years after 1978 economic reforms. Once her daughter teased her, "*I feel like you are missing from home during the vacation and all I have is my dad.*"

Intensified competition, increased workload, and extensive unpaid overtime have also been prevalent in many other fields among young employees. For example, Participant No.46 (female, 1993) and her husband worked in internet companies and she contended that "*996*"—working from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm for six days a week—is "*a prevalent work schedule for many employees in information technology companies*". In her company, "*employees who failed to meet their KPIs* [key performance indicators] *are pushed to work overtime without pay*". Participant No.45 (female, 1993) worked extremely hard as a product development manager from Tuesday to Friday and as an English teacher over the weekend in a private education corporation aimed at primary and secondary school students. Her company promoted a culture of "*being available 24/7 to customers*" and implemented a performance management system of "*rewarding top achievers and eliminating bottom performers*".

Owing to intense and exhausting work, interviewees in different occupations (e.g., Participants No.44, No.45, and No.46) coincidentally agreed that they had "*spare time but no energy*" and their spare time was "*highly fragmented*" such that they were unable to develop their hobbies or new skills which demand "*a whole* [i.e., non-fragmented] *period of tim*e", "*hard mental work*", and "*a lot of energy*". Participant No.45 (female, 1993) elaborated on this awkward state of life, "*I have leisure time but I don't want to do anything that is energy-consuming or brain-mangling, such as painting, reading books, dating, or learning a foreign language. I would rather spend two hours watching no-brainer TV dramas after I arrive home at 21:30. I feel like recovering and relaxing myself only through watching no-brainer TV dramas given that the working day has literally drained all my energy.*"

5.5.1.3 Increased parenting demands and marketized parenting resources due to economic and education reforms

Moreover, as Participant No.44 (male, 1978) noted, adults' stress and anxiety resulted from fierce workplace competition have been passed on to their children via

parenting and schooling. Consequently, both parenting demands and standards leveled up. The majority of interviewees in my study, particularly whose children were born in the 1990s and afterwards, reported that they had invested a lot more time, energy, and money in children's parenting and education than older generations in order to establish their children's competitive advantages from an early age. As China implements a "school catchment policy" that restricts the school and kindergarten admission to children whose parents are the homeowners and registered residents within the school catchment areas (Y. Huang & Yi, 2011), some participants even bought expensive school catchment housing and moved their homes accordingly to ensure their children could attend a prestigious kindergarten or primary/secondary school.

In Stage 1, children's academic achievements largely depended on school education and their own efforts because many parents were under-educated and/or busy with work and there were no private education services outside school. However, China's "academic burden alleviation" initiatives since 2000, such as simplifying school curriculums and reducing homework (X. Zhao et al., 2015), have "*transferred the prime responsibility of education from school teachers to parents and private education services*" (Participant No.25, female, 1964) and posed greater time and financial demands on parents. According to Participants No.13 (female, 1977) and No.25 (1964, female), parents now have to spend more time supervising children's homework and more money on private education services so that children could stand out in school competition, given that "*school teachers teach at such a very basic level and at such a fast pace that students could hardly absorb enough knowledge in class to get good test scores*" (Participant No.25, 1964, female).

Furthermore, I observed that parenting demands have increased significantly as people have attached more importance to the quality of parenting by emphasizing healthy diets, proactive parent–child communication, and meaningful family activities, especially after the 1980s when China adopted the "one-child policy" and singleton children were highly valued as the center of families. Family support, especially grandparental support for childcare is important in both stages. However, working mothers could send half-year-old children to workplace-affiliated kindergartens once they finished maternity leave and returned to work in Stage 1 but this option is

unavailable today because many public kindergartens in Beijing have set a minimum admission age of three years old. Also, unlike Participants No.7 (female, 1940) and No.10 (male, 1934) who sought informal childcare support from unemployed neighbors and paid a small sum of money in reward in Stage 1, working parents in Stage 2 employed in-home nannies for childcare and housework assistance as this occupation emerged and expanded after the marketization reforms. In Stage 1, children often helped their parents do housework and look after younger siblings. In contrast, parents seldom involved children in housework in Stage 2 given children's heavier academic burdens.

Participant No.22 (female, 1982) made a comparison between parents across two stages, "*Frankly speaking, our parents' generation adopted a free-range rather than attentive parenting style. Now people have higher expectations of their quality of life as a result of improved living standards nationwide. Personally, I think mothers nowadays have heavier domestic workload than the older generation because people need to do a lot more things to maintain a high standard of living.*"

5.5.1.4 A shift from homogenous state and workplace support to heterogenous market and personal network support as a result of economic reforms

Stage 1 is characterized by the state-planned economy. Interviewees reported that at this stage, their organizations provided a wide range of public welfare in their workplace-affiliated residential communities, such as housing, canteens, healthcare, childcare and schooling, shuttles, and recreational facilities, to ensure employees could utilize these services and amenities to meet most of their basic personal life demands in the vicinity of their workplace. Hence, employees saved substantial time and energy in commuting, cooking, shopping, and transporting their children to and from school because their workplace and most basic amenities were located near home.

Participant No.3 (female, 1969) favored the older generation's lifestyle when she recalled her parents' work–life experiences but she also pointed out this mode was circumstanced by the state-planned economy and not applicable to the current socialist market economy, "*Both work and family life were convenient because this residential community enabled my parents to juggle their work, childcare, and eldercare*

responsibilities easily and save lots of travel time. However, this mode is no longer feasible nowadays. In the past, the vast majority were state-owned enterprises and public organizations that could provide housing, schooling, and other infrastructures under relatively low pressure on profitability. Nowadays, it is not feasible to have [a large proportion of profit-driven] *private companies and organizations do so.*"

In Stage 2, China's marketization reforms and global trade engagement have boosted people's environmental and personal resources by facilitating national economic growth, improving people's wealth and living standards, and increasing the quantity and variety of personalized products and services that address more diverse, higher-level life demands beyond subsistence (Lu et al., 2008). For instance, my participants reported a prevalent phenomenon that parents paid for tailored educational services in order to enhance their children's academic performance and a few employed nannies for childcare and housework support.

5.5.1.5 Changes in individual perceptions about work and personal lives

China's rapid economic development substantially changed people's work and non-work demands and relevant socio-economic resources, which in turn, reshaped individuals' perceptions about work and personal lives. I observed that participants born in the 1960s or earlier commonly adopted a work-centric approach, worked unpaid overtime (e.g., self-learning) extensively and voluntarily, and highlighted dedication as their generation's social work norm. Several participants stressed that China's eight-hour workdays and six-day workweeks reinforced this work-centric culture until its implementation of five-day workweeks in 1995.

Participant No.40 (male, 1964) illustrated a work-centric and integration approach to managing his work and life given the unique job demands as academics, "*Personally, I think there is no clear-cut compartmentalization between work and life for academics. My work and life have been highly integrated. Both my wife and I are university teachers and we chat a lot about our teaching, our research, and all sorts of work-related stuff. There is no such thing as a purely life-domain issue. We even carry out some field research when we occasionally take a trip with our child. I spend most of time reading academic books in my field. Both my wife and I often prepare lessons and write papers late till 1–2 o'clock at night. We have little time for things*

other than preparing lessons and reading books. I also spend a lot of time supervising thesis and meeting students outside working hours and sometimes even during the weekend if the student has a placement and is not available for a meeting on weekdays. I think it's not easy for academics to clearly compartmentalize their work and life."

As a result of personalized lifestyles and intensified work and life demands during Stage 2, the interviewees shared more diverse perspectives on work–life interface. Some people (more likely to be male) were more work-centric because they attached greater value and importance to work, they had their family members or nannies take care of children and do housework, or they had little family commitments. Some people (more likely to be female) were more life-centric because they highly valued their children's upbringing and family harmony, undertook a relatively simple job, and/or no other people (e.g., partner) could help them with childcare and eldercare. However, due to non-adjustable heavy workload and extensive working hours, many interviewees could neither achieve such a desirable balance (e.g., Participants No.45 and No.46) nor maintain a clear-cut between work and life to reduce work-to-life intrusions (e.g., Participants No.34, No.37, and No.49).

5.5.1.6 A holistic and integration-oriented perspective of work–life balance

The majority of the interviewees desired a holistic and integration approach to achieve synergy between work and life, which can be best illustrated by combining arguments from Participants No.1 and No.33:

"*I think work and life are interdependent and their synergy can bring out the best in each other. There is a dialectical relationship between work and life—I will work more efficiently if I live a happy life.*" (Participant No.33, male, 1984)

"*Both good work and good life are indispensable. The ultimate goal of work is to live a better life. I wouldn't have a strong guarantee for my life if I didn't have a good job and stable income. However, life would be imperfect if I were working all the time, gave up lots of joie de vivre, and assumed little family responsibilities.*" (Participant No.1, male, 1964)

Moreover, Participant No.29's (female, 1956) comments reflected Chinese holistic thinking that seeks to achieve harmony and tolerates conflict between work and life, "*Generally speaking, I lead a happy life and work in earnest. Occasionally, I*

do feel guilty that I hadn't spent enough time with my daughter when she was young. However, I had no choice but to focus on my work and sacrifice some family time in that circumstance. Although I felt sorry for my daughter, I did try my best to take good care of her as well as do a good job at work in those early years. I mean, I didn't leave aside my daughter just because my job was too busy. Although I do encounter conflict between my work and personal life at times, I never feel negative or complain about it. Instead, I always focus on seeking solutions to relieve and reduce the strength of conflict. 'No complaint' is my attitude towards both work and life. You can work and live well if you have a positive, optimistic, non-querulous mindset."

This holistic perspective of work–life interface is also reflected in interviewees evaluation on their satisfaction of work and life. Interestingly, the participants evaluated their work–life balance satisfaction not only based on their current states of work and personal life but also in retrospection of the degree to which they consider their and significant others' work–life outcomes as worthwhile, meaningful, successful, and regretless throughout their lifetime. These work–life outcomes cover, but are not limit to, their work achievements, workplace relationships, family functioning, financial and social capitals, the elderly's physical and mental health, and (grand)children's academic/work/family achievements.

For instance, Participant No.36 (male, 1962) highlighted her daughter's career and family achievements when he evaluated his own satisfaction with his work and life, "*The relationship between my work and personal life is fairly positive and I am quite satisfied with it. I have a happy family and a successful career, maybe not as successful as some outstanding figures* [but I'm content with my achievements to date]. *My daughter also has a successful career and a good husband. My daughter currently works in a state-owned bank, which is one of the world's top 500 enterprises and one of China's top 10 companies. I also have my granddaughter quite early and looking after her brings me greater happiness. I am in my 50s, reaching the age when people should put health and family first and underplay their pursuits of fame and wealth.*"

In summary, due to the prevalent poverty in the Chinese society, people put an emphasis on basic demands, such as food, clothes, and housing in Stage 1. They commonly adopted a more work-centric approach to work–life interface thanks to extensive family and workplace support for work–life balance. In Stage 2, as a result

of rapid economic growth, people focused more on the better quality of life by accommodating higher-level and more diversified life demands, such as leisure and self-development. They also faced heavier work and parenting demands given prevalent intense competitions both at work and at school. As a result of the marketization reforms of public goods and services, people increasingly relied on work–life balance support from their family and personalized private services. People also held more diverse perspectives regarding work–life interface.

5.5.2 Industrialization

The impact of technological advancement on individuals' work–life experiences was two-sided. On the one hand, it provided people with new resources that improved efficiency of accommodating work and life demands. On the other hand, technological advancement brought about new work and life demands. Moreover, the widespread use of information technology seemed to reshape individuals' personal preferences for work–life segmentation versus integration.

5.5.2.1 Technological advancement brought about new resources that improved efficiency of fulfilling work and life demands

Technological advancement facilitates people's flexible working to better accommodate their work and life demands. For instance, Participant No.36 (male, 1962) often worked at home and assigned work tasks to his subordinates via email and instant message, which enabled him to take good care of his two-year-old granddaughter while working. Moreover, as Participant No.25 (female, 1964) noted, the application of information systems in the university has largely "*saved the manual labor*", "*improved the efficiency, transparency, and accuracy of administrative work*", and "*reduced workplace conflict via better communication*".

The advancement of technology has also provided new types of support for people to cope with their life demands, such as housework, leisure, and social activities. Participants recalled that since the 1990s, the widespread application of home appliances, such as rice cooker and washing machine, has saved people's personal resources of time, energy, and manual labor on household demands such as cooking and laundry. Also, new technologies have granted people more options to spend their

spare time, such as watching TV and online programs and networking via social media.

Moreover, the fast-growing light industry offered a greater volume and variety of manufactured products in the market (e.g., ready-made clothes and instant foods) in Stage 2, largely liberating individuals from time-consuming household chores which were common in Stage 1, such as knitting and sewing. In addition, the Chinese government's long-term, large-scale investments in infrastructure construction (e.g., heating, transport, and information systems) in recent years have not only eliminated heavy housework demands such as replacing coal gas tanks but also increased convenient services for accommodating daily life demands, such as online shopping and food delivery. Moreover, the use of online extracurricular classes also saves parents' and children's commuting time.

5.5.2.2 Technological advancement created new work and life demands

Technological advancement has not only generated new resources but also posed new challenges for managing work–life balance. For instance, technology inevitably creates new work demands, prolongs people's working time, intensifies work pace, and increases their work-to-life intrusions. Participant No.35 (male, 1956) elucidated that "*the explosive growth of new scientific knowledge and technological innovation in recent years have placed greater learning demands on medical researchers like me*". As new technology has been widely adopted in universities, older academics have to pay more personal time and efforts to adapt their teaching style from chalkboards to electronic presentations by learning to use new technological devices.

Furthermore, people could maintain a relatively clear boundary between their work and personal lives without work-related interruptions via mobile phones or instant messaging applications outside office hours till the late 1990s. Under this circumstance, people could easily choose a work–life segmentation or integration approach at will. In contrast, the widespread use of information technology for workplace communication since the 2000s has promoted an "always-on" work culture, largely extending people's working hours and causing greater work-to-life spillover. Participant No.45 (female, 1993) complained that work-related messages terribly invaded her personal lives that "*I can't fully get rid of work after working hours*" because her supervisors, colleagues, and customers (i.e., students and their parents)

could send her messages “*at any time, sometimes even at midnight or during holidays*”. She said, “*The cost of communication is huge. I have to keep my mobile phone on 24 hours a day. Even worse, I have to reply to my supervisors immediately and respond to my customers within 72 hours as required by the company.*” Participant No.40 (male, 1964) commented sharply on the side effect of technological development, “*The widespread use of advanced technology has not decreased the work intensity as expected, but rather made people busier and more laborious by speeding up the work pace.*”

I also observed the trend that the technological advancement has increased life demands in many aspects. As a result of China’s explosive growth in the construction industry, urban people’s average housing space per person increased from 6.7 m^2 in 1978 to 39.8 m^2 in 2019 (X. Fang, 2020; National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2019a) and hence, interviewees reported that they have to spend much more time cleaning home than before. Also, parenting demands have intensified as industrialization proceeds in Stage 2 for two reasons. First, “*the proliferation of automotive vehicles in recent years have made the traffic much more dangerous for children to go out alone and hence, parents increasingly transport their children to and from school every day and accompany children to play outdoors*” (Participant No.22, female, 1982) in Stage 2 instead of “*letting children go to school or play outdoors with their peers*” (Participant No.8, female, 1942) in Stage 1. Second, compared to Stage 1, parents have spent much more time supervising children’s homework in Stage 2 partially because children nowadays are easier to be lured by technological devices such as smartphones and laptops and get distracted from their homework.

