The career narratives of professional self-initiated expatriate women living and working in Beijing, China

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THE CAREER NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL SELF-INITIATED EXPATRIATE WOMEN LIVING AND WORKING IN BEIJING, CHINA

Melinda Jane Muir

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Southern Cross University
Australia
July 2014
DECLARATION

The complete work in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other education institute. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made.

Melinda Jane Muir
Date: July, 2014
This study is not the beginning, nor the end, but rather a consolidating pause in the journeys of all the women who have contributed to a better understanding of self-initiated expatriation.

— Melinda Muir, July 2014
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have many people to thank for their encouragement, reassurance and assistance during my DBA journey. First and foremost to all the women who participated in this study, without whom this thesis would not have been possible – an enormous thank you! I am truly indebted to each and every one of my 31 participants for sharing their stories with such sincerity and candour. You followed your own agendas and your own hearts. You gave generously of your time, were enthusiastic about my work and believed in my ability to represent you honestly and fairly. I hope that I have not disappointed you.

This study represents my apprenticeship in the world of research training. But what is an apprentice without a teacher? To that end my warmest appreciation and gratitude to my supervisors at Southern Cross University, Dr Don McMurray and Associate Professor Michelle Wallace, for their guidance, insight, reassurance and friendship in often the most challenging and difficult of times.

I am also reminded of Dr Seuss’ words that: You can get help from teachers, but you are going to have to learn a lot by yourself, sitting alone in a room. I didn’t realise just how lonely that room could be so to my family and friends who cheered me on from far and near and every corner of the globe, my heartfelt thanks.

Within the greater community, I am indebted to several people. In particular, my ‘critical’ friend Elizabeth, the librarians from the Lismore and Gold Coast campuses; the ever calm and accommodating administrators, Margot and Gina, John Revington, for his word smithing skills and Hannah Murphy for her grand designs.

Finally, to ‘JFW’— who has ‘lived’ this experience with me. What can I say! You have been my greatest cheerleader, my compass to guide me and my comfort when I have faltered. I am truly blessed.
ABSTRACT

The primary research focus of this study was to explore the career experiences of 31 western professional women living and working in Beijing, China, as self-initiated expatriates (SIEs). The host location was chosen for its growing economic and political influence on the global landscape, as well as its emergence as a major destination for international assignees. Nonetheless, as a destination for SIEs, China remains under-represented and under-researched within the current literature. Furthermore, although it is not clear how many foreign professionals make their way to China as SIEs, evidence suggests an increasing percentage of them are women.

The study has been informed by emerging developments and directions in the ‘new careers’ literature and global-mobility research and practice, which reside within the broader human resource management (HRM) and international human resource management (IHRM) literature. Not only are the numbers of the internationally mobile increasing but the pattern and direction of mobility are also changing. The increasingly varied array of assignees has been driven largely by a growing shortage of and demand for cross-border talent, as well as concern about the cost of international assignments. In sum, international careers are no longer the domain of company-assigned expatriates.

Despite a growing interest in SIEs, the question remains: What, in truth, do we know of the career dynamics and experiences of this expanding group of expatriates? A rich body of research on expatriation examines the career experiences of company-assigned expatriates, but the literature on the career constructs and career paths of SIEs in general and female SIEs in particular is limited.

An exploratory qualitative mode of social enquiry was applied, since the purpose of the study was to investigate the little-understood trend of professional
women initiating their own expatriation. An interpretive narrative approach provides the framework to give voice to those whose experiences may otherwise not be heard. The objective in exploring the careers of this purposive sample was to develop information-rich narratives that captured the women’s lived experiences in enough detail and depth to enable others to better understand how professional SIE women explain, account for and make sense of their careers.

An outcome from the study was the emergence of four career orientations relating to the respondents. The typology exemplifies an initial mapping of what a professional SIE woman’s career might look like. As such it provides a platform for future investigation and exploration of the array of career patterns for female SIEs, and possibly SIEs overall. An added conclusion worth noting is the observation that the women themselves did not identify with the world of the expatriate as it is commonly regarded. Thus, while the term SIE has become part of the lexicon over the past decade, it may no longer aptly describe how these women have come to view themselves.

The study addresses gaps in the extant literature and contributes to new knowledge and an understanding of the career-related behaviours, expectations and outcomes of professional SIE women, especially those living and working in Beijing, China. Given the overall shortage of skilled and experienced mid-level management and leadership talent in China, these women present as a potentially valuable source of talent to both local and multinational organisations. Understanding the career experiences of SIE women is a critical component of organisational HR recruitment and retention strategies.

*Key words:* self-initiated expatriate; women; new careers; identity; China.
RELATED PUBLICATIONS, PRESENTATIONS AND AWARDS ARISING FROM THIS STUDY


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NOTATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Notations

The names of the research participants have been replaced with pseudonyms in accordance with confidentiality agreements.

*Italics* are used to identify the participants’ statements from transcribed recordings.


Acronyms and Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRICS</td>
<td>Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAE</td>
<td>Company-assigned expatriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEE</td>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ex-HC</td>
<td>Ex-host country national</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FELO</td>
<td>Foreign executives in local organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIPE</td>
<td>Foreign invested partnership enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRS</td>
<td>Global Relocation Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCN</td>
<td>Host country national</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRM</td>
<td>Human resource management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>International assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIMP</td>
<td>Independent internationally mobile professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHRM</td>
<td>International human resource management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KCM</td>
<td>Kaleidoscope Career Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINT countries</td>
<td>Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Multinational company (corporation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCN</td>
<td>Parent country national</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFE</td>
<td>Self-initiated foreign experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIE</td>
<td>Self-initiated expatriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCN</td>
<td>Third country national</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFOE</td>
<td>Wholly foreign owned enterprise</td>
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF RESEARCH

As fast as we are moving around the world, the world is moving around us; it is not just
the individual, but the globe with which we’re interacting that seems to be in a constant
flux.
— Iyer (2000, p. 27)

1.1 Scope of Research

This study has been informed by recent developments and emerging directions in
international assignments and global mobility research and practice. My aim with this
research was to investigate the under-studied phenomenon of western professional
women who, of their own volition, choose to live and work in another country, that is,
China. In this thesis, I employ the commonly used term self-initiated expatriate (SIE)
to describe those who initiate their expatriation. In addition, I use the term professional
to denote a person with specialist occupational expertise due to their possession of a
‘craft or skill’ (Kanter, 1989, p. 510).

The starting point for this study stemmed from the intersection of two
phenomena: first, the world of the expatriate, traditionally a male domain, within which
women are now situated; and second, the changing nature of careers. In focusing on
western SIE professional women, I sought to discover and explore the ‘turning- point’
moments (Denzin, 2001, p. ix) or ‘epiphanies’ that led the women to become SIEs in
China, and their career narratives once there. Therein lies the genesis of this study:
exploration and inquiry. This thesis reviews the current body of knowledge on the
subject and reports on my primary research, the purpose of which was the generation of new knowledge in the understanding of the careers of SIE women.

Working critically with notions of narrative, I set out to explore the participants’ career experiences as SIEs. I examined content themes, forms and processes to arrive at a more informed understanding of how the women construct their careers, their career experiences and outcomes as SIEs. I adopted a career-management perspective in terms of the meanings, values and interpretations these individual women ascribe to their experiences of expatriation, and I employed a qualitative interpretative research methodology to capture the lived experiences of the SIE women. To that end, my method within this study was to focus on ‘viewing and talking about reality as much as it specifies technique and procedure’ (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p. 5).

Although there is ‘no absolute definition for the SIE’ (Doherty, Richardson, & Thorn, 2013a, p. 97), there are distinguishing characteristics (Haslberger & Vaiman, 2013). Typically, SIEs initiate and finance their own expatriation (Tharenou, 2009) and relocate to a country of their choice on a voluntary basis (Haslberger & Vaiman, 2013; Jokinen, Brewster, & Suutari, 2008). Often, they have no set timeframe in mind (Harrison, Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004; Suutari & Brewster, 2001; Tharenou, 2010a), and they may cross both national and organisational borders (Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; Jokinen et al., 2008). To distinguish SIEs from other types of internationally mobile individuals, such as immigrants and company-assigned expatriates (CAEs), I have adopted Cerdin and Selmer’s (2013, p. 1281) definition of an SIE, based on four criteria that must be fulfilled simultaneously. These are: (1) self-initiated international relocation, (2) regular employment (intentions), (3) intentions of a temporary stay, and (4) skilled or professional qualifications.
The structure of this chapter is as follows. The opening sections cover the background of the study, the research problem and scope of the research, the significance of the study, and the study objectives. A section on China as a destination for expatriates is included to place the research in its context. Following on each of the remaining four chapters of the thesis are briefly described. These chapters include the literature review, methodology, findings and data analysis, and discussion, conclusions and recommendations.

1.2 Setting the Scene: Background to the Research

The globalisation of business, fuelled in the twentieth century by economic, social and technological factors, has continued into the twenty-first century (Reis & Baruch, 2013, p. 1) with more people and organisations becoming global (Dickmann & Baruch, 2011). Moreover, the extent and direction of global mobility is changing (Reis & Baruch, 2013). The movement of people is not a new phenomenon. People have moved across international borders in search of a better life, education, employment opportunities or simply because of a personal preference for a particular destination, while others have moved to escape inequality, injustice and persecution or to reunite with family members (Dickmann & Baruch, 2011). There are those who move by choice (Favell, Feldblum & Smith, 2007), those movements are initiated by an organisation (Baruch, Dickmann, Altman, & Bounoïs, 2013) and those who move in response to forces beyond their control (Al Akrim & Özbilgin, 2010).

According to Carr (2010, p. 9), the global movement of people encompasses expatriation, migration, stepping-stone destinations, returns to home, lifestyle, retirements, international education, business sojourns, aid work, refugeehood, and tourism. Global movements can be permanent or temporary and involve both the skilled
and the unskilled (Beaverstock, 2012). Sometimes people may be free to move but do not have employment freedom, due to the lack of a requisite work permit or specific professional qualification (Reis & Baruch, 2013).

To date, the literature on international human resource management (IHRM) has mostly positioned the movement of people within the frame of the multinational corporation (MNC) (Brewster, Bonache, Cerdin, & Suutari, 2014). The subject has historically been the (predominantly) male company-assigned executive (Harris, 2002; Vance, Paik, & White, 2006) with a trailing spouse and family (Linehan & Walsh, 2000) ‘sent overseas on a temporary basis to complete a time-based task or accomplish an organisational goal’ (Harrison et al., 2004, p. 203). However, as international business continues to expand and the number of expatriates rises (Brookfield GRS, 2013), the picture is dramatically changing, becoming more complex and multifaceted (Baruch et al., 2013; Dickmann & Baruch, 2011; Mayerhofer, Hartmann, Michelitsch-Riedl, & Kollinger, 2004; Vaiman, Scullion, & Collings, 2012). The traditional expatriate demographic is giving way to different types of mobility and international experiences are changing (Brewster et al., 2014). Organisations other than MNCs, have employees based outside their own countries. Examples include diplomatic services, military services, international organisations (e.g. the United Nations) charities and other non-government organisations (Brewster & Lee, 2006).

An expanding diversity in corporate expatriation arrangements and configurations has been driven, in large part, by an increasing shortage of, and demand for, cross-border talent (Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007), as well as a focus on containing the cost of international assignees (Brookfield GRS, 2013). These arrangements include flexpatriates (Mayerhofer et al., 2004), short-term assignees (Harris et al., 2003), international business travellers (Welch, Welch, & Worm, 2007),
frequent flyers (Collings et al., 2007) and even electronically provided international experiences (Mayrhofer, Reichel, & Sparrow, 2012). Further, as the economic balance of power shifts to the five major, emerging, fast-growing national economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), the movement of expatriates is no longer primarily a West-to-East experience (O’Neill, 2001). For instance, since China encouraged a zou chuqu (which loosely translates as ‘swarm out’) in 2000, followed by Premier Wen Jaibao’s announcement in 2004 that ‘the Chinese government encourages more enterprises to go global’, (cited in Williams & Raman, 2011, p.192) the globalisation of Chinese business enterprises has increased substantially. By the end of 2008 Chinese MNCs employed over 300,000 local people, and Chinese expatriates in various categories exceeded 4.6 million (Xu & Du-Babcock, 2012, p. 2).

A group of international workers that has recently come to the fore is the SIE—those individuals who initiate their expatriation without organisational support mechanisms (e.g., Andresen, Al Ariss & Walther, 2012; Brewster & Suutari, 2005; Carr et al., 2005; Doherty et al., 2013a; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Jokinen et al., 2008; Vaiman & Haslberger, 2013). There have always been cases of self-expatriation (Dickmann & Baruch, 2011) and people who move internationally of their own volition (Suutari & Brewster, 2001); however, only since the late 1990s has this internationally mobile group received attention in the academic literature (Haslberger & Vaiman, 2013).

As the interest in SIEs has gained momentum, researchers have studied a broad range of topics, including motivation and reasons for going (Doherty, Dickmann, & Mills, 2011; Suutari & Brewster 2001; Thorn, 2009), demographic characteristics (Selmer & Lauring, 2010), career capital (Jokinen et al., 2008), implications for HRM (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010), cross-cultural adjustment (Begley, Collings, & Scullion, 2008; Despotic, Hutchings, & McPhail, 2014; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009),
career anchors (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2009), modes of engagement and career development (Al Ariss, 2010), career-related factors (Biemann & Andresen, 2010), and talent management (Haslberger & Vaiman, 2013; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014). Despite this recent research interest and data indicating that SIEs constitute a larger proportion of the international workforce than CAEs (e.g. 65 per cent vs. 35 per cent in Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), Doherty, Richardson and Thorn (2013, p. 10) suggest that ‘the field is still in its early stages of development requiring continued diversity and creativity in building the theoretical and empirical base’.

Much of the current literature on SIEs assumes that the individual is the predominant factor in the selection and pursuit of career options (e.g., Doherty et al., 2013a; Suutari, Brewster, & Tornikoski, 2013). This assumption is evident within the current discourse on new careers, so called to reflect the new economy, which is characterised by dynamic, competitive and technology-driven global forces that have given rise to new organisational forms and changing career paths and boundaries (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999; Thomas, Lazarova, & Inkson, 2005).

Within the boundaryless career perspective (Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Weick, 1996) careers are no longer confined to secure full-time jobs and single-firm employment arrangements. At the same time the organisation ceases to be the prime structure shaping careers. As a consequence of this shift Weick (1996, p. 41) argues that the ‘boundaries of organisations have become more permeable, more fluid, more dynamic, and less distinct’. Further, from a boundaryless perspective, individual career pathways are more about people moving freely and relying on competencies that they can transfer between companies (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996) and less about ‘climbing an organisational hierarchy through a structured functional pathway’ (Currie, Tempest, & Starkey, 2011, p. 756).
This portrayal of ‘new employment principles’ (Weick, 1996) is in contrast with the ‘structured industrial state’ (Galbraith, 1967, cited in Thomas, Lazarova, & Inkson, 2005, p. 341) of the post–World War II years. An era characterised by large, mostly stable corporations and institutions in which the traditional career flourished with its emphasis on continuous hierarchical career structures and lifelong employment. It is upon this view of the industrial state that most research in the careers field has been based (Arthur et al., 1999).

Theorising about boundaryless careers has dominated career research since 1994 (Arthur, 1994; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996; Mirvis & Hall, 1994) with different perspectives making for ‘lively debate on the future challenges for careers and career research’ (Pringle & Mallon, 2003, p. 841). At the heart of this debate is the question: ‘How bounded are the boundaryless’? In other words, ‘what does boundaryless imply’? (Pringle & Mallon, 2003, p. 839), and ‘how enabling or constraining are boundaries that people experience on their careers’? (Walton & Mallon, 2004, p. 76). As Mirvis and Hall (1994, p. 365) contend ‘the boundaryless career could be a bane or boon’. Hirsch and Stanley (1996, p. 224) suggest that the boundaryless career is most important for those with the most to lose from its arrival—‘employees with significant sunk career investment that are rendered obsolete by changes in business conditions and practices’. Cohen and Mallon (1999, p. 346) argue that the term promises ‘a freedom from restraints that, although appealing, cannot be attained’. Gunz, Evans and Jalland (2000, p. 25) explore the notion that rather than careers becoming boundaryless, ‘career boundaries have become considerably more complex and multifaceted in nature’. Sullivan (1999, p. 475) also argues that the word is a ‘misnomer, as systems need boundaries in order to define themselves’.
The literature has further been criticised for underestimating the influence of the social context in shaping an individual’s career behaviour and trajectories (Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012; Pringle & Mallon, 2003). This influence is due to factors such as labour markets, organisational practices, social networks and sociocultural issues. Others have argued that the literature has failed to recognise the importance of the individual’s perceptions of their own capabilities (e.g., Baruch, 2003; Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Gunz, Evans, & Jalland, 2002). Jacoby (1999, p. 137) argues that ‘career jobs have not melted into thin air’.