5.5.2.3 Technological advancement reshaped personal preferences for work–life segmentation/integration

I observed an interesting phenomenon that a work–life segmentation approach is preferred among young participants born in the 1990s although their heavy use of information technology both at work and in personal lives has largely blurred their work–life boundaries.

For instance, Participant No.34 (male, 1994) elaborated on his dilemma in adopting a segmentation approach, “*I think work is work; life is life. I hope to separate*

my work and life as clearly as possible but a clear-cut segmentation is a luxury given the nature of my work. As a university counselor, I have to enter the working mode quickly whenever students call me. It's difficult to manage because sometimes I have to sacrifice my personal time for handling student matters. Students usually have classes during the working hours and hence often approach me after office hours. At times they call me when I eat dinner with my family and I have to deal with it immediately in the case of an emergency."

In contrast, older participants are more tolerant of work-to-life spillover and commonly adopt an integration approach that accommodates their work and life demands in a more flexible way. For instance, some interviewees emphasized the importance of role modeling and cultivating children's healthy learning habits at an early age for efficient parenting. Learning by observing and imitating their parents' behaviors, such as working at home, children could finish their homework independently and efficiently. As Participant No.35 (male, 1956) illustrated, "*Our generation* [as parents] *influenced our children more often through 'role modeling'. When our children observed us working, reading books, and writing papers at home, they would engage in active learning spontaneously. This* [role modeling] *is more effective than preaching. Just imagine—if parents were playing Mahjong all the time, how could their children be willing to study?*"

In summary, China was an agricultural society in Stage 1 while it underwent rapid industrialization process in Stage 2. The technological advancement has, on the one hand, liberated people from some heavy manual work, but on the other hand, it created new work and parenting demands. Compared to the older generations who could easily segment their work and personal lives without technology-mediated work–life spillover in Stage 1, younger people suffered from frequent work–life interference due to heavy use of information technology and longed for a clear segmentation between work and personal life.

5.5.3 Social inequality

As a result of China's rapid economic transition, industrialization, and urbanization, the society becomes more affluent but less equitable in Stage 2 than in Stage 1 as people face higher income inequality, higher rural–urban occupational

mobility, lower educational mobility, and lower class mobility. This trend has also shaped individuals' demands, resources, and work–life interface, which is well captured in the findings from my interviews.

5.5.3.1 Intensified parenting demands as a result of increased social inequality

Against the backdrop of declining educational and class mobility in Stage 2, younger participants, particularly whose children were born in the 1990s and afterwards, are subject to heavier parenting demands because they "*attach greater importance to*" (Participant No.14, male, 1980), and "*set higher standards for*" (Participant No.21, female, 1977), children's academic achievements than older generations who commonly adopted a "*free-range parenting style*" (Participant No.8, female, 1942). While some interviewees reproduced their parental social class as intellectuals, quite a few participants achieved a higher socio-economic status than their parents who were farmers or workers by the means of tertiary education attainment.

I found that many participants, particularly those who have realized upward mobility through academic excellence, agreed with education as "*a powerful driver for upward social mobility*" and "*a way to change one's own and whole family's destiny*" (Participant No.44, male, 1978). Hence, these parents placed higher expectations on their children's educational attainment, which necessitates greater parental investments of time, energy, and money in homework supervision, private education services, and even in school catchment housing, posing greater financial and time challenges for working parents to juggle their work and parenting roles.

Participants No.13 (female, 1977) and No.15 (female, 1982) reported that children's education became the first or second "*largest contributors to their household expenditures*". Participants No.13 (female, 1977) and No.14 (male, 1980) revealed that the competition of parental investments in children's education have leveled up to a "*crazy*" level in recent years and the anxiety of "*not learning enough*" becomes prevalent among parents. A possible explanation for this phenomenon was given by Participant No.44 (male, 1978), "*Parents invest greater resources in education so as to protect their children against downward mobility and facilitate their*

children's upward mobility". As reported by the interviewees (e.g., Participants No.14 and No.51), this trend is not only prominent among well-educated intellectuals but also salient among less-educated workers and farmers they have known. "*Regardless of rural or urban parents, they all stress the importance of education and hope that their children can win a place at university because one needs at least a university degree to get a good job.*" (Participant No.14, male, 1980)

In line with Participant No.14's comment, the majority of the interviewees expect their children should "*at least attend a prestigious university because it now becomes mass education rather than elite education as in the past*" (Participant No.15, female, 1982) while a few choose to "*respect children's personal choices*" according to their own interests and abilities "*without pushing too hard*" (Participants No.43, male, 1964).

This educational rat race can be attributed to (1) the "*occupational inequality and discrimination against manual workers*" (Participant No.20, male, 1982) and (2) the structural mismatch between the education system and the labor market demand, rendering problems such as manufacturing labor shortage and graduate unemployment (Cui et al., 2018; Kang et al., 2019; Mok & Wu, 2016). Participant No.14 (male, 1980) elucidated that many parents constrain their children's life trajectories to a limited range of good universities and prestigious occupations, "*I know in some countries such as Germany, occupational prestige is more or less equal across occupations. But in the Chinese mind, white collars have higher social status. My parents' generation recognizes only three occupations—teachers, doctors, and public servants* [as good jobs] *and other jobs as precarious employment. Despite their decent wage earnings, blue collars have less social security benefits* [e.g., healthcare insurance and pensions] *and lower social status. The improvement of vocational education and employment in the future necessitates a new social norm of occupational equality, which may take us a long time to change.*"

Despite a general trend of increased parental investments in children's education, participants revealed differential work–life experiences across different parenting styles. Children's work–life achievements, such as academic performance, job, marriage, and even childbearing, are also a key factor that influences interviewees' self-evaluation on their work–life balance satisfaction. At one end, some interviewees found it a struggle to juggle their professional and parental roles when they had

devoted a lot of time, energy, and money to children's homeschooling and private education services but yielded unsatisfactory offspring outcomes. At the other end, work-centric participants who had adopted a free-range or role-modeling parenting strategy had fairly positive self-appraisals on both their work and offspring outcomes if their children were high achievers graduating from top-ranked universities. The majority of interviewees between these two ends were generally satisfied with their work and parenting outcomes if their moderate expectations and investments in children's education had paid off.

5.5.3.2 The impact of social inequality on work–life balance satisfaction

According to my observation, people felt satisfied with their work and personal lives relatively more easily in Stage 1 *and* in the early period of Stage 2 (around the 1980s) because they shared simple yet unitary standards for leading a good life—finishing work tasks while sufficing family's subsistence needs. Moreover, it was relatively easy for people to accommodate their basic work–life demands with homogeneous socio-economic resources provided by the state (usually in the form of employee welfare distributed by state- or collective-owned organizations) under the state-planned economy.

Participant No.5 (female ,1976) portrayed her impoverished, simple, but happy childhood as follows, "*When I was a child in the 1980s, my mother was a homemaker in charge of cooking three meals every day. It was an era when children grew up 'naturally'* [i.e., free-range] *and parents primarily concerned about getting enough food for their families. Our family* [was poor and] *did not have enough flour to eat so that my mom often had to borrow flour from our neighbors. The 'happiness index' was de facto quite high at that time. Everyone had similarly* [poor] *family conditions; the speed of work was not that fast and the level of work stress was not that high. And hence, people didn't feel like living a bitter life. The contemporary life was actually quite interesting.*"

In contrast, in Stage 2, it has become harder for people to maintain a satisfactory balance between work and personal life because people have been living in such a highly unequal society with structurally differentiated living standards and socio-economic resources—and the gap has been even widening over time in a market-

oriented economy—that the competition of limited opportunities for upward mobility and better life has been intensified whereas "*the anxiety and worries about downward mobility have been augmented prevalently among both adults and their children*" (Participant No.44, male, 1978). There is a common feeling in the Chinese society that people get trapped in endlessly escalating competition but working harder does not make life better (M. Zhou, 2020). Moreover, individuals feel unsatisfied more easily because people tend to raise their standards for good work–life outcomes as the society becomes more prosperous and people's quality of life widely improves in Stage 2.

5.5.3.3 Social inequalities in public and employee welfare

In general, the majority of the interviewees have felt satisfied with their work–life balance and quite a few have recognized that they are "*people with vested interests*" and "*beneficiaries of current national policies*" who are "*privileged*" in socio-economic resources compared to their contemporaries (Participants No.48). For instance, as employees from public institutions, they have higher job security and better packages of health insurance and pensions than people working in the private sector or state-owned corporations. In contrast, employees who work in start-up, private companies often lack a comprehensive benefit package covering generous health insurance and pensions.

Working in a start-up comic studio, Participant No.27 (female, 1993) complained that her employer did not provide mandatory employee benefits, "*We didn't have that* [benefit package]. *This is one of the reasons why my mother and my uncle look down upon my job. I didn't have any insurance in the beginning. Not until early this year did the company start to provide me with 'three insurances'* [i.e., endowment, unemployment, and medical insurances] *rather than 'five insurances'* [i.e., 'three insurances' plus employment injury and maternity insurances]. *Probably my employer provided the 'three insurances' for the fear of claims against her illegal treatments to the staff. We don't have employee welfare such as physical examination or housing subsidies at all.*"

In fact, "five insurances" were mandatory employee benefits in China at the time of our interview. Participant No.51 (female, 1993) also confirmed that her company exploited legal loopholes, "*Although my company provides us all the mandatory*

insurances and housing subsidies, my employer, just like many other small-scale private companies, doesn't offer us full insurance. Rather, our company insures employees according to the lowest standard of the national minimum wage."

Also, as holders of urban Hukou (especially in Beijing), the interviewees admitted that they have enjoyed much better educational and medical resources than people living in rural areas and smaller cities. Fortunately, as Participant No.14 noted, the Chinese government has reformed its social welfare (e.g., health insurance and pensions) and employment systems in the recent decade with the purpose of bridging the gaps between rural and urban Hukou holders, and between the public- and private-sector employees.

5.5.3.4 Improved gender equality at home as a result of occupational upgrading

Our interview findings reflect a general trend of improved gender equality over time. In fact, this improvement is associated with occupational upgrading in that the traditional gendered division of labor is more prevalent in farming households and less common among intellectuals. Also, a traditional family with a male breadwinner and a female homemaker was less common while dual-earner families becomes dominant in Stage 2 than in Stage 1 given reduced state support and increased economic pressures for sustaining families as a result of the marketization of many public goods and services.

Participant No.1 (male, 1964) contrasted the differences in gender ideology between rural and urban households *and* between his parents and his own family, "*My parents are farmers. The ideology of 'a male breadwinner and a female homeworker' is still prevalent in my home village. Both my parents carried out agricultural work but my mother often worked less on farm given her responsibilities for taking care of children and cooking meals. For about twenty years, my father did off-farm jobs for higher pay and hence, my mother shouldered all the farm and domestic work. I think my parents' division of family labor has little impact on mine given the contextual differences of rural and urban areas as well as the occupational differences between farmers and academics. In my opinion, men and women are equal and ideally, the distribution of housework should be equal. However, concerning our different job*

requirements and career development opportunities, my wife and I might have differential emphasis on work and life and have a share of domestic work different from a 50–50 split."

The majority of the participants demonstrated a certain degree of gender equality at home in that their division of domestic work largely depended on family members' work arrangements, working hours and commuting time, skills and capabilities, and personal hobbies rather than traditional gender roles. Among married participants in my research sample, about half of participants still had a more traditional family arrangement whereby women shouldered greater caring and housework responsibilities; a few interviewees adopted an opposite family arrangement whereby men primarily took care of family; some participants equalized their housework and parental involvement; and several participants outsourced most housework and childcare to grandparents or nannies.

In summary, the relatively small income inequality, high social mobility, and extensive state support made it easier for people to satisfy their basic subsistence demands in Stage 1, and hence, it was easier for people to feel content with their work and personal lives. In contrast, the widened wealth gap, reduced social mobility, the restoration of private ownership and heritage, and the marketization of public goods and services in Stage 2 have intensified the competition of limited opportunities for upward mobility and exacerbated the anxiety and worries about downward mobility. Moreover, people feel unsatisfied more easily because people tend to raise their standards for good work–life outcomes constantly along with China's rapid economic growth and widely improved living standards. Although the traditional gendered division of household labor is still prevalent over time, the gender equality at home generally improves as a result of occupational upgrading from farming to intellectual jobs.

5.5.4 Social solidarity

The change in social solidarity from "a society of acquaintances" (i.e., mechanical solidarity) to "a society of strangers" (i.e., organic solidarity) have considerably increased parenting demands and reduced personal network support. Consequently, working parents have relied more on private services. In addition, China's unique

reciprocal obligations in the relationships between citizens and the state, between individuals and the society, and between employees and the organization have cultivated Chinese people's peculiar perceptions about work and personal lives.

5.5.4.1 The impact of changes in social solidarity on parenting demands and resources

Extensive support from the state, organizations, communities, and personal networks in Stage 1 enabled flexible accommodation of people's work and parenting demands and facilitated their work–life integration. The co-location of the workplace and the residential community both in urban state- and collective-owned organizations and in rural collective-owned farms and enterprises cultivated "*a society of acquaintances*" (Participant No.44, male, 1978). These acquaintances connected with each other with multiple close social bonds—the same person could be a colleague, a neighbor, and a friend concurrently—and offered generous social support to help each other accommodate work and life demands flexibly. For instance, several interviewees requested their extended family members, colleagues, or neighbors to look after their children when they were busy with work or undertook business trips.

Parenting demands have grown substantially from Stage 1 to Stage 2 given changes in social solidarity. Under the state-planned economy in Stage 1, the workplace-affiliated childcare, schools, and shuttle services largely reduced parents' time demands for transporting their children to and from school, playing with their children, and supervising homework. Since the environment was deemed very safe surrounded by acquaintances who knew well and trusted in each other, children mainly spent time doing things with their siblings or peers who lived in the same residential community, such as traveling between home and school, doing homework, and playing outdoors.

In contrast, China's urban sprawl, housing marketization, and school catchment policy in Stage 2 has substantially expanded the physical distance between the workplace, home, and school and hence, increased working parents' traveling time. Moreover, in contrast to the "society of acquaintances" in Stage 1, a "society of strangers" (Givṇ, 2005; Ye, 2019) emerged in Stage 2 along with the vanishing workplace-affiliated residential communities because economic reforms have

marketized many public goods and services and organizations no longer provide employee welfare such as housing, childcare, and schooling near the workplace. In addition, the environment is deemed more dangerous and complicated when people in the neighborhood are unfamiliar strangers. Therefore, parents have to ensure children's safety by spending a lot more time transporting their children to school and monitoring their outdoor play and homework, especially after China enforced its "one-child policy" and singleton children became more "valued" or even "spoiled" in the 1980s.