When it comes to women and global careers, the representation of women in the traditional expatriate world has been consistently low. In the early 1980s, women accounted for around 3 per cent of corporate expatriates (Adler, 1984); today that number hovers around 23 per cent which marks a 3 per cent increase from 2012 and a 5 per cent increase from 2011 (Brookfield GRS, 2013, p. 11). Although female expatriates are under-represented relative to the size of the qualified female labour pool (Linehan & Scullion, 2004), some commentators (e.g., Altman & Shortland, 2008; Cole and McNulty, 2011; Hutchings & Michailova, 2014; Selmer & Leung, 2003; Stroh, Varma & Valy-Durbin, 2000) note there appears to be no concerted effort to increase the numbers of female expatriates. Stroh et al. (2000, p. 251) go so far as to state: ‘we can assume that qualified women may continue to be left out of the pool of candidates being considered for international assignments’.

However, a number of authors report that an increasing number of women are, of their own volition, moving to live and work in another country as SIEs (e.g., Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; Doherty et al., 2011; Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2008; Jokinen et al., 2008; Myers & Pringle, 2005; Tharenou, 2010; van den Bergh & du Plessis, 2013). Although figures are inconclusive, evidence from researchers and practitioners alike
suggests that the percentage of female SIEs is growing (e.g., Doherty et al., 2013a; Jokinen et al., 2008; Napier & Taylor, 2002; Tharenou, 2010; Thorn, 2009), that women are more likely to initiate their own expatriation than to be assigned by a company, and they are doing so in the same numbers as men (Doherty & Thorn, 2014; Tharenou, 2009; Thorn, 2009).

Generally, a woman’s decision to initiate her expatriation is in response to a range of push–pull factors (Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2008; Napier & Taylor, 2002; Suutari & Brewster, 2001; Tharaneou, 2010a), such as an inherent lack of opportunities available in the home country and a belief that self-initiated expatriation might enable a better work–life balance (Tharenou, 2010). However, beyond a general awareness of these factors, there are relatively few studies based on data from SIE women and their career experiences. What research there is, paints different perspectives with some suggesting that female SIEs move mainly for adventure (e.g., Richardson & McKenna, 2002) and others suggesting they do so to advance their careers (e.g., Tharenou, 2009).

Research findings regarding the extent to which the career path for female SIEs is bounded are inconclusive. Some contend that self-initiated expatriation provides women with new frontiers and alternatives to the traditional expatriate career path (e.g., Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2008; Myers and Pringle, 2005). Others argue that women continue to face barriers and injustice in the workplace, even as SIEs (e.g., Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; Tharenou, 2010; van den Bergh & du Plessis, 2013). For example, many SIE women move into lower-level positions, which pay less and are less challenging than their prior positions in the home country (Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; Lee, 2005). These issues are addressed further by this study in sections to come.
1.3 Situating the Research

1.3.1 Why women?

A challenge to the intent of this study may run as follows: ‘If equal numbers of men and women are SIEs’, as suggested in the literature (Tharenou, 2009), ‘is it appropriate to consider only women in this study?’ My response is ‘Yes’, if for no other reason than to account for the increase in female SIES to the point where their numbers are now more or less equal to those of male SIEs.

My reason for choosing to focus on women requires some words of explanation. I am not claiming that all experiences related to this study are exclusive to women. Based on anecdotal evidence and research to date, it is clear that many men have similar experiences. Selmer and Lauring’s (2010) study of SIE academics, for instance, found that there was no moderating effect of gender on work outcomes for SIEs compared to CAEs. Conversely, Al Ariss and Özbilgin (2010, p. 281) suggest that within the literature there is a ‘tendency to ignore the significance of gender difference’. In their study of Lebanese skilled expatriates who had moved to France compared to the men in the study the women highlighted work and life choice restrictions that led to an underutilisation of their skills or even exclusion from the labour market.

It does appear, therefore, that some of the factors involved in the decision to become an SIE are gender-related (Tharenou, 2010a), and may affect women and men differently. Thorn (2009), for example, found that in her analysis of highly educated New Zealanders spread over 93 countries men were more frequent movers than women. Further, women ranked culture, travel and relationships higher than men as key motivating factors.
An added reason for exploring women’s career experiences as SIEs lies in the fact that, despite recent gains, the literature is in its infancy. Consequently, SIE women remain largely under-researched by scholars, the business management community and policy-makers alike (Doherty & Thorn, 2014; McKenna & Richardson, 2007; Myers & Pringle, 2005) with little known of their career experiences (Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; Biemann & Andresen, 2010).

Women opting out of professional and managerial occupations (temporarily or permanently), particularly among women with children, has been a topic of interest to both those within and outside academia (e.g., Cabrera, 2009; Stone, 2007). Yet this growing phenomenon appears not to have been explored in the case of women who initiated their expatriation. For example, we do not know whether women SIEs continue their same career paths in their host countries or opt out in favour of non-standard arrangements such as self-employment.

Much of the literature on women in international management relates to those company-assigned postings and focuses on three concerns (e.g., Caligiuri & Cascio, 1999; Hutchings & Michailova, 2014). First, there are individual issues such as a woman’s own interest and motivation to undertake international assignments (e.g., Adler, 1984; Altman & Shortland, 2008). Second, there are organisational issues, such as selection practices (e.g., Harris & Brewster, 1999), exclusion from internal networks and lack of organisational support (e.g., Linehan & Scullion, 2008), as well as a lack of external networks and support (e.g., Hutchings, French, & Hatcher, 2008). Third, there are host country issues, such as receptiveness to foreign women (e.g., Varma, Toh, & Budhwar, 2006).
It could be argued that as the debate on women in management advances and the myths surrounding women’s involvement in international assignments are challenged now is an exciting time to study women, because what women, in all their diversity, want from an international career is developing and changing. Although this study is about women, I do not claim that the experiences described in this thesis can be generalised to all women. However, this study does present new perspectives and insights associated with preparing for and obtaining expatriation opportunities for women, particularly opportunities related to the self-initiated expatriation experience. Finally, much of the study on women’s careers has focused on overcoming silencing, on ‘unlearning to not speak’ (Piercy, 1971, cited in Paget, 1990, p. 147). This study seems an appropriate forum for a sample of SIE women to ‘gain a voice’ (Goldberger, Clinchy, & Belenky, 1987, p. 201). Thus, this study is relevant and essential.

1.3.2 Why Beijing, China?

My decision to limit the study to one locale, Beijing, China was premised on three factors. First, from only a trickle of foreign specialists in 1979 following the introduction of Deng Xiaoping’s open door policy to attract foreign capital, technology and managerial expertise e.g., Cheng & Kwan, 2000), generally speaking China is currently recording one of the highest rates of CAE assignments in the world (Brookfield GRS, 2013). In 2013, Beijing was host to the headquarters of 48 companies on the Fortune Global 500 list, overtaking Tokyo for the first time as the city in the world with the most profitable companies. In the same annual rankings report China with 89 companies listed in the top 500 was ranked second behind the United States with 132 companies. In third position was Japan with 62. Currently, more than 700 MNCs and research and development centres have their headquarters in Beijing (The Star Online, 2014).
Second, although China offers a variety of employment opportunities for foreigners, it is one of the most challenging expatriate destinations in the world (Brookfield, GRS, 2013). A wealth of evidence suggests that many western expatriate managers find their China assignments problematic (e.g., McEwan, Fang, Zhang & Burkholder, 2006; Neidel, 2012; Prahalad & Lieberthal, 2003; Selmer, 2005). It is estimated that a third of foreigners posted to China fail to see out their terms due to a range of issues that includes language barriers, difficulties integrating into the local community and the cost of healthcare (Brookfield GRS, 2013). As a destination for SIEs, Beijing is under-represented and under-researched within the current literature. Although it is not known how many western professional women make their way to China as SIEs, anecdotal evidence from a number of professional women’s networks (e.g., Viva, 85, Broads, WEConnect International, and Lean In) suggest the numbers are increasing.

Third, China is experiencing an acute shortage of skilled and experienced mid-level management and leadership talent (Sheldon & Li, 2012). To fill this void, foreign businesses operating in China have long turned to expatriate talent. Although this reliance on expatriates is not changing, the composition of the expatriate population is shifting. Many companies looking to lower their costs are turning to locally hired foreign employees or local hires. AON Hewitt (2011) estimates that these local hires account for nearly 48 per cent of the expatriate population. Moreover, an increasing number of CAEs want to stay in China on completion of their assignment and are willing to do so for reduced packages. Industry analysts estimate that locally hiring a foreign employee in China can reduce a traditional expatriate package by 30 to 50 per cent, mainly through cut-backs to high-cost items such as allowances for tax assistance, housing and children’s education in international schools (AON Hewitt, 2011).
Haslberger and Vaiman (2013, p.1) suggests that SIEs could ‘provide at least a partial answer to the talent shortages’, given that they are ‘mobile, self-starting, and generally well educated’.