Participant No.22 (female, 1982) elucidated an increase in the parenting demand given changes in social solidarity, "*My parents never transported me to and from school. They didn't worry* [about my safety] *because I bicycled between home and school with my classmates who lived in the same village and all the villagers knew each other well. But it doesn't work in today's society. Now we don't even know much about our neighbors. In addition, children's living arrangements are quite diverse in that they attend different after-school activities and reside in different areas. It's hard for children to form companionships to go home. I have no choice but to transport my child to and from school every day.*"

Meanwhile, social bonds have generally become weaker and people have increasingly relied on personalized and specialized private services (e.g., nannies and home tutors) to accommodate their personal life demands rather than social support from their extended families, friends, neighbors, and colleagues in such an increasingly atomized society exhibiting organic solidarity. Participant No.14 (male, 1980) prioritized private services over personal network support, "*If both my wife and I can't pick up my son from school for work-related reasons, I will entrust my child to my colleagues or parents of my child's friends who live in the same residential community as we do. In return, I also help pick up their children at times and have them eat dinner, do homework, and play with my child in my home. But I do it quite sparingly because I hesitate to bother other people frequently. I'd rather pay for after-school programs instead of bothering colleagues or friends.*"

5.5.4.2 Reciprocal obligations between individuals and collectives shaped individuals' perceptions about work and personal lives

As I mentioned in the research context, China's historical background, traditional

values, and holistic philosophy have shaped Chinese people's collective aspirations of living an affluent and peaceful life and a paternalist culture that instils unique values about individual–society and work–life relationships. Having witnessed so many wars, revolutions, reforms, and all kinds of political and social unrest throughout his lifetime, Participant No.6 (male, 1933) stressed that a stable state regime is indispensable for individuals to achieve work–life balance and life satisfaction, "*I am very content with the state regime, the governing party, and current national policies. Old people like me don't want to witness our own state collapse because such a good life would be destroyed if a 'Color Revolution' overthrew the regime like the poor Soviets did.*"

Although born in different times, both Participants No.6 (male, 1933) and No.40 (male, 1978) coincidentally stressed the importance of a stable society as an indispensable prerequisite for individuals to pursue a happy life, a successful career, and a satisfactory work–life balance because a stable regime can guarantee policy consistency and implement long-term national plans that facilitate rapid industrialization and steady economic development without interruptions. As Participant No.40 commented, "*I think one's personal development is closely connected to, and deeply influenced by, the development of one's country. China's economy wouldn't develop so fast and I wouldn't even have a platform to showcase my talents if China didn't have a stable regime.*" Participant No.15 (female, 1982) also stressed the important role of individuals' personal development in contributing to their country's progress, "*The relationship between the country and individuals is just as the song* [I and My Home Country] *sings, 'I and my home country, are the spindrift and the sea.' All the individuals' personal progresses can make a difference to their country's development.*"

Participants No.6 and No.12 are typical illustrations for reciprocal relationships between citizens and the state, and between individuals and the society, respectively. Participant No.6 (male, 1933) had a life trajectory "*arranged by the state*" after he was selected for the state-funded overseas study in 1952. His undergraduate education in the Soviet Union was sponsored by the Chinese government and his field of study and subsequent job were all decided by the government according to the national demands for talents in the high-technology sector. There were reciprocal exchanges between Participant No.6 and the state, "*The value generated by our labor was all handed over*

to the country except a very low wage. In return, the national welfare covered almost all the aspects of our lives." As a leading expert in his field who had made remarkable contributions to the country, Participant No.6 was "*quite satisfied with all the life arrangements and entitlements offered by the state*", including generous pension, healthcare, and housing benefits.

Participant No.12 (male, 1936) highly appreciated his reciprocal exchanges with the society. During the Third Chinese Civil War (1945–1949), he dropped out of school at the age of 13 due to poverty. His request to join the local communist guerrilla forces was declined because the guerrilla leader considered he was too young to fight in the guerrilla warfare. Instead, he resumed his school life until he finished his undergraduate study with financial aids from the guerrilla leader, classmates' parents, fellow villagers, and local and central governments. Having "*subsisted on public assistance and people's help*" since age 13, Participant No.12 have been devoted to repaying his gratitude to the society by making important scientific contributions and demonstrating strong altruism both at work and in personal life.

The mechanical solidarity and Chinese paternalist and collectivist cultures are partially reflected in some interviewees' comments about who should be responsible for work–life balance. While some participants regarded work–life balance as "*definitely*" or "*primarily*" a self-responsibility (e.g., Participants No.3 and No.5) "*without external support*" (Participant 14), some interviewees recognized or expected the role of family members, the workplace, domestic workers, and the government in facilitating their work–life balance (e.g., Participants No.6 and No.11). Participant No.1 argued that work–life balance necessitated systematic and synergistic cooperation between major stakeholders, "*I think it* [work–life balance] *should be a shared responsibility and a collective goal between individuals, families, organizations, and the government. President* [Jinping] *Xi said, 'Our mission* [of the government] *is to meet our people's aspirations to live a better life.' In other words, our government wishes happiness to every citizen and makes its efforts to ensure that people live a good life. Hence, the goals of individuals and our government are aligned—each of our families, and each of our individuals, is working for a better country; and in turn, a better country guarantees us better and happier lives.*"

Participant No.31's (male, 1978) words illustrated how the older generations

developed a holistic view of work–life interface from the co-location of the workplace and home as well as their highly intertwined professional and personal networks—e.g., colleagues were also good friends—in a society presenting mechanical solidarity, "*Work per se is an integral part of life. I think it's unnecessary to have a clear-cut separation between the public and private spheres. I might have spoken more words with my colleagues than my family members given that I have spent all my lifetime working in the same organization. For people who live in the workplace-affiliated residential community, the workplace is their second home. People segregate their work and personal life clearly probably either because they live too far away from their organization or because they feel hard to integrate into the workplace due to their personality issues.*"

I observed that interviewees who entered the workforce in Stage 1 generally displayed the peculiarities of organizing personal life around work (i.e., work centrality), prioritizing collective over personal interests (i.e., altruism and collectivism), doing extra work voluntarily for the benefit of the organization and colleagues (i.e., organizational citizenship behavior), and handling work–life spillover in a relatively flexible way (i.e., work–life integration). Participant No.48 (male, 1952) is a good example, "*I prioritize work over my personal life. I regard work as a pleasure rather than a burden. I am willing to devote myself to work although I have sacrificed many personal hobbies. I might lose lots of fun if I didn't work. It might be a deeply entrenched mindset of our generation that everything else, be it personal or family matters, can always give way to the collective work and the collective good. I used to volunteer in a trade union and spend a lot of time traveling to remote areas in order to buy great bargains for our union members several times a month. I didn't consider it as a waste of time because I did it for the collective good. It seems that no one in our team ever withdrew from this unpaid trade union work because of family matters*."

Compared to the older participants who were more work-centric, collectivist, and altruistic, younger interviewees who started their careers in Stage 2 have increasingly pursued personalized and diversified lifestyles, emphasized self-actualization and *joie de vivre* (e.g., leisure and personal hobbies), disfavored going the extra mile beyond their paid work duties (e.g., unpaid overtime), and preferred a segmentation approach between their work and personal lives given the increased impact of organic solidarity

and Western culture on the Chinese society in recent decades. Participant No.26's (female, 1993) view is typical among younger interviewees, "*Personally, the best scenario would be that work and life serve as two fully segregated spatial–temporal systems and never interfere with each other. One should stay focused and work efficiently during working hours while resuming the 'life mode' without considering any work matters after office hours. I'm sick of working extra hours or working at home.*"

In summary, the Chinese society has gradually transformed from mechanical solidarity in Stage 1 to organic solidarity in Stage 2 as a result of multiple factors, such as market-oriented reforms, rapid industrialization and urbanization, and one-child policy. The co-location of the workplace and the residential community in Stage 1 minimized parenting demands, encouraged work centrality and organizational citizenship behavior, and cultivated a "society of acquaintances" that enabled people to rely on generous social support from personal networks for work–life integration. In contrast, the reduced family size, the market-oriented reforms, the Western culture infiltration, and the increased distance between the workplace, home, and children's school in Stage 2 have intensified parenting demands and reshaped a more atomized "society of strangers" in which people have increasingly emphasized self-actualization and *joie de vivre*, relied more on specialized and personalized private services, and favored work–life segmentation. Despite all these changes in social solidarity, the shared aspirations and collective efforts of establishing a prosperous and peaceful society have persisted and prevailed among Chinese people throughout the 70-year history of modern China.

5.6 Discussion

In response to my research question, I begin with a brief summary of three major trends outlining individuals' perceptions and lived experiences about how China's modernization process has transformed people's demands, resources, and work–life experiences. Next, based on my findings, I advance a theoretical framework of societal development and work–life balance in Table 5.2. I discuss my theoretical contributions to the work–life balance literature and give my recommendations for the practice.

Finally, I reflect on the research limitations and shed light on avenues for future research.

5.6.1 Major tends of changing work–life experiences in the modernization process

My findings highlight three major changing trends in individual work–life experiences as China progressed in its modernization process. First, I observe a trend of diversification of people's demands and resources for achieving their desirable work–life outcomes under the context of China's market-oriented reforms, rapid industrialization, increased social inequality, and higher-level organic solidarity. Compared to the older generations who were more likely to use homogeneous public services at a low cost to accommodate their life demands in Stage 1, people are subject to greater structural inequalities because they rely more on heterogeneous and personalized paid services in Stage 2.

Second, my findings reveal a recent shift in people's preferred coping strategies from work–life integration to work–life segmentation. This shift has been circumstanced by the increasingly blurred boundary between work and life due to the prevalent use of information technology and young people's greater emphasis on quality of life and escalating expectations for non-work pursuits along with China's rapid economic growth.

Third, I discover a tendency of "involution" characterized by constantly raising standards for, escalated resource investments in, and increased difficulties in achieving satisfactory work–life outcomes. China's slowdown in economic growth and surge in social inequality have exacerbated the rat race (i.e., involution) for limited "prestigious" employment and education opportunities, which urges substantial investments of time, energy, and money in children's parenting and education and induces great work–life conflict in terms of time and financial strain but yields limited marginal benefits. This rat race is further intensified by the Chinese-style social solidarity—Chinese people's collective aspiration and national goal of catching up with the societal development of Western developed countries has been manifested through each Chinese citizen's hard work both in school and on the job.

Next, I discuss the theoretical implications of my research by elaborating on Table 5.2 about how individuals' changing work–life experiences have been shaped and

contextualized by China’s modernization process.

5.6.2 Theoretical implications

Our research contributes to the work–life balance literature by (1) advancing a holistic perspective of work–life balance, (2) offering a multilevel and systematic conceptualization of work–life balance, and (3) contextualizing the conceptualization of work–life balance through the lens of modernization theory. In this section, I discuss the theoretical implications of these three aspects drawing on the summary of findings in Table 5.2 and the extant literature.

5.6.2.1 A holistic perspective of work–life balance

I found that Chinese participants commonly adopt a *holistic* perspective of work–life balance which contrasts with the dominant Western perspective in the current literature in three major aspects. First, this holistic perspective emphasizes the harmony of work–life interdependence and synergy. Consistent with previous work–life balance research in the Chinese context, I revealed that Chinese people tend to view work and non-work issues as harmony components of their overarching life that complement and facilitate each other (Russell, 2008). They strive for the synergy rather than a clear segmentation between work and life and thus, they underplay the conflict caused by work–life spillover (M. Zhang et al., 2014) and focus more on seeking solutions to harmonize work and personal life. This holistic perspective is distinctly different from the Western perspective that predominantly draws a clear distinction or assumes a zero-sum game between work and non-work spheres (Friedman et al., 1998; Grawitch et al., 2010) and advocates achieving work–life balance by minimizing conflict caused by work–life spillover (McGinnity, 2020).

This variation in understanding of work–life interface may be attributed to the cultural differences between the West and the East. The Western segmentation-oriented perspective of work–life balance seems to be grounded in the dominant *analytic* style of thinking in Western cultures that (a) views entities as relatively independent objects rather than interdependent parts of a larger system, (b) addresses the relationships between entities and wider contexts parsimoniously, and (c) spotlights and problematizes contradictions (de Oliveira & Nisbett, 2017). In contrast, *holistic* style

of thinking is more common in East Asian societies and involves more emphasis on synergistic relationships between parts and their whole, "greater attention to context and relationships, assumptions of change rather than stasis, and acceptance of contradiction" compared to Western *analytic* thinking (de Oliveira and Nisbett, 2017, p. 782). I return to the specific contexts in which the Western and Eastern perspectives of work–life balance might work better in a later section.

Second, different from the dominant Western perspective that tacitly frames work as "a necessary evil to support non-work activities" and pays greater attention to the threats of work demands on non-work interests (Grawitch et al., 2010, p. 129), this holistic perspective attaches positive values to both work and non-work aspects. Research participants not only viewed work as a way of earning money to support family and other non-work pursuits but they also underlined the meaning, value, and joy of work per se. Although having differential focus and priorities—some were more work-centric and others might be more life-centric at a certain stage of life, participants generally acknowledged both work and life as indispensable and valuable components of their overall journey of life.

Third, this holistic perspective evaluates work–life balance as achieving an overall satisfactory life encompassing desirable work and non-work accomplishments throughout lifetime. Following a holistic perspective, research participants evaluated their satisfaction with work and personal life based not only on their current state but also on their past work and non-work achievements and their anticipated future accomplishments over the life span, which is different from the *work–life enrichment theory* (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) that focuses primarily on positive work–life interface in the contemporary context or in a relatively short time frame. Following a holistic perspective, people are more capable of tolerating temporary contradictions and dedicating themselves to their long-term goals and ultimate meaning of life. For instance, Chinese people believe that their contemporary sacrifice of partial family and leisure time for work in the early stage of career development can bring about greater socio-economic resources for their family and leisure activities in a long term (M. Zhang et al., 2014) and hence, this temporary work-centric devotion is not detrimental for their work–life balance.

Moreover, research participants addressed not only their own but also their

significant others' work and non-work achievements in evaluating their own work–life balance satisfaction, such as their children's career and family development and the elderly's wellbeing. Also, this holistic evaluation of work–life balance is more often given by people who are in their late stage of career or retirement life, whilst young people focus more on their contemporary state of work and life and occasionally address their anticipated development of their careers and personal lives in the future.

Although scholars have increasingly paid attention to a life-course or life-span perspective that stresses people's differential demands and experiences of work–life interface across different stages of life or career in recent years (e.g., Darcy et al., 2012; Skinner et al., 2014; Wepfer et al., 2015), to the best of my knowledge, this holistic-style evaluation of work–life balance identified by my research has not yet been captured in the extant work–life balance literature. Hence, my proposed holistic perspective of work–life interface offers an alternative approach to integrating the life-course or life-span analysis into the work–life balance research. Interestingly, my finding echoes a leadership study conducted by Bennis and Thomas (2002) who found that American leaders born in the 1900s–1930s interpreted work–life balance as a lifelong pursuit of achieving a successful career during prime years and enjoying happy family life after retirement, whilst younger leaders born in the 1960s–1970s focused more on their contemporary work–life challenges. I speculate that individuals tend to adopt a holistic view of work–life balance as they grow older.

Following this holistic perspective, Chinese people tend to adopt an integration approach that manages work–life spillover in a flexible and inclusive manner. Compared to Westerners, Chinese people may be more tolerant of work–life conflict (M. Zhang et al., 2014) and better at coping with work–life spillover because their holistic mindset allows more permeable, malleable, and flexible boundaries between work and non-work spheres—this is *de facto* the work–life integration approach (Bulger et al., 2007; Nippert-Eng, 1996) which has increasingly been advocated by Western scholars against the backdrop of information technology blurring work–life boundaries (Morris & Madsen, 2007).

5.6.2.2 A multilevel and systematic conceptualization of work–life balance

Following this holistic perspective and based on my findings, I conceptualize

work–life balance as a fit between demands and resources in that work–life balance is achieved when a person possesses and can mobilize adequate resources—including personal resources (e.g., time and money) and environmental resources (e.g., family/organizational support) from multilevel social systems—to fulfil their work and non-work demands to achieve desirable work–life outcomes.

In contrast to Western theories focusing primarily on maintaining boundaries to minimize conflict between *work* and *non-work* domains (McGinnity, 2020), my holistic conceptualization focuses more on the balance between *demands* and *resources* from multilevel social systems for achieving desirable work–life outcomes. This demand–resource fit requires *multilevel* and *systematic* evaluation of the degree to which individuals' available resources can be mobilized to achieve desirable outcomes through fulfilling prioritized work–life demands because these demands and resources may come from *multilevel* environments encompassing multiple social systems across different levels.