1.3.3 The business context

Globalisation has changed the way organisations conduct their business as well as how they must manage their workforces effectively in the global context (Tarique & Schuler, 2010). Overall, careers are becoming increasingly global (Tams & Arthur, 2007). Both scholarly and practitioner literature provide ample evidence of a large and growing number of individuals whose careers transcend national borders (e.g., Briscoe, Hall, & Mayrhofer, 2011; Dickmann & Baruch, 2011; Peiperl & Jonsen, 2007).

At the same time, there is every indication that organisations face a formidable challenge to attract, develop and retain a much-needed supply of human capital in the international arena (Farndale, Scullion, & Sparrow; 2010; Haslberger & Vaiman, 2013; Tarique & Schuler, 2010). Contributing factors include: dual-career issues (e.g., Riusala & Suutari, 2000), disruption to family life and the education of children (e.g., Collings et al., 2007), career uncertainty on repatriation (e.g., Cox, Khan, & Armani, 2012; McNulty, DeCieri, & Hutchings, 2009), issues of repatriation adjustment for both the expatriate and their spouses/partners (e.g., Collings, Doherty, Luethy, & Osborn, 2011; Howe-Walsh, 2013), and misgivings regarding international terrorism and political unrest (e.g., Scullion & Collins, 2006). Paradoxically, despite women continuing to express an interest in undertaking international assignments, organisations persistently demonstrate a lack of willingness to recruit and develop women for international assignments (Altman & Shortland, 2008; Collings et al., 2007).
The changing nature of the global economic landscape and the emerging BRICS and their successors, the MINTs (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey) economies present unique challenges to the talent supply–demand equation. Increasingly, MNCs are meeting with resistance from candidates reluctant to transfer to these locations (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2003; Scullion & Collings, 2006). This lack of supply of qualified candidates is compounded by the fact that countries such as China are facing their own shortages of suitably qualified and skilled local talent (Gupta & Wang, 2009; Iles, Chuai, & Preece, 2010) and may have difficulties in sustaining a net surplus workforce with the right skills into the future. Kapoor and Sherif, (2012, p. 1627) go so far as to declare that only those companies able to adapt their human resource practices to changing labour markets will likely ‘survive, succeed and prosper in the global competition’.

As organisations continue to search for individuals who can effectively manage within these complex environments, the question remains: ‘Where will the talent come from’? Vaiman and Collings (2013, p. 1738) note that following the global financial crisis talent challenges remain acute in both India and China. In practical terms, there is a need to recognise the potential value of SIEs to MNCs, particularly in light of the current focus of scholars and IHRM practitioners on human capital and talent management in a globalised world (e.g., Baruch et al., 2013; Schuler, Jackson, & Tarique, 2011; Vaiman & Collings, 2013). SIEs are usually embedded in their local context and the breadth of their interaction with locals in the host country is wide; indeed, this view is proffered by many researchers (e.g., Carr et al., 2005; Inkson, Arthur, Pringle, & Barry, 1997; Jokinen et al., 2008; Myers & Pringle, 2005). Whether female SIEs, in particular, are new sources of talent is unclear. Or do they encounter
glass walls and glass ceilings in the host country similar to those they may experience in their home country? These are legitimate questions to ponder.

1.3.4 The researcher’s background

The decisive factor in undertaking this research was curiosity. I was guided by Denzin, in that the choice of research topic ‘represents a highly personal decision’ (1989, p. 76), and as the researcher I am ‘historically and locally situated within the very process being studied’ (2001, p. 3). My decision to explore the lives of female SIEs working in Beijing is predicated on my personal life and own career experiences. I was raised in a traditional expatriate family in a time when the company determined my father’s next place of work, and my mother’s key role was to help the family adjust to their new environment. Later, after a number of years climbing the corporate career ladder, I embarked on a significant career change in order to pursue a long-held dream to work in China.

Thus began my 15-year personal journey as an SIE, although initially this was more by accident than design. Equipped with a range of skills and China experience, I assumed I would be a much sought-after asset to any company looking to expand their China business. Much to my chagrin, this was not the case, at least not for the MNCs. They were concerned about the fact that if sent on assignment, I would be unaccompanied, and if my husband were to join me, what would he do. One recruitment company even informed me I was too blonde to be sent to China!

It appeared that the world of the expatriate was still the realm of the married man with trailing spouse and school-aged children. In the end, taking the independent road seemed to be the only way forward if I were to pursue my career goals. In those early days when I did go it alone, leaving my husband behind to pursue his career, the
reaction from many was one of incredulity. I am unsure whether the disbelief was because I had chosen to go to China of my own accord or because I had left my husband to cook his own meals.

Adopting an historical perspective, I am reminded that although I may have appeared a trailblazer—indeed a novelty—many women have initiated their expatriation to take up paid employment in foreign lands prior to me. Examples include governesses, teachers, education officers, nurses and medical officers, as well as those employed, albeit occasionally, as colonial administrative staff in the colonies. Whether there is continuity between these women and the SIE women of today, and the stories in this research resemble my personal story remains to be seen.

1.4 Justification for the Research

The impetus for exploring the career narratives of western professional female SIEs working in China was the research value and timeliness of such an exploration. First, over the last decade, women have begun to initiate their expatriations as a means of becoming active participants in the international arena. Despite the growing recognition that SIEs are more than simply young travellers in search of adventure (Doherty et al., 2011), there is an absence of empirical studies about SIEs in general and more specifically about women who choose to work in particular locations.

Second, given the significance of alternative forms of employment to professional and managerial careers in organisations in the context of the new career debate, it is important to understand how women account for their careers as well as for their decision to become SIEs. The exploration of these issues is legitimate and essential.
1.5 Research Aims and Objectives

As with any doctoral thesis, a contribution to knowledge is paramount. However, the difference between a PhD thesis and a professional doctoral thesis is that the latter should focus on a contribution to knowledge in the context of professional practice that is relevant to both the practitioners and the affected actors. This contribution to practice is equally as important and is arguably inextricably linked with the contribution to academic knowledge.

Informing existing and future practices is fundamental to this research. Helping organisations and individuals to better understand the careers of SIE women specifically, as reflected in the views of the participants in this research, provides a constructive approach to inspiring effective solutions to the problems they face. Thus, my objective with this study was to offer new insights into an under-researched area, namely women who self-initiate their expatriation and, in particular, the careers of western professional women moving to Beijing to live and work as SIEs.

Through this study, I aimed to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the construct of their careers, the factors affecting their career decisions, and their career experiences. Furthermore, I am interested in understanding how the respondents construct or modify and make sense of their professional identity as they navigate their transition to China as an SIE. For the purpose of this study professional identity is defined as ‘the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role’ (Schein, 1978, cited in Ibarra, 1999, pp. 764 – 765). Dunbar (1992, p. 532) maintains that professional identity is not the same as social identity: ‘the former is
work-related and linked to economic activities whereas the latter concerns social status’. In the context of this study, an individual is considered to have a multifaceted professional identity, comprising career (a personal identity), family (a role identity) and cultural (a collective identity) which may vary in the degrees to which they impact the reason to expatriate (Tharenou, 2010, p. 105).

Few studies have explored the careers of female SIEs. Consequently, little is known about the factors that influence their decision to expatriate, their background and family influences, their career experiences, their successes and failures and, indeed, who they are. To frame the research questions, I considered several guiding lines of enquiry: expatriation and gender, mobility and the changing nature of assignments, the emergence of the SIE in the context of career, factors influencing the decision to self-initiate expatriation, new careers, and the relationship between professional identity and mobility. Based on this inquiry, I developed the following research objectives.

**Objective 1:** To identify the determinants that influence women to self-initiate their expatriation to Beijing, China.

**Objective 2:** To explore the meanings, values and interpretations individual women ascribe to their SIE experiences in terms of their career.

**Objective 3:** To better understand the extent to which women are the architects of their careers as SIEs.

**Objective 4:** To explore the professional identities of women who have initiated their expatriations and to better comprehend the degree to which the different components of professional identity (career, family and culture) affect the mobility of female SIEs.
1.6 The Research Design

My aim with this study was to explore subject matter about which relatively little was known to gain a more in-depth understanding while maintaining the flexibility to explore future areas of research (Patton, 2005). Thus, I decided on an exploratory qualitative mode of social enquiry for the research. Silverman (1998, p. 3) contends that ‘the particular strength of qualitative research, for both researchers and practitioners, is its ability to focus on actual practice in situ’.

Exploratory research has the potential to provide the researcher with ‘thick’ description (Geertz, 1979, pp. 1–2). By this, Denzin (1989, p. 83) means that in the narrative ‘the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard’. This produces for the reader the feeling they experience or could experience the events described (Denzin, 1989). Furthermore, exploratory research involves a high level of researcher involvement and interpretation. The researcher is interested in the perspectives and beliefs of the participants and places an emphasis on the meaning of their words and actions, with the aim of identifying patterns through observations, documentation and analysis (Patton, 2005). Klenke (2008) suggests that it is not possible to conduct a rigorous research analysis without an understanding of the underpinning philosophical paradigm driving the researcher’s assumptions. These assumptions, in turn, justify the choice of methodological strategies for the research.

The study was framed within the interpretive paradigm given that my intention was to commence with observations of a specific situation (i.e., female SIEs in Beijing, China) and to seek to establish patterns about the phenomena rather than to prove a theory or test hypotheses leading to cause-and-effect conclusions. An interpretive approach is associated with the symbolic interactionist Chicago school in sociology of
the 1920s-1930s (Neuman, 2011, p. 101). It carries with it the notion of choice, free will and individualism and assumes that reality is constructed from and arises out of social interaction (Berger & Luckman, 1967, Blumer, 1969). Another central assumption is the so-called ‘Thomas theorem’, which claims ‘that when a person defines a situation as real, this situation is real (Joas, 1988, p.83).

The interpretive paradigm has been criticised for a number of reasons, not the least of which are the potential for researcher bias and the fact that generalisations beyond the focus of the research scope are rejected (Denscombe, 2003 cited in Yin 2010, p. 74). However, Denscombe (2003) concedes that a high degree of rigour can be achieved if the researcher adopts a systematic and transparent approach to the analysis.

As a consequence of my background and the fact I was keen to focus on ‘the streams of experience’ individuals construct and give meaning to (Denzin, 2009, pp. 67 – 68) pointed to narrative inquiry or storytelling as the most appropriate methodological tool. The term ‘narrative’ has a variety of meanings and applications and is often used synonymously with the notion of ‘story’ (Clandinin, 2007, p. 428). Ricoeur (1984, p. 150) maintains that: ‘A story describes a sequence of actions and experiences done or undergone by a certain number of people, whether real or imaginary’. Denzin (2001, p. 59) argues that story and narrative are nearly equivalent terms: ‘narrative is a telling…the process of making or telling a story, while ‘a story is an account that involves the narration of a series of events in a plotted sequence that unfolds in time’. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 189) advocate: ‘Narrative inquiry is the study of experience…a matter of people in relation contextually and temporally’. In essence, it ‘embraces narrative as both the method and phenomena of study’ (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5) and involves the reconstruction of a person’s experience in relationship both
to the other and to a social setting (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, cited in Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5).

The relationship of the researcher to the researched is fundamental to narrative inquiry. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007, p. 15) argue that to use narrative as methodology and explore narrative as the phenomenon of interest, the researcher must ‘embrace a relational understanding of the roles and interactions of the researcher and the researcher’. Bateson’s (1990) Composing a Life captures a researcher entwined in a researcher-researched relationship. In focussing on the lives of five women researchers she utilises concepts such as ‘unfolding stories’ and ‘rethinking achievement’ by ‘weaving something new from many different threads’ (p. 16) in a way that the reader can ‘see’ and ‘feel’ how the women composed their lives.

Stutts and Barker (1999, p. 215) argue that narrative can be both a strength and a weakness — a strength in that it can produce a ‘rich body of knowledge’; a weakness in that it is still considered to be in its infancy. These and other matters such as issues of ‘reliability’, ‘objectivity’, ‘generalisability’ and ‘validity’ are examined further in Chapter 3.

1.7 Outline of the Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction and Scope of Research includes an overview of the background of the research, the research problem and scope, goals and objectives, research issues, an overview of the research methodology and reasons for undertaking the study.
Chapter Two: The Literature Review reviews the main literature relevant to the study—that is, expatriation, new careers and identity, as well as the theoretical constructs in which the study is positioned. This chapter identifies the research gap in the literature that this thesis fills and the research questions on which the study was based.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods details the nominated research design and philosophical approach adopted for the study. It explains and justifies the methodology and methods chosen for the research and ethical deliberations.

Chapter Four: The Findings presents the analysis of the data collection.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations expounds the central conclusions from the research. Suggestions for further research together with the contribution of the study to academic knowledge are considered. The implications for HR practitioners are discussed and the ways in which the findings might affect HR practices and policies. The thesis concludes with my personal reflections and a discussion of the personal growth and learning I experienced in undertaking this study.

1.8 Delimitations of Scope

The fundamental choices I made, as the researcher that set the parameters for this study include: the choice of objectives, the research questions, theoretical perspectives that I have adopted and the population I chose to investigate. The nature of my purposive sample is narrowed to a particular dimension of interest — western professional women living and working in Beijing, and characterised by a deliberate effort to achieve maximum variation and representativeness within the sample (Patton, 2002).
My decision to utilise an exploratory qualitative mode of enquiry precludes the use of statistics and other quantitative measures. Furthermore, there is a lack of generalisability from the study sample to the entire population. Partial generalisations, however, may be possible to similar populations. Additionally, I did not use structured interviews in order to minimise my influence on the respondents. The research design framework is further discussed in Chapter 3. The limitations to the research are addressed in Section 5.6.

1.9 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the fundamentals of this study and introduced the research problem and research issues. I have provided a synopsis of some of the current issues in the literature regarding new careers and expatriation. I have justified the research, briefly described and validated the methodology, outlined the study and discussed the delimitations. I also explored my rationale for undertaking the study. On this basis, I proceed with a detailed description of the research, commencing with an in-depth review of the relevant literature upon which I based the study.
CHAPTER 2
THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.
— Marcel Proust (1871 – 1922)

2.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I review the empirical and theoretical literature relevant to this study of western professional women who initiated their expatriation to live and work in Beijing, China. The aim of the literature review is to identify research issues worthy of inclusion in the body of knowledge on SIE women. I begin by presenting a literature map of the research in Section 2.2. In Section 2.3, I consider expatriation and the internationally mobile, the growing interest in global careers and the relevance of this literature to women. In Section 2.4 I examine the new careers literature and consider its adequacy both for women and for those individuals whose careers fall outside traditional expatriate structures. Furthermore, I explore the evolving trends in women’s careers and career choices, with a particular emphasis on the emerging literature of ‘the ‘opt-out revolution’, a term coined specifically to describe the exit of ‘educated professional women’ from the corporate world ‘who were supposed to achieve like men’ (Belkin, 2003, p. 1). I was interested to discover more about this recent phenomenon and whether this literature has any bearing on SIE women. I then turn my attention to issues of identity in Section 2.5. Based on this review and analysis, this chapter concludes with the identification of the research questions for the study in Section 2.6.
2.2 Conducting the Literature Review

In conducting the literature review my aim was to begin my research with a basic foundation of knowledge while at the same time avoiding a narrow theoretical perspective that could have constrained my research (Lewis, 2003, p. 49). Guided by Janesick (2000, p. 384) that qualitative researchers have ‘open but not empty minds’, it was important to acquire an understanding of existing knowledge and ideas in order to consider how my topic could add to, extend, or replicate research already completed (Creswell, 2003, p. 39). In other words: ‘What questions remain?’ and ‘what has not yet been studied?’ (Flick, 2014, p. 67).

The initial review of the literature enabled me to build a picture of existing research about SIEs and was instrumental in refining key research questions and methods. I anticipated undertaking further reviews of the literature as the study evolved, particularly in areas not identified in the early stages. Additional references to the literature are included in the thesis findings and discussion (see Chapters 4 and 5) which allows for what Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 52) label ‘supplementary validation’, either supporting or challenging the empirical findings of this study.

Thus, the literature review for this research continued progressively throughout the duration of the thesis (Anderson & Poole, 2001, p. 21) from June 2011 until April 2014. The preliminary classification of the literature is presented in Section 2.1.1 and exhibited in Figures 2.1 and 2.2 respectively.
Figure 2.1  The research literature map
Source: Developed for this research.
2.2.1 A literature map of the research

A map of the initial literature identified for this study is displayed in Figure 2.1. Given that I was exploring the topic of SIEs for the first time I started with a broad synthesis of the IHRM literature. The main streams of this literature have traditionally focussed on CAEs: their selection (e.g., Brewster & Scullion, 1997), their role in MNCs (e.g., Dowling, Festing, & Engle, 2008), their effective management (e.g., Tung, 1984), adjustment and adaptation challenges (e.g., Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991), and repatriation issues (e.g., Black & Gregersen, 1999).

Nevertheless, I was interested in investigating the literature along the following themes: ‘new and different types of expatriation’, ‘the changing landscape of international business’ and ‘transforming patterns of global staffing’. It was through this initial search that I was introduced to the notion of self-initiated expatriation — firstly in the guise as the ‘the big overseas experience’ (Inkson et al., 1997) or the self-directed travel of ‘young people autonomously exploring other countries and cultures’ (Inkson & Myers, 2003, p. 170). Thereafter, I turned my attention to ‘women and expatriation’ to follow up on Nancy Adler’s (1984) ground breaking work that reframed and challenged the traditional mind-sets of women as expatriates.