The *systematic demand–resource fit* refers to the overall balance between an individuals' personal and environmental demands and resources. For instance, a working mother's may have to postpone her childbearing plan (*personal demand*) given her partner's busy work schedules (*micro-level demand*), a workaholic organizational culture (*workplace-level demand*), and/or gender discrimination in the labor market (*societal-level demand*). However, she could carry out her childrearing plan at will if she has enough savings for raising children as a full-time mother (*personal resource*) or could resort to grandparental childcare support (*micro-level resource*), workplace childcare facilities (*workplace-level resource*), and/or affordable and reliable childcare institutions or nannies (*societal-level resource*). Hence, I contend that work–life balance is achieved through systematic and multilevel *demand–resource fit*, which means that the synergy of resources from multilevel social systems can counteract or neutralize the negative impact of demands from multilevel environments.

In response to the recurrent call for more multilevel and systematic investigation of the work–life balance discourse (e.g., Allen et al., 2015; Kossek, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault, 2017), my multilevel and systematic conceptualization in conjunction with Y. Fan et al.'s (2021) conceptual framework offers a stronger

explanation for the contextualized relationships between individuals' work–life experiences and their multilevel social contexts and serves as a good tool for multilevel and systematic analysis of contextualized work–life interface. Also, my research findings and multilevel and systematic conceptualization of work–life balance provide support for the previous contention from other scholars (e.g., Gregory and Milner, 2009; Lewis et al., 2007; Lewis and Giullari, 2005) that work–life balance is not purely a personal choice or responsibility since individual work–life experiences are contextualized by their demands and resources from multilevel social systems and therefore, work–life balance researchers should not downplay the contexts and the person–environment interactions.

5.6.2.3 Contextualizing work–life balance through the lens of modernization theory

By incorporating the modernization theory into work–life balance research, I offer a systematic framework (see Table 5.2) to map the contextualized relationships between the societal development and individual work–life experiences via four dimensions of modernization (i.e., economic development, industrialization, social inequality, and social solidarity) and via societal-, workplace-, and micro-level changes in people's demands and resources.

I observe from research participants that a holistic perspective of work–life balance thrives across different generations of people even though China's modernization process from an agrarian to an industrial and information society has brought about drastic societal changes in economic, technological, social, and cultural aspects. By scrutinizing historical contexts and empirical findings, I suspect and challenge that the dominant perspective in the current work–life balance literature—the Western segmentation-oriented perspective is grounded in Western *analytic thinking* (de Oliveira & Nisbett, 2017) and the unique social context of the short period of postwar prosperity in Western societies (Baily & Kirkegaard, 2004; Naithani, 2010) and hence, this stream of Western concepts, theories, and practices of work–life balance are largely a by-product of, and a luxury granted by, an economically advanced and industrialized society.

Such a work–life segmentation approach necessitates several prerequisites which

were largely satisfied by the Western societies in the 1960s. I summarize these requisites combining the Western historical contexts and my empirical findings. First, the guarantee of spare time and money for family and leisure in the society at large necessitates a surge in productivity and wage rates driven by industrialization (Baily & Kirkegaard, 2004; Owen, 1976; Whaples, 1990) and institutionalized shorter working schedules (e.g., 40-hour workweek) driven by a greater emphasis on labor rights protection (Lee et al., 2007; J. C. Messenger, 2004).

Second, the growing salience of work–life balance concerns, especially by protecting their family and leisure activities from the intrusion of work, is circumstanced by a shift of people's essential pursuits from basic subsistence to higher quality of life (Bennis & Thomas, 2002) given an economic boom that lifts people's overall living and working conditions, for example, the West's postwar prosperity (Baily & Kirkegaard, 2004; Naithani, 2010) and China's forty-year "reform and opening" period (i.e., Stage 2). The taken-for-granted Western assumption of work–life balance in terms of having enough time and money to prioritize family and leisure activities (Grawitch et al., 2010; Warren, 2015) is a luxury to the broad masses in low-income societies and the impoverished sub-populations of economically advanced societies because they are more likely to adopt a work-centric approach in order to secure survival and basic subsistence.

Third, the segmentation approach can work well in the interim stage between an agrarian and an information society. However, it is not applicable to an agrarian society where farm and domestic responsibilities are highly intertwined (Goodman & Kaplan, 2019) and less feasible in an information society where the widespread use of information technology blurs the borders between work and personal life (Adisa et al., 2017). The segmentation approach hinges on explicit physical and temporal boundaries between work and life (Nippert-Eng, 1996), often circumscribed by regular working hours and separate locations of the workplace and home. Hence, the segmentation approach is also contingent on the nature of jobs. It may be more feasible in jobs such as assembly workers or administrative staff in the university who have a standard work schedule. In contrast, the segmentation approach may be less implementable in jobs which (a) have relatively flexible work schedules (e.g., academics), (b) serve clients in unsocial hours (e.g., university counselors and teachers

in private education corporations), or (c) entail the co-location of the workplace and home (e.g., farmers) or the adoption of a home-based work arrangement.

A work–life integration approach that manages work–life spillover in a more inclusive and flexible manner has its advantages over work–life segmentation in an agrarian or an information society and in those jobs that have relatively blurry spatial and temporal work–life boundaries. I recognize that an integration approach is more commonly adopted by people who hold a holistic perspective of work–life balance for several reasons. First, as this holistic perspective emphasizes harmonious interdependence and synergy between work and life, people who hold this perspective underplay contradictions and proactively seek coordination when encountering work–life spillover. Their work–life role transitions may consume less energy and induce less conflict than non-holistic thinkers and hence, they are more competent to adopt an integration approach that requires more frequent role transitions.

Second, since this holistic perspective underlines the achievement of work–life balance throughout the lifetime, people who hold this perspective are often more long-term oriented in that they can endure temporary sacrifice of family and leisure time for better career development so as to bring about better socio-economic resources to support family and leisure activities in a long term (M. Zhang et al., 2014). Hence, these people show greater resilience and flexibility towards temporary work–life spillover as long as it facilitates their achievement of desirable work–life outcomes in a long term.

Third, this holistic perspective is grounded in China's tradition of holistic thinking and unique historical contexts and shows great vitality and longevity encompassing China's societal development from an agrarian society to an industrial and information society. In fact, this holistic perspective has evolved along with the societal development. In Stage 1 when China was a typical agrarian society, under the guidance of socialist ideology of communal life, the central government purposefully designed the co-location of the workplace and the residential community in both urban and rural areas by offering workplace-affiliated public housing. The society was characterized by mechanical solidarity where people were largely surrounded by acquaintances who were their colleagues, friends, and neighbors concurrently. Hence, the older generations living in this environment got accustomed to the blurry spatial

boundaries between work and family and frequent role transitions given their highly intertwined professional and private social networks. Furthermore, given the widespread poverty and extensive provision of public welfare, people commonly adopted a work-centric integration approach to organize their life around work because their holistic belief that temporary devotion to work could bring about greater benefits to their family and their country in the long term.

The holistic perspective also thrives in Stage 2 despite that China's market-oriented reforms, rapid industrialization, and urban sprawl have largely increased the physical distance between the workplace and home. At this stage, people still commonly adopt a holistic and integration-oriented perspective approach to work–life interface by (a) being resilient and flexible about work–life spillover, (b) developing overlapped professional and personal networks, and (c) pursuing the realization of personal values through the synergy of work and non-work achievements. In fact, this holistic perspective may facilitate Chinese people's better adaptation to an information society where the prevalent use of information technology blurs work–life boundaries and necessitates more of an integration rather than a segmentation approach.

However, very recently young Chinese intellectuals who were born in the 1990s and have grown up in an affluent and stable society begin to prefer a clear-cut boundary between work and personal life in order to escape from excessive work-to-life spillover. In fact, these young Chinese intellectuals' strong preference for work–life segmentation may reflect their greater emphasis on quality of life and urgent appeal for the government's better protection of labor rights through improving law enforcement and organizational compliance around healthy working conditions in adaptation to an information era (X. Zhang & Yao, 2021) rather than a sheer cultural shift towards the Western analytic, segmentation-oriented mindset.

To summarize key findings (see Table 5.2), I found that individual perceptions and lived experiences about societal development have shaped and transformed their work–life experiences in various ways. First, the growing salience of work–life balance concerns is driven by a relatively high level of economic development that guarantees individuals' basic subsistence and facilitates their pursuit of higher quality of life. The economic improvement also changes people's work-centric integration approach and underscores the importance of non-work pursuits. Furthermore, as the

society becomes economically more advanced, it becomes harder for people to get satisfied with their work and personal life because they also raise their standards for desirable work–life outcomes. Moreover, their raised standards may result in the rat race (i.e., involution) in employment, parenting, education, and other aspects of life, whereby their escalated investments in resources may bring about diminishing marginal returns. Hence, I contend that a satisfactory work–life balance hinges on the relative fit between demands and resources rather than the absolute quantity of resources available.

Second, industrialization separates work from home temporally and spatially and creates conditions for a work–life segmentation approach, whilst the informatization blurs the work–life boundaries and necessitates more of a work–life integration approach. People who hold an analytic, segmentation-oriented perspective may be more accommodated to an industrial era; and a holistic and integration-oriented perspective may be more suitable for an agrarian or information society.

Third, people get satisfied with their work and life more easily in a society with relatively equal distribution of socio-economic resources than a less equal one. This is probably because structural social inequalities substantially intensify the rat race (or involution) at work and at school, exacerbate work and parenting demands, and popularize anxiety around intergenerational social mobility.

Fourth, "a society of acquaintances" exhibiting mechanical solidarity (e.g., small communes, towns, and villages) may cultivate a holistic, integration-oriented perspective of work–life balance with a stronger emphasis on collective interests (e.g., national and organizational goals) given people's highly intertwined work and personal lives through the co-location of the workplace and home and highly overlapped professional and personal networks. In contrast, "a society of strangers" resembling organic solidarity (e.g., metropolitan areas) may shape a more analytic, segmentation-oriented perspective with a stronger emphasis on family and personal interests because social ties beyond kinship networks become weaker and it is easier to develop professional and personal networks separately and reside away from the workplace. Also, when a society transforms from mechanical to organic solidarity, individuals hold more diversified perspectives of work–life interface, ranging from work- to life-centric and from integration- to segmentation-oriented given that

individuals tend to pursue more heterogeneous work–life demands and resort to more differential and personalized resources.

5.6.3 Limitations and future research

In this section, I reflect on research limitations and propose recommendations for future research. First, I noticed the limitation of research sample in that the majority of participants receive high education and have a highly secure job—many have worked in the same organization all their lifetime. Hence, my research sample is not diverse enough to represent the working population in China and the research findings should be cautiously interpreted. However, interviewees also compared themselves with their partners, children, parents, siblings, classmates, and other people who work as farmers, manufacturing workers, entrepreneurs, and so on. As such, I might still have a rough understanding of Chinese people's work–life experiences beyond the intellectual community. Future research could extend my study by investigating people from diverse occupations and sectors so as to enrich our knowledge of the impact of China's modernization on people's demands, resources, and work–life experiences over time.

Second, I recognize the limitation in my research scope in terms of a case study on modernization and work–life balance in the Chinese context because China's modernization path may be quite different from that of Western societies and other developing economies. Future research could explore whether people from other Global South countries undergo similar or vastly different changes in their demands, resources, and work–life experiences as Chinese people have achieved in their modernization process. I recommend scholars to apply my analytical framework (see Table 5.2) to other national contexts and solicit multi-generational research participants aimed at developing a more comprehensive understanding of how different paths to modernization and different stages of societal development shape people's demands, resources, and work–life experiences.

Third, the research time frame (1949–2019) allows me to explore two important stages in China's modernization process but restrains me from exploring a new page of the history in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically transformed the global political and economic landscape and reshaped people's work–life experiences.

Global crises, such as economic recessions and pandemic, may have a profound and enduring impact on the society at large and individuals' lived experiences, manifesting in multilevel environment and lasting for years or even decades (Chatrakul Na Ayudhya et al., 2019; Guillén R, 2011). I expect that a longitudinal design and my systematic analytical framework (see Table 5.2) may be particularly useful for scholars to develop a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the long-term impact of such a global health crisis on people's demands and resources from multilevel social systems and on individual work–life experiences. Therefore, I call for longitudinal research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on work–life balance by applying (a) my systematic and multilevel analytical framework of societal development and work–life balance in conjunction with (b) a capability approach to understanding work–life balance in the context of global economic crises (Chatrakul Na Ayudhya et al., 2019).

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

In this thesis, I conducted three complementary studies in response to an overarching research question:

How do demands and resources from individuals and their embedded multilevel social systems jointly shape individuals' work–life experiences and generate desirable outcomes for individuals and their embedded social systems?

This thesis addresses this question by theoretically advancing and empirically applying a *systematic* approach encompassing process-oriented, multilevel, and multidimensional perspectives to work–life balance research. I bring in insights from the social support literature (Bruhn & Philips, 1984; S. Cohen & Wills, 1985; Shinn et al., 1984; Tardy, 1985) to advance the conceptual development of work–life balance support as a *multidimensional* construct that underscores the reality–perception transformation during the processes of the decision-making, implementation, and evaluation of work–life balance support mechanisms. Drawing a *process-oriented* view from resource theories (Grawitch et al., 2010; Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018), I contribute to the literature by explicitly highlighting the mediating role of key personal resources in bridging the contextual factors and individual work–life experiences. Furthermore, I adopt a *multilevel* perspective from the socio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1992) and deepen our understanding of the impact of the societal-level dynamic process (e.g., modernization) on micro-level work–life experiences over time.

In this chapter, I summarize the key findings in response to this overarching research question. Then I briefly discuss the overall theoretical contributions and practical implications of my thesis. This chapter concludes with a reflection on the research limitations and avenues for future research.

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

Study 1 (see CHAPTER 3) systematically synthesized dispersed multi-disciplinary evidence and advanced the conceptualization of work–life balance support as a process-oriented, multilevel, and multidimensional construct. This systematic literature review spotlighted some major gaps in the existing literature as follows: (a) the limited knowledge of societal- and workplace-level support mechanisms and their family, organizational, and societal antecedents, outcomes, and contexts; (b) a lack of systematic consideration of different stakeholders' (i.e., individuals, employers, and the state) shared and competing interests; (c) an insufficient understanding of the long-term impact and sustainability of work–life balance support mechanisms; and (d) the underplay of the iterative, bidirectional interactions between individuals' objective and subjective work–life experiences and their social environment. To address these gaps, I put forward three major research directions in terms of (a) *cost-effectiveness analysis* of specific support mechanisms, for instance, a comprehensive evaluation on the human and financial resource investments and returns of implementing flexible working arrangements; (b) *pluralist thinking* that considers whether a support mechanism enables a win-win situation by achieving the mutual interests of multiple stakeholders or only achieves partial goals or one-sided interests due to the failed reconciliation of the conflicting interests of multiple stakeholders; and (c) *context specification* by explicitly addressing the different priorities and objectives of stakeholders in specific contexts (accounting for variations in populations and associated family, organizational, and societal/national dynamics).