From here, I reviewed the literature on current approaches to the study of careers and the current ‘state of the art’ of career theory, based on major lines of enquiry that have thus far emerged. I began by focusing on the protean and boundaryless careers, two frameworks that resonate with the careers of SIEs. Subsequently, I examined some of ‘the next generation of career concepts’ (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, p. 1554), namely the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Afterwards, I moved to an illustrative review of women’s career
patterns that might contribute to an understanding of professional SIE women’s career experiences. One area I was interested in exploring was the impact of self-initiated expatriation on an individual’s identity and career aspirations and their sense of belonging and the relationship between identity and mobility.

2.2.2 Situating the study

In sum, the research sits at the intersection of three broad areas of knowledge—the domains of expatriation, new careers and identity, as presented in Figure 2.2. The intersection of these literature strands provided the focus of my study. Within the three domains are specific sub-domains of interest highlighted in Section 2.1.1 — the literature map of the research. The literature review will build upon these three areas to assist furthering the research agenda into the career experiences of professional SIE women living and working in Beijing, China.

**Figure 2.2** Situating the study: the intersection of career, expatriation and identity
Source: Developed for this research.
2.3 Expatriation and the Internationally Mobile

You’re an expatriate. You’ve lost touch with the soil. You get precious. Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed by sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, see. — Hemingway (1926, p. 115)

Hemingway’s description of the expatriate is at once romantic, exaggerated, simplistic and somewhat degrading. Within the field of IHRM, the concept of expatriation is a highly complex issue (Harzing, 1995). Expatriates are described as individuals sent overseas by their current employer for a nominated period of usually ‘two to five years (depending on the country of origin)’ (Stroh, Gregersen, & Black, 2000, p. 681) with the intention of returning home when the assignment is completed (e.g., Brewster, Sparrow, 2007; Harrison et al., 2004; Selmer 1995). Although expatriates are often ‘out of sight, out of mind’ of the parent company during their transfer (Stroh et al., 2000, p. 681) they remain within the organisation for the duration of their expatriation. Much of the research on expatriation concerns business or corporate expatriates, however expatriates may also come from public sector organisations including diplomats and military personnel (Selmer & Fenner, 2009, p. 75).

The literature on business expatriates is largely concerned with the traditional cyclical descriptions of the expatriate cycle—namely: selection, training, adjustment, performance management, remuneration and repatriation (e.g., Scullion, & Collings, 2006, p. 6). However, as Osland (1995, p. xiv) observes, ‘there is more to the expatriate experience than commonly meets the eye’.

Discussions on an organisation’s motives for engaging expatriates are generally traced to the work of Edström and Galbraith (1977) and their work represents the seminal theoretical contribution in the field of international assignments. The reasons
for using expatriates include position filling, management development and organisational development. Therefore, expatriates are typically responsible for controlling, coordinating and transferring knowledge among various subsidiary units—a set of strategic capabilities not easily provided by local employees (Sparrow, Brewster, & Harris, 2004). Harzing (2004, p. 262) argues that ‘the key point that companies should realise is the fact that expatriation is a strategic tool to achieve specific organisational goals and needs to be used as such’.

Perlmutter’s (1969) classic study on international staffing identified three classifications of staffing MNCs, *ethnocentric*, *polycentric* and *geocentric* (Harzing, 2005, p.252; Collings & Scullion, 2006, p. 18), based on ‘the orientation toward foreign people, ideas, resources’ in headquarters and subsidiaries, and host and home countries (Perlmutter, 1969, cited in Collings & Scullion, 2006, p. 18). Today, MNCs continue to classify their staffing policies following these orientations, although there is debate on the appropriate mix of nationalities (Collings & Scullion, 2006). In an ethnocentric staffing policy key managerial positions in subsidiaries and affiliates are assigned to parent country nationals (PCNs). A MNC that adopts a polycentric staffing policy appoints host country nationals (HCNs) who are not expatriates to key positions (Dowling et al., 2008). However, they may be brought into the headquarters, usually for training purposes, and are then referred to as *inpatriates*.

An inpatriate staffing strategy may be temporary or permanent with trips between the home and host locations to share and transfer knowledge (Harvey, Speir, & Novecevic, 2001). This resourcing strategy is particularly prevalent in foreign operations setting up in emerging markets (Harvey et al., 1999). In addition, *ex-host country nationals* (ex-HCNs) are local nationals who, after studying or working abroad, have returned with international experience to their home countries to join the local
workforce (Hsieh et al., 1999; Thite et al., 2009). A company following a geocentric staffing policy assigns senior management positions based on merit, regardless of nationality (Heenan & Perlmutter, 1979). A fourth classification was later added by Heenan and Perlmutter (1979) called *regiocentric*. Here, managerial positions are filled by nationals of countries within defined regions.

There is increasing evidence of the more traditional expatriation assignments of three to five years giving way to shorter terms of two or three years as a maximum (Collings et al., 2007) and different types and configurations of assignments (Scullion et al., 2007). Cost considerations, lower mobility from the traditional expatriate pool and an increasing number of dual-career couples are cited as major reasons for these changes (e.g., Collings & Scullion, 2008; Fischlmayr & Kollonger-Santer, 2014).

Much of the early expatriate literature was dominated by research based on North American MNCS (e.g., Collings & Scullion, 2009), with a strong organisational focus on organisational needs rather than an individual perspective (Lane, DiStefano, & Maznevski, 2012). While the organisational perspective has been useful for raising awareness of specific HRM practices it largely ignores individual dynamics and the individual’s interpretation of success and failure (Arthur et al., 1997).

### 2.3.1 Who gets to go: selecting expatriates

The selection of personnel for international assignments has been a major topic of consideration in the literature since Tung’s (1981, p. 68) seminal work on a ‘contingency framework’ of the selection, recruitment and training of expatriates. Traditionally, selection has been based on members of staff waiting to be offered a position or posting based on others’ observations of a requisite set of skills and qualities they may or may not possess (Bolino, 2007). These attributes include: personal cross-
cultural adaptation competences (personal, people and perception skills), as well as the organisation’s philosophy and orientation towards international assignments (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985, 2001, p. 79). Indeed, Mendenhall and Oddou suggest that the successful nominee ‘should probably be flattered’ as it usually means that they are admired for their technical or managerial competence (2011, p. 82).

The notion of an individual proactively seeking an overseas assignment receives limited attention in the literature. An exception is provided by Harris and Brewster (1999), who describe the ‘coffee-machine system’ and query the assumption that the selection process is formal and objective. In a study of senior international HRM specialists in nine major blue-chip international firms, the authors report that managers are more likely to be assigned an international appointment after actively nominating themselves (or each other) during coffee breaks rather than through a more strategic analysis against ideal-type criteria. They argue that such a system reflects the ‘reality of expatriate selection’ (Harris & Brewster, 1999, p. 495).

It is widely suggested in the literature that the selection of expatriates should take into account a range of soft skills, such as cultural sensitivity, relational skills, language skills, prior international experience and the ability to handle stress (e.g., Caligiuri, 2000; Guptara, 1986; Mendenhall, Dunbar, & Oddou, 1987). However, repeated research shows that, despite the prevalence of these lists, the major criteria most commonly applied are technical competence (e.g., Harris & Brewster, 1999) and availability of personnel (e.g., Dowling et al., 2008; Selmer, 2010). According to Shilling (1993, p. 58), ‘too often expatriates are selected in a knee-jerk reaction to the need to fill a new or unexpected vacancy overseas’. Similarly, Mendenhall and Macomber (1997, p. 58) state that selection for overseas assignments ‘is an irrational process’ in most organisations, generally not under the control of HR.
Although some of the above observations on expatriate selection date back more than 15 years, a review of more-current literature revealed similar commentary (e.g., Anderson, 2005; Caligiuri, Tarique, & Jacobs, 2009; Carey, Herst, & Chan, 2010). Additional layers of complexity, with clear implications for the analysis of expatriate selection and outcomes have existed since the earliest expatriations but only recently has it been recognised in the literature. The three main layers of this complexity include (1) different types of assignments and international experience, (2) different types of organisations and (3) looking beyond the traditional organisational and expatriate perspectives (Brewster, Bonache, Cerdin & Suutari, 2014).

### 2.3.2 Women and expatriation

In a ferociously competitive global economy, no company can afford to waste valuable brainpower simply because it is wearing a skirt.


About the single most uncontroversial, incontrovertible statement to make about women in international management is that there are very few of them.