Study 2 (see CHAPTER 4) showed that both perceptions of two key personal resources—perceived adequate childcare time and good family financial management capacity—enhanced working mothers' work–life balance satisfaction and positively predicted their long-term job retention over six years of their children's primary school education. Findings supported the *resource depletion* mechanism in that longer working hours, undertaking a managerial role, frequently working in the evening, having more children in household, having a child with longstanding illness, and longer hours of using home-based childcare support served as *time-based demands* as they hindered effective allocation of personal time for childcare, which in turn resulted

in poorer work–life balance satisfaction and job retention. Similarly, frequently working in the evening and having a child with longstanding illness served as *financial-based demands* as they depleted family finances. In contrast, utilizing part-time and home-based working arrangements promoted work–life balance satisfaction via *resource accumulation* mechanism in terms of expanding or eliciting effective allocation of both personal resources of childcare time and family finances, functioning as both *time-based* and *financial-based resources*. Also, undertaking a managerial role, having a working partner, and establishing a local social support network served as *financial-based resources* as they enhanced the family financial management capacity. This research also confirmed the *resource investment* mechanism by revealing that working mothers might trade their childcare time for better family finances when they undertook a managerial role. Thus, undertaking a managerial role served as both a *time-based demand* and a *financial-based resource* for pursuing work–life balance. Research also identified nuanced differences in terms of between- and within-individual effects of some contextual demands and resources, such as utilizing part-time working arrangements and undertaking a managerial role.

Study 3 (see CHAPTER 5) underlined three major changing trends in individual work–life experiences as China progressed in its modernization process during 1949–2019. First, compared to the older generations who were more likely to use homogeneous public services at a low cost to accommodate their homogenous life demands in Stage 1 (i.e., the state-planned economy stage of 1949–1978), people were subject to greater structural inequalities because they relied more on personalized paid services to fulfil their heterogeneous demands in Stage 2 (i.e., the socialist market economy stage of 1979–2019). Second, there was a recent shift in people’s preferred coping strategies from work–life integration to work–life segmentation under the context of informatization and a greater emphasize on quality of life. Third, there was a tendency of “involution” characterized by constantly raising standards for, escalated resource investments in, and increased difficulties in achieving satisfactory work–life outcomes given the rat race in all walks of life. In addition, by scrutinizing historical contexts and empirical findings, I acknowledge that the Western segmentation-oriented perspective is grounded in Western *analytic thinking* (de Oliveira & Nisbett, 2017) and the unique societal context of the short period of postwar prosperity in

Western societies (Baily & Kirkegaard, 2004; Naithani, 2010). In fact, the taken-for-granted Western assumption of work–life balance in terms of having enough time and money to choose to prioritize family and leisure activities (Grawitch et al., 2010; Warren, 2015) is a luxury to the broad masses in low-income societies and the impoverished sub-populations of economically advanced societies because they are more likely to adopt a work-centric approach in order to secure survival and basic subsistence.

6.2 Overview of Theoretical Implications

This thesis contributes to the work–life balance literature by theoretically advancing and empirically applying a *systematic* approach encompassing process-oriented, multilevel, and multidimensional perspectives to study how individual work–life interface is shaped by contextual demands and resources over time. First, drawing insights from the social support literature (Bruhn & Philips, 1984; S. Cohen & Wills, 1985; Shinn et al., 1984; Tardy, 1985), I advance the conceptualization of work–life balance support as a *multidimensional* construct by proposing a structure–functionality typology that distinguishes between the objective reality versus subjective evaluation of work–life balance support. Specifically, *structural* dimensions include the (a) provision, (b) utilization, (c) intervention, and (d) timing of work–life balance support mechanisms. *Functional* dimensions cover the (a) perceived availability, (b) perceived necessity, (c) expectation, (d) perceived usefulness, and (e) perceived consequence of work–life balance support mechanisms. I also provide a process-oriented conceptual model for explicating how people transform the physical reality into subjective perception and vice versa during their design, implementation, and evaluation of societal and organizational support mechanisms for work–life balance.

Furthermore, I examined the role of actual utilization of several micro- and workplace-level support mechanisms in influencing working mothers' work–life balance satisfaction and job retention. The findings contribute to the work–life balance research and employee retention literature by scrutinizing the actual effectiveness of work–life balance support mechanisms for promoting job retention given that the relevant literature has primarily focused on exploring the role of the perceived

availability rather than the actual utilization of support mechanisms and turnover intentions rather than actual retention.

Second, drawing from the *conservation of resources (COR) theory* (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018) and the *personal resource allocation (PRA) framework* (Grawitch et al., 2010), I enrich the *process-oriented* view of work–life interface by explicitly highlighting three underlying mechanisms by which contextual factors influence individuals' work–life experiences and job retention, respectively, by depleting, expanding, or trading their key personal resources in a long term of six years. These mechanisms are resource depletion, resource accumulation, and resource investment and this thesis provides a long-term validation of these mechanisms, extending relevant research predominantly using short-term longitudinal (e.g., ranging from several days to months) or cross-sectional designs (e.g., Au and Ahmed, 2016; Li *et al.*, 2018; Lin *et al.*, 2017).

By highlighting the critical role of both time and finances in promoting working mothers' work–life balance and job retention, this thesis adds important insights to the extant work–life balance literature that emphasizes time-based but neglects financial-based constraints and resources (Grawitch et al., 2010). In line with this theoretical implication, my research underscores the importance of a holistic evaluation on the impact of contextual factors on people's work–life balance or other work–life outcomes by considering the mediating role of *multiple* key personal resources simultaneously because (a) a satisfactory work–life balance often necessitates effective allocation of multiple (rather than a single) key personal resources and (b) a contextual factor may necessitate the depletion of one personal resource (e.g., time) in exchange for another personal resource (e.g., money) and hence, has a paradoxical impact on one's work–life balance.

Third, with reference to the *multilevel* perspective from the socio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1992), this thesis expands our understanding of how the macro-level dynamic process might transform micro-level work–life experiences over time through changing the societal-, workplace-, and micro-level demands and resources for sustaining work–life balance. By incorporating key insights from the modernization theory, I develop an analytical framework for scholars to explore how the multi-faceted societal development may impact individuals' work–

life experiences via four critical dimensions of modernization, namely economic development, industrialization, social inequality, and social solidarity.

Through an empirical examination of how China's societal development has shaped individuals' work–life experiences, my thesis proposes a holistic, integration-oriented conceptualization of work–life balance. In contrast to the dominant Western analytic, segmentation-oriented conceptualization, this holistic perspective emphasizes (a) the harmony of work–life interdependence and synergy, (b) attaching positive values to both work and non-work aspects, and (c) achieving an overall satisfactory life encompassing desirable work and non-work accomplishments throughout lifetime. Different from the work–life enrichment theory (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) that emphasizes positive work–life interface in the contemporary context or in a relatively short time frame, from a holistic perspective, people evaluate their work–life balance based not only on their current state but also on their past work–life achievements and their anticipated future accomplishments over the life span. As such, people are more capable of tolerating temporary contradictions and dedicating themselves to their long-term goals and ultimate meaning of life. For instance, Chinese people believe that their contemporary sacrifice of partial family and leisure time for work in the early stage of career development can bring about greater socio-economic resources for their family and leisure activities in a long term (M. Zhang et al., 2014) and hence, this temporary work-centric devotion is not detrimental for their work–life balance.

6.3 General Practical Implications

This thesis also offers some general practical recommendations for employees, employers, and policymakers. First, a holistic perspective of work–life interface suggests that individual employees can coordinate their work and non-work goals and adjust their expectations for desirable work–life outcomes on account of their constraints of key resources such as time and money so as to make their work and personal lives more compatible and less conflicting. For instance, when both career progression and childcare demand for substantial time investment, employees could potentially postpone their childrearing plan if they attach greater value to career

progression at an early stage of their career. Alternatively, they could compensate for their insufficient time to spend with children by focusing on short-time but high-quality interactions with children and seeking family support or domestic help for housework.

For working mothers, having both, a working partner and a local social support network comprising family members and friends, could increase their family financial security, contributing to better work–life balance. Furthermore, a negotiation with partner for an equal share of childcare and housework would alleviate working mothers' time pressure for juggling childcare and employment, promoting their work–life balance and retention in employment.

For employers, both attractive financial incentives and part-time and home-based working arrangements that increase the time to spend with primary school-age children can improve working mothers' work–life balance and job retention. However, part-time employment may be more suitable for female employees who are not the only or primary source of family income because otherwise, part-time employment may cause financial insecurity and hence impair work–life balance. Research findings suggest that delegating childcare responsibilities may not be an optimal choice for women to improve their work–life balance. Instead, it may be better for employers to offer working arrangements that allow working mothers to work fewer hours to accommodate their childcare demands and improve parenting quality (Chandola et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the governmental and organizational provision of work–life balance support should be tailored to people's actual work–life demands (e.g., basic subsistence or high quality of life) as well as adapted to specific societal contexts (e.g., level of economic development and industrialization). Work–life balance practices from affluent and industrialized Western societies may not apply to societies, families, or individuals who are currently trapped in poverty or economic crises or subsisting in an agrarian society. Hence, for an overall improvement of people's working and living conditions, it is more important for the policymakers to give context-specific support addressing people's or the country's top priorities, such as poverty alleviation for the impoverished and achieving industrial upgrading for low-productivity, low value-added economies. In fact, work–life balance is a "luxury" granted by an economically

advanced and industrialized society because it hinges on relatively high productivity, decent working and living conditions, and abundant socio-economic resources for coping with work–life challenges.

Finally, in line with many scholars' argument (e.g., Gregory and Milner, 2009; Lewis et al., 2007; Lewis and Giullari, 2005), this thesis advocates the shared responsibility and systematic cooperation between individuals, families, organizations, communities, and the state to facilitate individuals' work–life balance and generate positive returns for all the stakeholders involved, forming a virtuous cycle. Since many people's work–life conflict originates from societal problems such as poverty and aging population which individuals cannot solve by themselves, I call for systematic and structural change that entails joint and synergistic efforts from multilevel social systems to transform the entire society and create better conditions for people to work and live. My research serves as a good example: China has achieved state-led industrialization, economic upgrading, and regime and social stability manifested through win-win collaboration between citizens and the government over the past seven decades, pulling 0.76 billion people out of poverty during 1978–2019 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020a), significantly improving their working and living conditions, and providing a greater quantity and variety of products and services for people to cope with their diverse work–life demands.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

A systematic approach to work–life balance research is vital for scholars to contextualize individuals' work–life interface in their embedded social environment but this approach is still only emerging in this field. My thesis could inspire future research to apply a systematic analytical approach to explore individuals' work–life experiences in relation to their embedded multilevel social systems so as to offer more context-specific and nuanced theoretical explanations and practical implications. My research focuses particularly on the theoretical development of work–life balance and offers several conceptual frameworks and a number of avenues for future research.

Study 1 provides a systematic theoretical framework and research agenda for the process-oriented, multilevel, and multidimensional investigation of work–life balance

support mechanisms. Specifically, I recommend a *multilevel* and *process-oriented* investigation of the spiral process of interactions between individuals and their environment through resource changes, specifically highlighting the influence of stressors and support mechanisms on individuals' personal resources, work–life balance, and on their embedded social systems. Furthermore, I suggest a *multidimensional* and *process-oriented* investigation of three iterative processes of interactions between individuals' subjective perception (i.e., functional dimensions) and physical environment (i.e., structural dimensions) of work–life balance support—decision-making, realization, and subjective feedback processes. Study 1 is a conceptual work and its theoretical framework still necessitates empirical examination in the future.

Study 2 has touched upon working mothers' time–money conundrum by highlighting the critical role of both adequate childcare time and family finances and the potential trade-off between both in shaping working mothers' work–life balance satisfaction. Although this research rejected the hypothesis of a substitution effect between time and financial resources on working mothers' work–life balance satisfaction, my findings imply that female managers potentially trade time for money to spend on their children and this could be explained by the resource investment mechanism (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Scholars might further explore this time–money conundrum with regard to different contextual demands for sustaining work–life balance, such as eldercare, leisure, and social activities. This research could draw from Whillans et al. (2016) and use their resource orientation measure to ascertain to what extent individuals prioritize time over money and what effects this has on their work–life balance. Although Study 2 has utilized a nationally representative data that covers a wide range of occupations and sheds light upon different household structures (i.e., single-parent versus dual-parent), the generalizability of findings has been limited to working mothers. More research is needed to validate the resource depletion, accumulation, and investment mechanisms in other populations, such as fathers or people without children who have life demands other than childcare.

Future research could also adopt field or natural experimental designs to provide evidence of policy effectiveness in real-life settings (Leatherdale, 2019). Such studies could test whether the introduction of a specific work–life balance support mechanism,

such as national and organizational family-friendly policies, can improve employees' work–life balance given its overall impact on multiple key personal resources. This is because there may be complex trade-offs between different types of personal resources in the decision-making of implementing or adopting a particular support mechanism. For instance, research indicates that some women from low-income or working-class families have to opt out of the workforce to make time for, and save costs on childcare (Barglowski & Pustulka, 2018). The time–money conundrum can be further explored through the lens of social class. As Warren (2015) suggests, such trade-off between time and money for work–life balance is potentially a class-based decision in that middle-class professionals may prioritize making more time for family and leisure, whilst the working class may have to prioritize making money for subsistence livelihood.

Study 3 sheds a light on some major trends of societal development shaping individuals' work–life experiences over time and advances a holistic, integration-oriented perspective of work–life balance, bringing alternative insights into the work–life balance literature dominated by Western analytic, segmentation-oriented conceptualization. However, it should be noted that the findings from Study 3 are limited due to (a) a homogenous and small sample of intellectuals characterized by good education and high job security; (b) a case study on China which has a unique modernization path different from that of most developed economies and Global South countries; and (c) a time frame of 1949–2019 without covering the COVID-19 pandemic which has had striking and complex influences on people's work and personal lives. Therefore, I suggest that future research could explore whether the modernization process has unevenly impacted different populations from the perspective of social inequality and pay more attention to some under-studied occupations in the current literature, such as farmers and the self-employed. I recommend an application of the analytical framework of Study 3 to other societies in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how different paths to modernization and different stages of societal development shape people's demands, resources, and work–life experiences. For instance, scholars could explore how the de-industrialization process in some Western economies has reshaped manufacturing workers' work and lives in some industrial cities (e.g., Detroit and Chicago of the

United States). Also, more research like Goodman and Kaplan's (2019) is needed to understand how people in agrarian societies can improve their quality of work and personal lives. Furthermore, an eagle eye should be kept on how the societal dynamics amid and after the COVID-19 pandemic may change people's demands and resources for harmonizing their work and personal lives and how people could better recover from such a global health crisis with the help of their governments, organizations, communities, and families.

6.5 Conclusion

This thesis theoretically advanced and empirically applied a systematic approach to the work–life balance research by explicitly spotlighting the person–environment interaction in work–life interface. Based on a systematic literature review of studies on work–life balance support (Study 1), I put forward a process-oriented, multilevel, and multidimensional theoretical framework for explicating the person–environment interactions and how these shape individual experiences and perceptions about work–life balance. Utilizing a nationally representative sample of British working mothers, I conducted a process-oriented investigation in a longitudinal quantitative study (Study 2) by revealing three underlying mechanisms—resource depletion, resource investment, and resource investment—through which contextual factors impact individuals' work–life balance satisfaction and job retention over time by depleting, expanding, or trading two key personal resources—childcare time and family finances. I also conducted an exploratory qualitative study (Study 3) from a multilevel perspective to deepen our understanding of how macro-level societal dynamics (i.e., China's modernization process) might transform micro-level work–life experiences by changing individuals' demands and resources from societal-, workplace-, and micro-level environment. It is my hope that this thesis illuminates a holistic, integration-oriented conceptualization and a systematic approach to studying work–life balance.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Sample Characteristics

Table S1: Sample characteristics

Characteristics	Age 5 Survey	Age 7 Survey	Age 11 Survey
Age	M = 34.91 SD = 5.45	M = 36.93 SD = 5.50	M = 40.82 SD = 5.51
Relationship to the cohort child	(1) Natural mother: 8007 (99.75%) (2) Adoptive mother: 9 (.11%) (3) Step mother: 2 (.02%) (4) Grandmother: 8 (.10%) (5) Other female relative or non-relative: 1 (.01%)	(1) Natural mother: 8053 (99.68%) (2) Adoptive mother: 10 (.12%) (3) Grandmother: 14 (.17%) (4) Other female relative or non-relative: 2 (.02%)	(1) Natural mother: 8232 (99.52%) (2) Adoptive mother: 12 (.15%) (3) Foster mother: 6 (.07%) (4) Step mother: 2 (.02%) (5) Grandmother: 12 (.15%) (6) Natural sister: 1 (.01%) (7) Other female relative or non-relative: 7 (.08%)
Country	(1) England: 4853 (60.46%) (2) Wales: 1213 (15.11%) (3) Scotland: 1075 (13.39%) (4) Northern Ireland: 886 (11.04%)	(1) England: 4972 (61.54%) (2) Wales: 1207 (14.94%) (3) Scotland: 1067 (13.21%) (4) Northern Ireland: 833 (10.31%)	(1) England: 5153 (62.29%) (2) Wales: 1234 (14.92%) (3) Scotland: 1038 (12.55%) (4) Northern Ireland: 847 (10.24%)
Religion	(1) Christian: 4727 (58.89%) (2) Muslim: 169 (2.11%) (3) Hindu: 128 (1.59%) (4) Sikh: 76 (.95%) (5) Jewish: 19 (.24%) (6) Buddhist: 14 (.17%) (7) Other: 23 (.29%) (8) None: 2869 (35.74%) (9) Not applicable: 2 (.02%)	(1) Christian: 3552 (43.97%) (2) Muslim: 180 (2.23%) (3) Hindu: 103 (1.27%) (4) Sikh: 86 (1.06%) (5) Jewish: 14 (.17%) (6) Buddhist: 16 (.20%) (7) Other: 20 (.25%) (8) None: 4060 (50.25%) (9) Not applicable: 48 (.59%)	(1) Christian: 3719 (44.96%) (2) Muslim: 242 (2.93%) (3) Hindu: 116 (1.40%) (4) Sikh: 81 (.98%) (5) Jewish: 14 (.17%) (6) Buddhist: 14 (.17%) (7) Other: 18 (.22%) (8) None: 4067 (49.17%) (9) Not applicable: 1 (.01%)

Table S1 (continued)

Characteristics	Age 5 Survey	Age 7 Survey	Age 11 Survey
Ethnic group	(1) White: 7355 (91.63%) (2) Mixed: 48 (.60%) (3) Indian: 205 (2.55%) (4) Pakistani and Bangladeshi: 110 (1.37%) (5) Black or Black British: 218 (2.72%) (6) Other: 91 (1.13%)	(1) White: 7374 (91.27%) (2) Mixed: 51 (.63%) (3) Indian: 209 (2.59%) (4) Pakistani and Bangladeshi: 123 (1.52%) (5) Black or Black British: 226 (2.80%) (6) Other: 94 (1.16%) (7) Not applicable: 2 (.02%)	(1) White: 7337 (88.70%) (2) Mixed: 46 (.56%) (3) Indian: 201 (2.43%) (4) Pakistani and Bangladeshi: 159 (1.92%) (5) Black or Black British: 209 (2.53%) (6) Other: 98 (1.18%) (7) Not applicable: 222 (2.68%)
Marital status	(1) Married, 1st and only marriage: 5174 (64.46%) (2) Remarried, 2nd or later marriage: 519 (6.47%) (3) Single, never married: 1581 (19.70%) (4) Legally separated: 262 (3.26%) (5) Divorced: 440 (5.48%) (6) Widowed: 27 (.34%) (7) Not applicable: 24 (.30%)	(1) Married, 1st and only marriage: 5183 (64.15%) (2) Remarried, 2nd or later marriage: 527 (6.52%) (3) Single, never married: 1433 (17.74%) (4) Legally separated: 294 (3.64%) (5) Divorced: 569 (7.04%) (6) Widowed: 35 (.43%) (7) Not applicable: 38 (.47%)	(1) Married, 1st and only marriage: 5047 (61.01%) (2) Remarried, 2nd or later marriage: 609 (7.36%) (3) Single, never married: 1207 (14.59%) (4) Legally separated: 404 (4.88%) (5) Divorced: 789 (9.54%) (6) Widowed: 49 (.59%) (7) A Civil Partner (legally recognized): 103 (1.25%) (8) A former Civil Partner: 8 (.10%) (9) A surviving Civil Partner: 1 (.01%) (10) Not applicable: 55 (.66%)
Household characteristics	(1) Dual-earner family: 6625 (82.53%) (2) Woman as the primary breadwinner and caregiver with a non-working partner: 285 (3.55%) (3) Single-parent family: 1117 (13.92%)	(1) Dual-earner family: 6483 (80.25%) (2) Woman as the primary breadwinner and caregiver with a non-working partner: 265 (3.28%) (3) Single-parent family: 1331 (16.47%)	(1) Dual-earner family: 6242 (75.46%) (2) Woman as the primary breadwinner and caregiver with a non-working partner: 360 (4.35%) (3) Single-parent family: 1670 (20.19%)

Table S1 (continued)

Characteristics	Age 5 Survey	Age 7 Survey	Age 11 Survey
Type of organization worked for	(1) Private organization/firm/company: 3793 (47.25%) (2) Local government or town hall (including local education authority, fire, and police): 1494 (18.61%) (3) National Health Service or NHS Trust: 1038 (12.93%) (4) Non-profit organization (including charity and co-operative): 324 (4.04%) (5) Civil Service or Central Government (excluding armed forces): 306 (3.81%) (6) State higher education (university or polytechnic): 121 (1.51%) (7) State-owned organization/company: 16 (.20%) (8) Armed Forces: 11 (.14%) (9) Other: 107 (1.33%) (10) Not applicable: 817 (10.18%)	(1) Private organization/firm/company: 3536 (43.77%) (2) Local government or town hall (including local education authority, fire, and police): 1813 (22.44%) (3) National Health Service or NHS Trust: 1005 (12.44%) (4) Non-profit organization (including charity and co-operative): 364 (4.51%) (5) Civil Service or Central Government (excluding armed forces): 288 (3.56%) (6) State higher education (university or polytechnic): 118 (1.46%) (7) State-owned organization/company: 13 (.16%) (8) Armed Forces: 7 (.09%) (9) Other: 78 (.97%) (10) Not applicable: 857 (10.61%)	(1) Private organization/firm/company: 3220 (38.93%) (2) Local government or town hall (including local education authority, fire, and police): 1935 (23.39%) (3) National Health Service or NHS Trust: 1007 (12.17%) (4) Non-profit organization (including charity and co-operative): 378 (4.57%) (5) Civil Service or Central Government (excluding armed forces): 307 (3.71%) (6) State higher education (university or polytechnic): 197 (2.38%) (7) State-owned organization/company: 75 (.91%) (8) Armed Forces: 8 (.10%) (9) Other: 112 (1.35%) (10) Not applicable: 1033 (12.49%)

Table S1 (continued)

Characteristics	Age 5 Survey	Age 7 Survey	Age 11 Survey
Total number of children in household	*M* = 2.16 *SD* = .87	*M* = 2.28 *SD* = .87	*M* = 2.33 *SD* = .89
NS-SEC occupation-based social class	(1) Upper class (higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations): 2956 (36.83%) (2) Middle class (intermediate occupations): 2396 (29.85%) (3) Working class (routine and manual occupations): 2576 (32.09%) (4) Not applicable: 99 (1.23%)	(1) Upper class (higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations): 3053 (37.79%) (2) Middle class (intermediate occupations): 2353 (29.12%) (3) Working class (routine and manual occupations): 2572 (31.84%) (4) Not applicable: 101 (98.75%)	(1) Upper class (higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations): 3169 (38.31%) (2) Middle class (intermediate occupations): 2608 (31.53%) (3) Working class (routine and manual occupations): 2214 (26.76%) (4) Not applicable: 281 (3.40%)
OECD equivalized weekly family income (£)	*M* = 421.56 *SD* = 208.10	*M* = 449.72 *SD* = 216.34	*M* = 476.49 *SD* = 157.45
OECD equivalized UK-wide household income quintile	(1) Lowest quintile: 504 (6.28%) (2) Second quintile: 1323 (16.48%) (3) Third quintile: 1983 (24.70%) (4) Fourth quintile: 2173 (27.07%) (5) Highest quintile: 2006 (24.99%) (6) Not applicable: 38 (.47%)	(1) Lowest quintile: 579 (7.17%) (2) Second quintile: 1350 (16.71%) (3) Third quintile: 1963 (24.30%) (4) Fourth quintile: 2107 (26.08%) (5) Highest quintile: 2072 (25.65%) (6) Not applicable: 8 (.10%)	(1) Lowest quintile: 260 (3.14%) (2) Second quintile: 1335 (16.14%) (3) Third quintile: 2091 (25.28%) (4) Fourth quintile: 2282 (27.59%) (5) Highest quintile: 2304 (27.85%)
Whether family income below 60% median poverty indicator	(1) Above 60% median: 6855 (85.40%) (2) Below 60% median: 1134 (14.13%) (3) Not applicable: 38 (.47%)	(1) Above 60% median: 7011 (86.78%) (2) Below 60% median: 1060 (13.12%) (3) Not applicable: 8 (.10%)	(1) Above 60% median: 7730 (93.45%) (2) Below 60% median: 542 (6.55%)
Number of observations	8027	8079	8272

Appendix B: Results of Additional Analyses

After controlling for the mediation effects, the following contextual factors still had significant direct effects at Level 1 and/or Level 2 on WLB satisfaction (see Table 4.4): (a) weekly working hours (B_{L1} = –.05, B_{L2} = –.06, p < .01), (b) undertaking a managerial role (B_{L1} = –.21, p < .01), (c) frequently working in the evening (B_{L1} = –.21, B_{L2} = –.21, p < .01), (d) the number of children in household (B_{L2} = .18, p < .01), (e) the age of cohort child (B_{L1} = .24, p < .05), (f) having a cohort child with longstanding illness (B_{L2} = –.16, p < .05), (g) using part-time (B_{L1} = .48, B_{L2} = .48, p < .01) and (h) home-based (B_{L1} = .54, B_{L2} = .81, p < .01) working arrangements, (i) having a local social support network (B_{L1} = .60, B_{L2} = .46, p < .01), , and (j) weekly hours of utilizing home-based childcare support (B_{L1} = –.01, B_{L2} = –.03, p < .01).

Given our research interest in improving female caregivers' WLB and their persistence in the labor force, we also performed additional analyses to examine the direct and indirect effects of each contextual demand and resource on female caregivers' subsequent job retention via two personal resources and WLB satisfaction (see Table 4.4 and Table 4.5). The results are elaborated as follows.

Findings indicate that several contextual factors at Level 1 and/or Level 2 had negative indirect effects on female caregivers' job retention via decreased perceived adequacy of childcare time and subsequently worsened WLB satisfaction, as follows: longer weekly working hours (B_{L1} = –.01, B_{L2} = –.02, p < .05), undertaking a managerial role (B_{L1} = –.07, B_{L2} = –. 09, p < .05), working in the evening more frequently (B_{L1} = –.05, B_{L2} = –.05, p < .05), having more children in household (B_{L1} = –.13, B_{L2} = –.07, p < .05), having a cohort child with longstanding illness (B_{L2} = –.11, p < .05), and longer weekly hours of utilizing home-based childcare support (B_{L1} = –.01, B_{L2} = –.02, p < .05). Moreover, working more frequently in the evening at Level 2 (B = –.01, p < .05), having a cohort child with longstanding illness (B = –.02, p < .05), and utilizing part-time working arrangements at Level 1 (B = –.02, p < .05) also had negative indirect effects on female caregivers' job retention via reduced family financial management capacity and subsequently worsened WLB satisfaction. After controlling for the mediation effects, undertaking a managerial role

at Level 1 had a negative direct effect on job retention ($B = -.35$, $p < .01$).

In contrast, utilizing part-time ($B_{L1} = .24$, $B_{L2} = .29$, $p < .05$) and home-based ($B_{L1} = .20$, $B_{L2} = .27$, $p < .05$) working arrangements at both Level 1 and Level 2 had positive indirect effects on job retention via increased perceived adequacy of childcare time and subsequently improved WLB satisfaction. Furthermore, we found that the following contextual factors at Level 1 and/or Level 2 had positive indirect effects on job retention via increased family financial management capacity and subsequently improved WLB satisfaction: undertaking a managerial role ($B_{L2} = .03$, $p < .05$), utilizing part-time working arrangements ($B_{L2} = .03$, $p < .05$), utilizing home-based working arrangements ($B_{L2} = .05$, $p < .05$), having a working partner ($B_{L1} = .06$, $B_{L2} = .03$, $p < .05$), and having a local social support network ($B_{L2} = .05$, $p < .05$). After controlling for the mediation effects, several contextual factors had positive direct effects on job retention: longer weekly working hours at Level 1 ($B = .07$, $p < .01$), utilizing part-time working arrangements at Level 2 ($B = .33$, $p < .01$), having a working ($B = .45$, $p < .01$) or non-working ($B = .60$, $p < .05$) partner at Level 2, and longer weekly hours of utilizing home-based childcare support at Level 2 ($B = .02$, $p < .05$). Besides, good financial management capacity had a positive direct effect on job retention ($B = .09$, $p < .05$) whilst perceived adequacy of childcare time had no significant direct effect on job retention after controlling for the mediation effects. Also, having higher WLB satisfaction had a positive direct effect on job retention ($B = .26$, $p < .01$) holding other variables constant.

Appendix C: A Historical Overview of China's Modernization Process (1949–2019)

Semi-colonial semi-feudal society stage (1840–1948)	
Year	***Before 1949***
Economic development	• China was a self-sufficient, agriculture-based subsistence economy for over 2,000 years.
Industrialization	• China had a low level of industrialization (characterized by the rural homecraft and urban handicraft industries) (Hu, 2020).
Social inequality	• China had a high level of social inequality during 1912–1949.
Social solidarity	• Chinese people shared collective aspirations of living a peaceful and affluent life because they had suffered from Western colonization and imperialist wars for over a century since 1840s. • The Chinese society was in urgent need for a recovery from the Second Sino–Japan War (1931–1945) and the Second Chinese Civil War (1945–1950).

Stage 1: State-planned economy stage (1949–1978)	
Year	***1949–1959***
Economic development	• China started to adopt the state-planned economic system. • Against the backdrop of the Cold War (1947–1991), China joined the socialist camp in 1950 and encountered the economic blockade from the capitalist camp. • First economic crisis (1949–1951) of hyperinflation and severe unemployment in cities owing to many years of wars • Second economic crisis (1958–1960) related to the Sino–Soviet split, droughts, and famine
Industrialization	• Pre-industrialization phase (1949–1978) (Q. Huang, 2018b) • The state extracted surplus value from the entire workforce to accumulate capitals for funding industrialization. • China received economic aid of loans, technicians, and devices from the Soviet Union to establish a relatively comprehensive industrial system with an emphasis on heavy industries in the 1950s.
Social inequality	• The 1950 Land Reform established the system of collective land ownership, redistributed rural lands to every peasant, ensured relatively equal land distribution among peasants, and transformed peasants into smallholding farmers. • All the private properties were nationalized and the state ensured relatively equal distribution of basic commodities and public services to citizens under the state-planned economy.
Social solidarity	• The new Chinese regime gained its legitimacy and mass support that facilitated its nationwide social mobilization by taking measures to defend its sovereignty, enhance social equality, invigorate economy, and restore public order. As a result, Chinese citizens trusted in and collaborated with the government and committed themselves to realize their collective goals of establishing a peaceful and prosperous society throughout the 70-year history of modern China.