In 1979 Nancy Adler (1979, p. 407) first posed the question: ‘Women in international management, where are they?’ In accord with Fisher (1992) and Caulkin’s (1977) statements (above), women remain in the minority when it comes to international assignments (Altman & Shortland, 2008; Fischlmeyer & Schroll-Machl, 2010), with recent reports estimating that women account for only about 23 per cent of the total number of CAEs worldwide (Brookfield GRS, 2013). Although expatriate women may no longer be seen as essentially playing the role of ‘incorporated wife’ (Callan & Ardener, 1984) or ‘accompanying or trailing spouse/partner’ (Linehan & Walsh, 2001,
p. 88), gender remains a key variable in any examination of expatriation, the characteristics of expatriates and their experiences.

Research conducted first by Adler (e.g., 1984, 1987, 1994) and others (e.g., Altman and Shortland, 2008; Harris, 1995, 2004; Selmer and Leung, 2002, 2003; Shortland, 2009) examining the reasons for women’s under-representation in international assignments has settled on four main explanations. First, organisations assume that women are not interested in international positions because of work–family conflicts. For married women the assumed quandary has been ‘the husband’s dilemma’ (Izraeli, Banai, & Zeira, 1980). Second, some organisations refuse to send women abroad due to (1) unfounded fears about their competence and/or physical safety and (2) a persistent (male) bias that discourages the selection of women for international assignments. Third, organisations believe that many host countries are prejudiced against women expatriates. Fourth, it is alleged that women are unable to rise to the challenge and adjust successfully (Vance & Paik, 2001).

Although these reasons, or ‘myths’ as Adler labelled them (1984, p. 66), have systematically proved to be unfounded, most employers have continued to not expatriate women. These reasons (women’s choices linked to family commitments, host country reception and women’s assignee characteristics) have become the main themes at the core of academic research in the field ever since. This is despite evidence suggesting that women can and do succeed on their international assignments (Shortland & Altman, 2011), and are accepted by host countries even when local women are not readily accepted into the workforce (e.g., Adler, 1984; Kollinger, 2005; Taylor, Napier, & Mayrhofer, 2011; Tung, 2004; Vance & Paik, 2001). Some research suggests that women may be preferred over men as expatriate managers (Hutchings &
Michailova, 2014), while as early as 1980 Izraeli et al. concluded that only ‘exceptional women could actually succeed in the job’ (1980, p. 62).

The literature demonstrates a mixed picture, with contrasting views regarding whether women desire expatriate careers. Some studies have shown that women have a strong interest in expatriate careers (Adler, 1984; Linehan, 2000) and are as receptive to them as men (Napier & Taylor, 2002; Tung, 1998). Others have found that men are more willing to accept international assignments than are women (Ribbens & Powell, 1995; van der Velde, Bossink, & Jansen, 2005), or they are more active in seeking international opportunities (Tharenou, 2008).

There is a distinction between expressing an interest in, and actively engaging in expatriation (Andresen et al., 2006). The decision to seek or accept an international assignment is affected by factors such as age, income, dual careers, professional tenure, previous expatriate experience and issues related to marital status and the family (e.g., Chew & Zhu, 2002; Dupuis et al., 2008; Taillieu, 1992; Tharenou, 2008; van der Velde et al., 2005; Zhu et al., 2006). Managing family commitments and the demands of expatriation place particular strains on married women and women with children (Linehan, 2000). Fischlmeyer and Schroll-Machl (2010) suggest that women need to surpass men at juggling a number of competing duties, with the sacrifice of their personal life common at senior expatriate levels (Linehan & Walsh, 2000).

Employer assumptions that women, particularly married women, are not interested in international roles (Adler, 1984; Schafer, 2000) lead to women often being compelled to request consideration for expatriate positions (Linehan & Walsh, 1999). The literature thus indicates that the selection processes for expatriate assignments reinforces traditional gender divisions (Hearn et al., 2008). As Fischlmayr and Schroll-
Machl conclude; ‘HR managers are often subconsciously influenced by gender stereotyping, which significantly affects their choice of candidates’ (2010, p. 369).

Research revealing the low proportion of women offered international assignments parallels findings from research on the glass ceiling effect (Forster, 1999), whereby artificial unbreachable barriers keep ‘minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievement’ (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission 1995, cited in Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001, p. 656). Although women are securing positions in the managerial ranks from where expatriates are traditionally selected, they appear to remain largely unsuccessful in entering the expatriate selection pool (Selmer & Leung, 2002). Insch, McIntyre and Napier (2008, p. 19) refer to this situation as an ‘expatriate glass ceiling’ or ‘second pane of obstruction that women face.

The term glass border, coined by Mandelker (1994, p. 16), has come to refer to the barriers—covert and overt—that limit women’s international careers, as well as assumptions about their availability, suitability and preferences for international appointments (Linehan & Walsh, 1999, p. 264). Haines and Saba (1999) argue that the glass border reinforces the effect of the glass ceiling and vice versa. Glass walls, a term for another institutionalised career boundary, typically refers to the functional and occupational segregation attributed to employment barriers that prevent the lateral movement of women and ethnic minorities between departments or organisations (Gunz et al., 2002; Mattis, 2004). This separation is due to institutional factors, such as organisational practices and sociocultural context (Gunz et al., 2002). Thus, it could be concluded that when it comes to international assignments women face both horizontal and vertical boundaries.
Within the literature, it is widely acknowledged that female expatriates will remain a minority until organisations reappraise their HRM policies and practices regarding women and international assignments (e.g., Altman & Shortland, 2008; Fischlmayr & Schroll-Machl, 2010). Somewhat surprisingly, the literature on gender and expatriation makes little or no mention of the courses of action available to those women who cannot gain international experience through company-assigned expatriation. Nor, indeed, does it mention what happens to the company-assigned woman who finds her career advancement blocked or constrained—a theme that resonates within the literature on women’s careers (see Sections 2.4.8 and 2.4.9). These issues are further explored in the appraisal of gender and self-expatriation (see Section 2.3.9).

2.3.3 The changing nature and face of expatriate careers

As discussed in Section 1.2, a number of recent contributions to the IHRM literature note significant changes in the nature of expatriate careers (e.g., Collings et al., 2007; Dickmann & Baruch, 2011; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Thomas, Lazarova, & Inkson, 2005). Not only has the mobility of professionals increased as organisations utilise alternative types of assignments outside traditional expatriation, but the institutionalised nature of mobility has also changed. Of significance here, as noted by Scullion, Collings and Gunnigle (2007, p. 37), are a number of trends impacting on the international business landscape. These are: (i) the emergence of the BRICS and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) as significant markets, (ii) adjustments in the security landscape post-9/11, (iii) the changing nature of careers, and (iv) the shifting nature of international assignments (Scullion et al, 2007, p 310), and (v) the conditions under which assignments are accepted. With respect to the fourth trend Scullion et al.
(2007) note the challenges of recruiting and retaining managerial talent due to factors such as dual career issues, the limited participation of women and issues of repatriation (Scullion et al., 2007, p 311). All these factors have the potential to impact on IHRM policy and practice with respect to internationally mobile employees.

Moreover, there is an evolving body of research that suggests disengagement between how an individual perceives the value of an international assignment to their career development and advancement and the perceived value of these assignments from the organisation’s perspective (e.g., Dickmann et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2005).

As the global landscape becomes more complex, due in part to mergers, divestitures, start-up operations, corporate restructuring and the demand for project work (Cappellen & Janssens, 2005), a variety of global career patterns and configurations are replacing the traditional long-term expatriation assignment (Baruch et al., 2013). The variety of assignment policies based on time exposure and international work patterns are exhibited in See Figure 2.3 (Baruch et al., 2013; Brookfield GRS, 2013). At the same time, attention is turning to individuals who initiate their expatriate experiences (e.g., Brewster & Suutari, 2005; Carr et al., 2005; Doherty, 2013a & 2013b; Inkson and Myers, 2003; Jokinen et al., 2008; Suutari & Brewster, 2001).
Figure 2.3 Assignment policies based on time exposure and the international work pattern

2.3.4 SIEs: the beginning

A review of the term *self-initiated expatriate* by Doherty, Richardson and Thorn (2013a) confirms that it evolved to differentiate itself from the more established terms *company-assigned expatriate* and *corporate expatriate*. They argue that while there is a relationship between SIE as the new construct and corporate expatriation as the traditional construct, SIE as a concept is emerging as a noticeable field of study in its own right (Doherty et al., 2013a, p. 99).
The notion of the SIE had its genesis in the emerging new career paradigm, which emphasises the individual over the organisation (Arthur et al., 1999; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996a; Hall, 1979). Inkson et al. (1998, p. 3555) were among the first to identify an alternative to the CAE, namely those seeking the ‘big overseas experience’ or affectionately ‘the big “OE”’. Commonly described as adventurous ‘free agents’, these were usually young self-supporting people heading overseas for a prolonged period to explore, learn about, and experience other cultures rather than for formal career development purposes. Suutari and Brewster (2001) later expanded the notion to the self-initiated foreign work experience (SFE), to include those more experienced people who deliberately choose self-expatriation as an international career model.