Year	*1960s*
Economic development	• Third economic crisis (1968–1970) due to huge fiscal deficits • China encountered the economic blockade from both socialist and capitalist camps due to the Sino–Soviet split and the ideological disputes.
Industrialization	• Pre-industrialization phase (1949–1978) (Q. Huang, 2018b) • The central government deployed the Third Front Movement strategy to prioritize the development of heavy and defense industries and move these factories from the east coast to the middle and west inland regions for national security concerns.
Social inequality	—
Social solidarity	—
Year	***1970–1978***
Economic development	• The Chinese leaders sought a détente with the United States and the capitalist camp in the 1970s. As a result, the West lifted its twenty-year economic blockade against China after the American president Richard Nixon visited China in 1972. • The Chinese government enforced the 1978 "reform and opening" economic reforms that transformed its state-planned economy to a socialist market economy (i.e., marketization) and opened its economy to the global trade (i.e., globalization). These economic reforms boosted China's economic growth and industrial upgrading in the next four decades. • Fourth economic crisis (1974–1976) due to enormous fiscal deficits and foreign debts
Industrialization	• Pre-industrialization phase (1949–1978) (Q. Huang, 2018b) • China imported $4.24 billion technological devices and services and some labor-intensive, low-technology, and low value-added industries (e.g., textiles) from the West to adjust its industrial structure by correcting the imbalance between heavy and light industries in the 1970s. • The industrial products took up 45.2% whereas the primary products accounted for 54.8% of China's total export in 1978 (J. Y. Lin & Yu, 2015; Wen, 2012).
Social inequality	—
Social solidarity	—
Stage 2: Socialist market economy stage (1979–2019)	
Year	***1979–1989***
Economic development	• The Chinese society gave its top priority to the economic development whereas the radical ideological battle was no longer a major socio-political concern after 1978. • Fifth economic crisis (1979–1981) due to huge fiscal deficits • Economic reforms in the 1970s and 1980s not only boosted agricultural productivity, rural entrepreneurship, and farmers' income and consumption but also accelerated industrialization and urbanization in rural areas, driving rapid national economic growth in 1983–1988. • Sixth economic crisis (1988–1989) of stagflation
Industrialization	• Initial phase of industrialization (1979–1999) (Q. Huang, 2018b) • Economic reforms in the 1970s and 1980s accelerated industrialization in rural areas.
Social inequality	• The sixth economic crisis (1988–1989) increased the wealth gap.

Social solidarity	• Chinese people had more diversified values, increasingly hedonic pursuits, and more personalized lifestyles as a result of market-oriented reforms and Western cultural infiltration.
Year	***1990s***
Economic development	• In 1992, China formally introduced the concept of the "socialist market economy". • Seventh economic crisis (1993–1994) due to fiscal, financial, and trade deficits • The marketization and opening-up reforms in the 1980s and 1990s reinforced the export-orientation of China's economy and strengthened the impact of global economic fluctuations on China's economic development. • Eighth economic crisis (1997–1998) triggered by the 1997 Asian financial crisis • The government's increased public investments in infrastructure construction in less developed areas during 1998–2010 sustained China's high-speed economic growth and improved people's working and living conditions.
Industrialization	• Initial phase of industrialization (1979–1999) (Q. Huang, 2018b) • In the late 1990s, heavy industrial products (e.g., electrical machinery) already surpassed light manufacturing products (e.g., textiles) and became China's most important exports (J. Y. Lin & Yu, 2015). • The industrial products took up 86.9% whereas the primary products accounted for 13.1% of China's total export in 1997 (J. Y. Lin & Yu, 2015; Wen, 2012).
Social inequality	• The marketization of education and healthcare increased citizens' financial burdens and exacerbated social inequality. • The government issued long-term government bonds for investments in infrastructure construction in less developed areas to bridge the urban–rural, regional, and wealth gaps during 1998–2010.
Social solidarity	—
Year	***2000s***
Economic development	• The government's increased public investments in infrastructure construction in less developed areas during 1998–2010 sustained China's high-speed economic growth and improved people's working and living conditions. • China seized the opportunity of globalization to upgrade its industrial and economic structures and facilitate its economic development but its economy became more susceptible to global economic fluctuations after joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. • Ninth economic crisis (2008–2009) ignited by the 2007 United States subprime mortgage crisis and the global financial crisis in 2008–2009 • China still achieved a 9% GDP growth in 2008 against the backdrop of the global financial crisis.
Industrialization	• Middle phase of industrialization (2000–2010) (Q. Huang, 2018b) • China seized the opportunity of globalization to upgrade industrial and economic structures after joining the WTO in 2001. • In 2007, China took up 18.1% of global high-technology manufacturing exports (J. Y. Lin & Yu, 2015). • The industrial products took up 94.8% whereas the primary products accounted for 5.2% of China's total export in 2007 (J. Y. Lin & Yu, 2015; Wen, 2012).

Social inequality	• The government issued long-term government bonds for investments in infrastructure construction in less developed areas to bridge the urban–rural, regional, and wealth gaps during 1998–2010.
Social solidarity	—
Year	***2010–2019***
Economic development	• Tenth economic crisis (2012–2016) triggered by the 2010 European sovereignty debt crisis and the 2012 global economic crisis • The United States government (under the Donald Trump administration) launched a trade and technological war against China in 2018–2019 (M. Kim, 2019; H. Sun, 2019).
Industrialization	• Late phase of industrialization (2011–present) which targeted at achieving basic industrialization by 2020 and completing full industrialization by 2030 (Q. Huang, 2018b) • In 2015, China launched the supply-side structural reform to eliminate excess or obsolete capacity and upgrade the industrial sector. • The proposal of "Made in China 2025" national strategic plan in 2015 set out new directions for China's industrial upgrading and provided strong incentives to improve both the quantity and the quality of high-technology industrial products and services in areas such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence (AI), new materials, and aerospace (Zenglein & Holzmann, 2019).
Social inequality	• The government increased its public investments in the rural revitalization and poverty reduction to bridge the rural–urban gap and the wealth gap. • China lifted 764.88 million people out of poverty during 1978–2019 and reduced rural poverty headcount ratio from 97.5% in 1978 to 0.6% in 2019 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020a).
Social solidarity	—

Note: Historical materials and research evidence were mostly drawn from Wen (2012, 2017, 2020) and Lu et al. (2008) (unless cited otherwise).

Appendix D: Characteristics of Research Participants

No.	Year of birth	Age	Gender	Latest occupation and organization	Professional title/ Administrative rank	Academic degree	Marital status	Age of child(ren)	Gender of child(ren)
1	1964	54	Male	University chancellor; teaching and research staff in a university (public institution)	Professor; director (equivalent to associate professor)	Doctoral	Married	26	Female
2	1967	52	Female	Auxiliary teaching staff in a university (public institution)	Senior laboratory technician (equivalent to associate professor)	Master’s	Married	26	Female
3	1969	50	Female	Auxiliary teaching staff in a university (public institution)	Senior laboratory technician (equivalent to associate professor)	Master’s	Married	24	Male
4	1981	38	Female	Administrative staff (deputy minister of the department) in a university (public institution)	Deputy division chief (equivalent to associate professor)	Master’s	Married	8	Male
5	1976	43	Female	Teaching and research staff in a university (public institution)	Lecturer	Master’s	Married	14	Female
6	1933	86	Male	Researcher in a scientific research institute (public institution) (retired)	Senior researcher (equivalent to professor)	Bachelor’s	Married	57; 52; 50	Male; female; female
7	1940	79	Female	Financial accountant in a scientific research institute (public institution) (retired)		Associate	Married	56; 53	Female; female

No.	Year of birth	Age	Gender	Latest occupation and organization	Professional title/ Administrative rank	Academic degree	Marital status	Age of child(ren)	Gender of child(ren)
8	1942	77	Female	Researcher in a scientific research institute (public institution) (retired)	Senior engineer (equivalent to associate professor)	Bachelor's	Married	42	Female
9	1943	76	Male	Researcher in a scientific research institute (public institution) (retired)	Senior engineer (equivalent to associate professor)	Bachelor's	Married	42	Female
10	1934	85	Male	Researcher in a scientific research institute (public institution)	Senior researcher (equivalent to professor)	Bachelor's	Married	57; 56	Male; male
11	1933	85	Female	Researcher in a scientific research institute (public institution) (retired)	Senior engineer (equivalent to associate professor)	Bachelor's	Married	57; 56	Male; male
12	1936	83	Male	Researcher in a scientific research institute (public institution) (retired)	Senior researcher (equivalent to professor)	Bachelor's	Married	56; 52	Male; female
13	1977	42	Female	Homemaker		Associate	Married	13	Male
14	1980	39	Male	Auxiliary teaching staff in a university (public institution)	Intermediate laboratory technician (equivalent to lecturer)	Master's	Married	8	Male
15	1982	37	Female	Administrative staff in a university (public institution)		Master's	Married	8; 4	Male; male
16	1979	40	Female	Teaching and research staff in a university (public institution)	Associate professor	Doctoral	Married	9; 2	Male; female

No.	Year of birth	Age	Gender	Latest occupation and organization	Professional title/ Administrative rank	Academic degree	Marital status	Age of child(ren)	Gender of child(ren)
17	1978	40	Female	Teaching and research staff; head of a college in a university (public institution)	Professor; division chief (equivalent to the middle ground between professor and associate professor)	Doctoral	Divorced		
18	1980	38	Female	Teaching and research staff in a university (public institution)	Associate professor	Doctoral	Married	4	Female
19	1972	47	Female	Teaching and research staff in a university (public institution)	Professor	Doctoral	Married	15	Male
20	1982	37	Male	Teaching and research staff in a university (public institution)	Associate professor	Doctoral	Divorced	3	Male
21	1977	41	Female	Teaching and research staff; head of a college in a university (public institution)	Associate professor; division chief (equivalent to the middle ground between professor and associate professor)	Doctoral	Married	13; 13 (twins)	Male; male
22	1982	37	Female	Administrative staff in a university (public institution)	Assistant researcher (equivalent to lecturer)	Master’s	Married	8	Male
23	1969	50	Female	Administrative staff in a university (public institution)	Section chief (equivalent to lecturer)	Master’s	Married	23	Male
24	1985	34	Female	Postdoctoral researcher in a university (public institution)		Doctoral	Married	3	Female

No.	Year of birth	Age	Gender	Latest occupation and organization	Professional title/ Administrative rank	Academic degree	Marital status	Age of child(ren)	Gender of child(ren)
25	1964	55	Female	Administrative staff (teaching secretary) in a university (public institution) (retired)	Associate researcher (equivalent to associate professor); section chief (equivalent to lecturer)	Bachelor’s	Married	17	Male
26	1993	26	Female	Administrative staff in a personnel management institution (public institution)		Master’s	Unmarried		
27	1993	26	Female	Principal/ assistant comic artist in a comic studio (private enterprise)		Master’s	Unmarried		
28	1965	54	Male	Administrative staff in a university (public institution)	Senior laboratory technician (equivalent to associate professor)	Bachelor’s	Married	26; 26 (twins)	Female; female
29	1956	63	Female	Teaching and research staff in a university (public institution)	Professor	Bachelor’s	Married	35	Female
30	1982	37	Male	Administrative staff (secretary and student counsellor) in a university (public institution)	Lecturer	Master’s	Married	0.4 (5 months)	Female
31	1978	41	Male	Teaching and research staff; deputy head of a college in a university (public institution)	Associate professor; deputy division chief (equivalent to associate professor)	Doctoral	Married	6	Male

No.	Year of birth	Age	Gender	Latest occupation and organization	Professional title/ Administrative rank	Academic degree	Marital status	Age of child(ren)	Gender of child(ren)
32	1971	48	Male	Teaching and research staff; head of a college in a university (public institution)	Professor; division chief (equivalent to the middle ground between professor and associate professor)	Doctoral	Married		
33	1984	35	Male	Administrative staff in a university (public institution)	Lecturer	Master's	Married	4	Male
34	1994	25	Male	Administrative staff (student counsellor) in a university (public institution)	Assistant lecturer	Master's	Unmarried		
35	1956	63	Male	Teaching and research staff; head of a college in a university (public institution) (retired)	Associate professor; division chief (equivalent to the middle ground between professor and associate professor)	Master's	Married	35	Male
36	1962	57	Male	Teaching and research staff; head of a college in a university (public institution)	Professor; division chief (equivalent to the middle ground between professor and associate professor)	Master's	Married	26	Female
37	1967	52	Male	Teaching and research staff; chief librarian in a university (public institution)	Professor; division chief (equivalent to the middle ground between professor and associate professor)	Doctoral	Married	23	Female

No.	Year of birth	Age	Gender	Latest occupation and organization	Professional title/ Administrative rank	Academic degree	Marital status	Age of child(ren)	Gender of child(ren)
38	1963	57	Male	Auxiliary teaching staff in a university (public institution)	Senior laboratory technician (equivalent to associate professor)	Master’s	Married	29	Female
39	1975	44	Male	Teaching and research staff; deputy head of a college in a university (public institution)	Professor; deputy division chief (equivalent to associate professor)	Doctoral	Married	8	Male
40	1964	55	Male	Teaching and research staff in a university (public institution)	Associate professor	Bachelor’s	Married	22	Female
41	1984	35	Male	Teaching and research staff in a university (public institution)	Lecturer	Doctoral	Married		
42	1990	29	Male	Teaching and research staff in a university (public institution)	Assistant lecturer	Master’s	Married		
43	1964	55	Male	Teaching and research staff; head of a college in a university (public institution)	Professor; division chief (equivalent to the middle ground between professor and associate professor)	Doctoral	Married	22	Female
44	1978	40	Male	Administrative staff (monitoring director) in a university (public institution)	Lecturer; division chief (equivalent to the middle ground between professor and associate professor)	Master’s	Married	10; 3	Female; female
45	1993	26	Female	Teacher in a private education company (private enterprise)		Master’s	Unmarried		

No.	Year of birth	Age	Gender	Latest occupation and organization	Professional title/ Administrative rank	Academic degree	Marital status	Age of child(ren)	Gender of child(ren)
46	1993	26	Female	Content operations staff in an internet company		Master's	Married		
47	1949	70	Female	Teaching and research staff; teaching secretary in a university (public institution) (retired)	Lecturer	Bachelor's	Married	35	Female
48	1952	67	Male	Teaching and research staff; head of a college in a university (public institution)	Professor; division chief (equivalent to the middle ground between professor and associate professor)	Bachelor's	Married	35	Female
49	1977	42	Female	Teacher in a senior high school (public institution)		Bachelor's	Unmarried		
50	1960	59	Male	Administrative staff (director of retirement services) in a university (public institution)	Division chief (equivalent to the middle ground between professor and associate professor)	Master's	Married	30	Male
51	1993	26	Female	Exhibition planner in an exhibition design company (private enterprise)		Master's	Unmarried		

Appendix E: Sample Semi-Structural Interview Guide

1. Participant Information Sheet

1.1 Identification code (assigned by researcher): ______ 1.2 Age: ______

1.3 Gender: ______ 1.4 Occupation: ______

1.5 Type of current organization: ______ 1.6 Education: ______

1.7 Marital status: ______ 1.8 Years of work experience: ______

1.9 Number of organizations you have worked in: ______

1.10 Cities you have worked and lived in: ______

2. Biographical Timeline Sheet

2.1 Personal life

2.1.1 Which year were you born?

2.1.2 When did you get married?

2.1.3 How many children did you have? When did you have your first (and subsequent) child(ren)?

2.1.4 Do you have any other caring responsibilities (e.g., elderly care)? When did you start taking care of them?

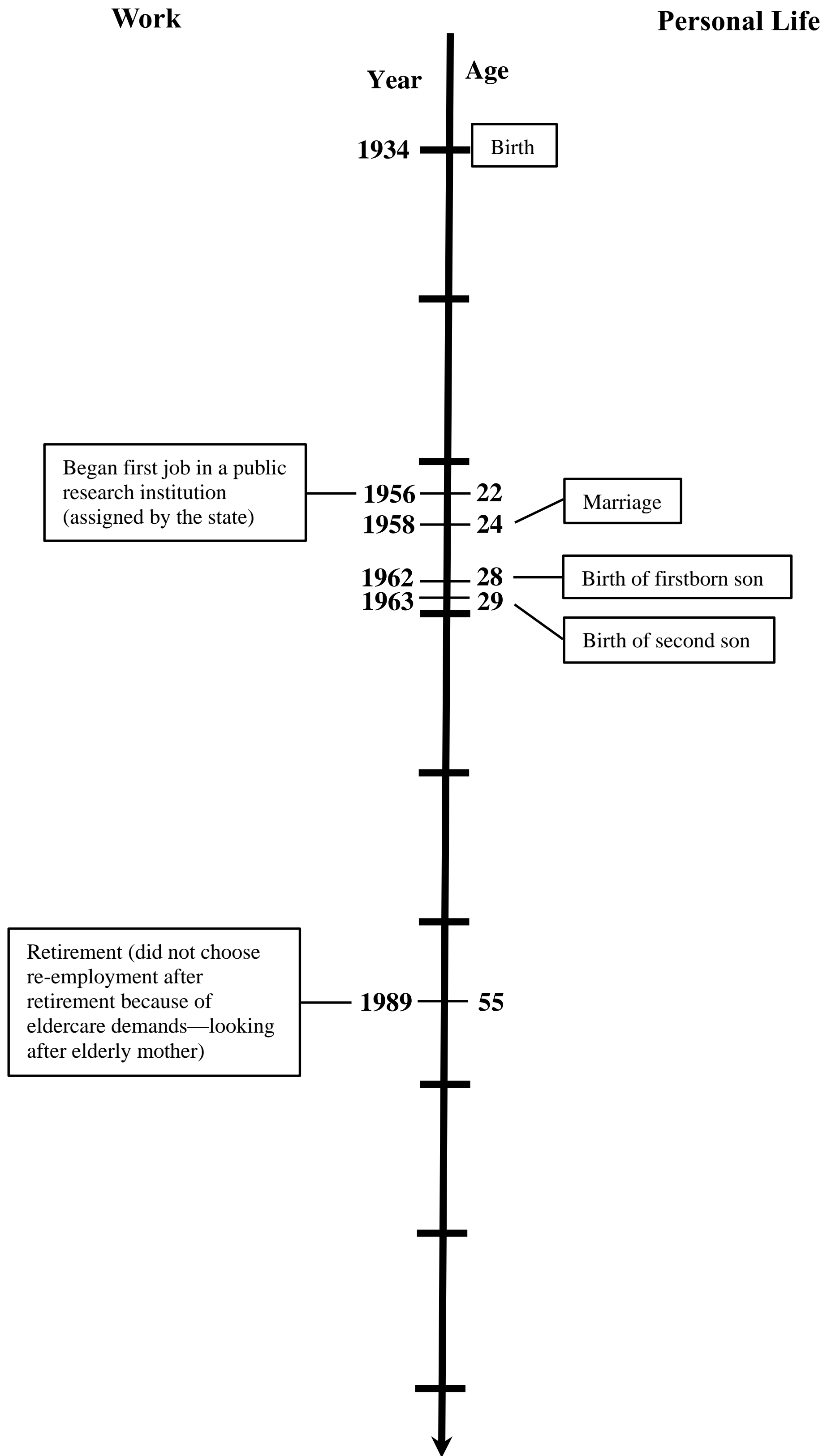
2.2 Work

2.2.1 When did you start your first job? What type of organization was it? Why did you choose it?

2.2.2 Have you changed your jobs, occupations or organizations since then? When? Why?

2.2.3 Have you pursued an academic/professional degree while working? When? Why?

2.2.4 When did you retire from your last job?


Biography Timeline (Sample)
Identification code: 11
Work
Personal Life
Year
Age
1934
Birth
Began first job in a public research institution (assigned by the state)
1956
22
1958
24
Marriage
1962
28
Birth of firstborn son
1963
29
Birth of second son
Retirement (did not choose re-employment after retirement because of eldercare demands—looking after elderly mother)
1989
55

3. Interview Questions

3.1 Work scenarios

3.1.1 How long do you work per day? How many days do you work per week? Do you adopt a fixed or flexible work schedule?

3.1.2 How do you commute between work and home every day? How long does a single trip take?

3.1.3 How often do you work overtime? How many extra hours do you work every week?

3.1.4 How often do you work at home?

3.1.4 How often and how long do you take a business trip? (How do you arrange childcare responsibilities while you are away from home?)

3.1.5 How long are your holidays per year? Do you take all the days offered as time off by your organization? Why (not)? Do you need to work during your holidays?

3.2 Nonwork/life scenarios

[Participant's non-work demands]

3.2.1 Who prepares three meals for you and your children every day?

3.2.2 Who does cleaning at home?

3.2.3 Who buys groceries and commodities for family?

3.2.4 Who usually looks after sick children or family members?

3.2.5 Do you need to transport your child(ren) to and from school? How do you arrange this task?

3.2.6 Do you need to help your child(ren) with homework?

3.2.7 Have you taken your child(ren) to extra-curricular classes? How many extra-curricular classes do your child(ren) have? How long do they take? Who is responsible to transport the child(ren) to and from extra-curricular classes?

3.2.8 Who usually takes care of child(ren) during the summer/winter vacation?

3.2.9 Do you have eldercare responsibilities? Who usually looks after the elderly?

3.2.10 How do you and your partner divide domestic work? What factors influence your division of domestic labor?

3.2.11 Did you use maternity/paternity leave during and after you or your partners' pregnancy and childbearing? How long did the maternity/paternity leave last? Was the leave sufficient for the mother to recover and return to the work?

3.2.12 At what age did the child(ren) enter the kindergarten? Who looked after the child(ren) before they went to kindergarten?

3.2.13 Do you have sufficient time to pursue activities of personal interest to you, such as leisure, hobbies, and social activities? Has the time spent on these activities changed over time?

[Participant's parents' non-work demands when the participant was young]

3.2.14 Who prepared three meals for you when you were young?

3.2.15 Who did cleaning at home when you were young?

3.2.16 Who bought groceries and commodities for family when you were young?

3.2.17 Who usually looked after you at a young age when you were sick?

3.2.18 Did your parents need to transport you to and from school when you were young? How did they arrange this task?

3.2.19 Did your parents help you with homework when you were young?

3.2.20 Did your parents take you to extra-curricular classes when you were young? How many extra-curricular classes did you have? How long did they take? Who was responsible to transport you to and from extra-curricular classes?

3.2.21 Who usually took care of you during the summer/winter vacation when you were young?

3.2.22 Did your parents have eldercare responsibilities when you were young? Who usually looked after the elderly?

3.2.23 How did your parents divide domestic work? Did their division of domestic labor influence you and your partner's division of domestic labor?

3.3 Work–life interface

3.3.1 [Personal resource allocation] In terms of a rough estimate, what is the current ratio of your time and energy that is devoted to work *versus* personal life?

3.3.2 [Personal resource allocation over time] Has this ratio (of your time and energy that is devoted to work *versus* personal life) changed across different life or career stages? For example, is there any change in this ratio before and after your marriage or having a child?

3.3.2 [Work–life balance satisfaction] Are you satisfied with the amount of time and energy you distribute to your work and personal life? Would you like to improve your work–life balance? If it can be improved, how? If it cannot be improved, why?

3.3.3 [Perceived work–life relationship] How do you perceive the relationship between your work and personal life?

Appendix F: Coding Index

1. Modernization

1.1 Economic development

1.1.1 Economic pressures (micro-level stressors)

1.1.2 Stress related to economic development (societal-level stressors)

1.1.3 Socio-economic development (societal-level resources)

1.1.4 Personal resources: income (micro-level resources)

1.1.5 Marketization

1.1.6 Globalization

1.2 Industrialization

1.2.1 Stress related to technological development (societal-level stressors)

1.2.2 Technological development (societal-level resources)

1.2.3 Public infrastructures (societal-level resources)

1.3 Social inequality

1.3.1 Gender inequality

1.3.2 Social stratification

1.3.3 Urban–rural gap

1.3.4 Occupational inequality

1.4 Social solidarity

1.4.1 Micro-level relationships

1.4.1.1 Spouse relationships

1.4.1.2 Parent–child relationships (i.e., between participants and their children)

1.4.1.3 Self–elderly relationships (i.e., between participants and their parents or parents-in-law)

1.4.1.4 Relationships with extended family members

1.4.1.5 Friend relationships

1.4.1.6 Neighbor relationships

1.4.2 Workplace-level relationships

1.4.2.1 Supervisor–subordinate relationships

1.4.2.2 Coworker relationships

1.4.2.3 Organization–employee relationships

1.4.2.4 Teacher–student relationships

1.4.3 Societal-level relationships

1.4.3.1 Relationships between the state and citizens

1.4.3.2 Relationships between the society and individuals

1.4.3.3 Relationships between the collective and individuals

1.4.3.4 Class relations

1.4.3.5 Gender relations

2. Demands

2.1 Micro-level demands

2.1.1 Participant's family care demands

2.1.1.1 Looking after sick child(ren) or family members

2.1.1.2 Transporting child(ren) to and from school/kindergarten

2.1.1.3 Helping child(ren) with homework

2.1.1.4 Taking child(ren) to extra-curricular classes

2.1.1.5 Looking after child(ren) during the summer/winter vacation

2.1.1.6 Playing with children

2.1.1.7 Looking after the elderly

2.1.1.8 Looking after the child(ren) before they entered the kindergarten

2.1.1.9 Looking after the grandchild(ren)

2.1.1.10 Other parenting activities

2.1.2 Participant's housework demands

2.1.2.1 Cooking

2.1.2.2 Cleaning

2.1.2.3 Buying groceries and commodities

2.1.2.4 Other housework activities

2.1.3 Participant's other micro-level demands

2.1.3.1 Participant's division of domestic labor

2.1.3.2 Reasons that influence participant's division of domestic labor

2.1.3.3 Parental influence on participant's work/life

2.1.3.4 Activities of personal interests (e.g., leisure, hobbies, and social

activities)

2.1.3.5 Economic pressures

2.1.3.6 Personal health

2.1.3.7 Romantic relationships and marriage

2.1.3.8 Childrearing

2.1.4 Parents' family care demands (when the participant was young)

2.1.4.1 Looking after sick child(ren)

2.1.4.2 Transporting child(ren) to and from school/kindergarten

2.1.4.3 Helping child(ren) with homework

2.1.4.4 Taking child(ren) to extra-curricular classes

2.1.4.5 Looking after child(ren) during the summer/winter vacation

2.1.4.6 Playing with children

2.1.4.7 Looking after the elderly

2.1.5 Parents' housework demands (when the participant was young)

2.1.5.1 Cooking

2.1.5.2 Cleaning

2.1.5.3 Buying groceries and commodities

2.1.5.4 Other housework activities

2.2 Workplace-level demands

2.2.1 Reasons for choosing/changing a job

2.2.2 Work schedule and working time

2.2.3 Workload, work stress, and work contents

2.2.4 Commuting

2.2.5 Working overtime

2.2.6 Working at home

2.2.7 Business trips

2.2.8 Working during holidays

2.2.9 International/domestic assignments

2.2.10 Enquiry about family/childrearing plans in the recruitment

2.2.11 Work-related social engagement

2.2.12 Professional development and further education

2.2.13 Other workplace-level demands (e.g., work environment, workplace

relationships, promotion, performance appraisal, and prospects of organizational development)

2.3 Societal-level demands

2.3.1 Social norms about work

2.3.2 Social norms about parenting and education

2.3.3 Social norms and national policies about marriage and childrearing

2.3.4 Housing

2.3.5 Medical care

2.3.6 Eldercare

2.3.7 Public insecurity and political instability

2.3.8 Stress related to economic development

2.3.9 Stress related to technological development

2.3.10 International environment (e.g., globalization and international relations)

3. Resources

3.1 Micro-level resources

3.1.1 Personal resources: autonomy

3.1.2 Personal resources: time and energy

3.1.3 Personal resources: income

3.1.4 Support from family members

3.1.5 Support from friends

3.1.6 Support from neighbors

3.2 Workplace-level resources

3.2.1 Supervisor support

3.2.2 Coworker support

3.2.3 Flexible work arrangements

3.2.4 Maternity/paternity leave

3.2.5 Holidays

3.2.6 Medical care assistance

3.2.7 Eldercare assistance

3.2.8 Childcare and education support (e.g., affiliated kindergarten or school)

3.2.9 Shuttle services and commuting subsidies

3.2.10 Housing benefits

3.2.11 Canteen

3.2.12 Shops and markets

3.2.13 Leisure, creational, and social activities and facilities

3.2.14 Trade union

3.3 Societal-level resources

3.3.1 Paid services (e.g., nannies, domestic services, drivers, nursing workers, restaurants, take-aways, and eldercare institutions)

3.3.2 National or local government policies

3.3.3 Public infrastructures (e.g., transport, hospitals, and recreational facilities)

3.3.4 Kindergartens and childcare institutions

3.3.5 Primary and secondary schools

3.3.6 Extra-curricular classes and after-school programs

3.3.7 Public security and social stability

3.3.8 Technological development

3.3.9 Socio-economic development

4. Work–life interface

4.1 Personal resource allocation between work and life

4.1.1 Work centrality

4.1.2 Life centrality

4.1.3 Dual centrality

4.1.4 Changes in personal resource allocation across different life/career stages

4.2 Satisfaction with work–life balance

4.2.1 Satisfied with work–life balance

4.2.2 Wish to improve work–life balance

4.2.3 Possible solutions to improve work–life balance in the future

4.2.4 Reasons why work–life balance cannot be improved

4.3 Perceived relationship between work and life

4.3.1 Segmentation/integration approach

4.3.1.1 Work and life should be segmented

4.3.1.2 Work and life are integrated/combined

4.3.2 Positive relationships

4.3.2.1 Work and life compensate each other

4.3.2.2 Work and life facilitate/ mutually reinforce each other

4.3.2.3 Work and life are balanced

4.3.3 Negative relationships

4.3.3.1 Work and life are conflicting

4.3.3.2 Work and life are blending

4.3.4 Work/life priority

4.3.4.1 Prioritizing work over life

4.3.4.2 Prioritizing life over work

4.3.5 Holistic approach

4.3.5.1 Work is a means to support life/family

4.3.5.2 Work is (part of) life

4.3.5.3 There is a harmonious and synergistic relationship between work and life

♦ **Note:** The format of this coding index is as follows:

1. Theme

1.1 Category

1.1.1 Code (summary)

1.1.1.1 Code (detail)

APPENDICES

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This thesis is dedicated to my family, our intellectual community,
and a shared future of all humankind in solidarity.