Richardson and McKenna (2000) built on Osland’s (1995) use of Joseph Campbell’s metaphor of the ‘hero’s journey’ to analyse the experiences of expatriates by developing their own metaphors to depict motives for going overseas and experiences of expatriation in their sample of academic self-selecting expatriates. The authors identified two metaphorical types for motivation to expatriate: the explorer and the refugee, and two metaphorical types for how expatriation is experienced: the outsider and the tightrope walker (Richardson & McKenna, 2000, pp. 214 – 215). Subsequently, Richardson and McKenna (2002, p. 14) added to their metaphorical ‘dominant frames’ to include two further motivations to go: the mercenary and the architect, and two for experiencing expatriation: the explorer and the student. Each of these metaphors is summarised below (Richardson & McKenna, 2002, pp.70 – 76; McKenna & Richardson, 2007, p.311):
(1) **Mercenaries**: motivated to maximise rewards, such as money, lifestyle, status and benefits.

(2) **Architects**: motivated to build a career independent of organisational structures. Such professionals may follow a boundaryless route in their career trajectory (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

(3) **Refugees**: motivated by a desire to escape difficult circumstances such as personal problems or an unsatisfying professional or personal life.

(4) **Explorers**: motivated by the appeal of adventure, a new culture and professional environment.

(5) **Tightrope walkers**: individuals experience risk or challenges —‘without the support of a safety harness’ (p. 74) — such as the prospect of losing a job and having to leave the host country.

(6) **Missionaries**: individuals who want to do good, improve others and advance skills and knowledge to other parts of the world.

(7) **Outsiders**: individuals who find it difficult to integrate into local communities and may therefore experience a degree of isolation.

(8) **Student**: individuals experience expatriation as both a personal challenge and a transformation —‘a “letting go” of one world and “taking another”’ (Osland, 1995, p.136).

(9) **Seekers**: searching for self-knowledge and self-awareness and a belief it will be found in a new and different environment.
Banai and Harry (2004, p. 97) explored the notion of *international itinerants*, defined as ‘independent career professionals’ seeking and engaging in consecutive unrelated employment relationships across industry and geographic boundaries. They grouped these professionals into a number of different managers: failed expatriates in terms of not aligning themselves with one employing organisation; unique expertise; cosmopolitans; mavericks; returning nationals; and novelty seekers.

Richardson and Mallon (2005, p. 409) introduced the term *self-directed expatriates/expatriation* for their study of British academics who expatriated independently. Later, McKenna and Richardson (2007, p. 307) referred to professionals who expatriate without organisational support as *independent internationally mobile professionals* or IIMPs. The literature further distinguishes alternatives to the CAE in the form of the *independent business traveller* who is a specialist contracted to provide expert input (e.g., Welch, Welch, & Worm, 2007, p. 174).

The term *self-initiated expatriates/expatriation* first appeared in the literature with articles by Dickmann, Doherty, Mills and Brewster (2008) and Jokinen et al. (2008). In 2009 at the Academy of Management symposium titled *Self-initiated Foreign Experiences* the term SIE was agreed upon and it has become commonplace in the literature ever since (Doherty et al., 2013a). The term SIE recognises the following characteristics: independently relocates on a voluntary basis, a temporary condition even if the timeframe is open-ended, and high skill level (Doherty et al., 2013a; Haslberger & Vaiman, 2013). Additional entries to the vocabulary include *self-initiated repatriation* (Begley, Collings, & Scullion, 2008; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010) and *self-initiated mobility* (Thorn, 2009). Analysing the differences between CAEs and SIEs, Biemann and Andresen (2010) referred to *self-initiated foreign work experiences* and *self-initiated international workers*. 

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In sum, Doherty et al. (2013a, p. 99) argue that there are two essential components for a self-initiated expatriation: first, relocation across a national border and, second the initiative to relocate must come from the individual. Thus, the core feature is ‘individual volition’ (Doherty et al., 2013a, p. 99). Nevertheless, self-initiated expatriations are becoming more complex and the types of expatriation increasingly multilayered.

2.3.5 SIEs: an evolving genre

The study of SIEs has gained momentum in the last decade. A broad range of topics has been covered, including reasons for going (Doherty et al., 2011; Suutari & Brewster 2001), career capital (Jokinen et al., 2008), implications for HRM (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010), cross-cultural adjustment (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009), career anchors (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2009), modes of engagement and career development (Al Ariss, 2010) and career-related factors (Biemann & Andresen, 2010). Recently, self-initiated expatriation has been considered as a formal career-enhancing experience that can contribute to the development of work-related and personal skills as well as the accumulation of portable and tradeable career capital (Doherty & Dickmann, 2009; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Jokinen et al., 2008; Myers & Pringle, 2005). The research has resulted in diverse and at times contradictory findings. For example, Inkson et al. (1998) found evidence of self-initiated expatriation leading to career success, whereas Lee (2005, p. 183) found that a ‘lack of job autonomy, job suitability and job variety’ contributed to the underemployment of SIEs. However, despite inconsistencies in the research, notable insights are emerging about SIEs.

It is now evident that there is a range of variations in the types of self-initiated expatriation nesting in the field, that the margins of the definition are blurring and SIEs are far from a homogenous group. Howe-Walsh and Schyns (2010, p. 261), for
example, distinguish between career expatriates, who move for a specific job and private expatriates, who relocate for personal reasons. Added to the mix are those individuals who initiate their own expatriation but with organisational support, self-initiated corporate careerists (Altman & Baruch, 2013). Then there are those who truly ‘go it alone’ as non-sponsored careerists (Baruch et al., 2013), waiting until they are in-country before seeking employment. Another subgroup is the self-employed, either in a business they take with them or a business they establish in their new countries.

More recently, the literature has recognised organisational self-initiated expatriates (Doherty et al., 2013a) — individuals who proactively seek an overseas position within their own organisation. Little research has examined SIEs moving from the developing to the developed countries. Al Ariss (2010) found that these individuals are likely to be moving not so much by choice but by necessity to escape unfavourable living conditions.

There has been a tendency for the research to focus on professionals which assumes SIEs are essentially highly educated professionals or engaged in managerial roles (Doherty et al., 2013a, p. 99). Yet, there are other work-related groups, including semi-skilled, low- or unskilled workers who self-initiate their expatriation (Haslberger & Vaiman, 2013). Hundreds of thousands of women from Central and South America, South and Southeast Asia, and Africa, for instance, make the often difficult decision to leave their families and move, either legally or illegally, to North America, Europe, and the wealthier countries of the Middle East and Asia (Adams & Dickey, 2000).

Clearly, the complexity and diversity of self-initiated expatriation is apparent: SIEs share strong similarities in some dimensions but differ widely in others. Despite these differences there is an underlying constant: clearly they are a subset of the larger group of the internationally mobile (Doherty et al., 2013a).
2.3.6 Issues of permanence

A key feature in undertaking a self-initiated expatriation is the anticipated and eventual length of time spent in the host country (Doherty et al., 2013a). Haslberger and Vaiman (2013, p. 4) note the ‘temporary nature intended even if open ended’ with no prearranged return to the home country (Andresen & Gustschin, 2012). However, according to Dorsch, Suutari and Brewster (2012, p. 49), ‘many SIEs never return home’. This then raises the question: ‘At what point does an SIE who has settled for a long period in another country become a migrant’? (Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010).

Furthermore, what constitutes a ‘long period’? Doherty et al. (2013a, p. 102) raise the point that expected length of stay and actual length of stay may change over time introducing a further level of complexity. Thorn and Inkson (2013, p.78) distinguish between SIEs and what they refer to as ‘one-shot’ migrants. In their illustrative scenario the one-shot migrant moves from country A to country B with the intention of settling permanently. The SIE moves to country B with the intention of eventually moving on to country C and beyond. The one-shot migrant may follow suit, ‘thus becoming an SIE’.

Consider, another example, the corporate expatriate who chooses to leave their current employment and remain in the host country and sometime later seek permanent residency: does this person’s status change from that of a corporate expatriate to an SIE and then to a migrant? Doherty et al. (2013a) suggest not given that relocation across a national border did not occur in the transfer of employment, although individual choice was involved. For many SIEs who have in effect ‘settled’ in their new country, the host country’s migration policies may well determine their temporal scope. Both these scenarios illustrate the ‘fine gradations’ between the categories (Thorn & Inkson, 2013, p. 75), in addition to the complexities of classification and the need to ensure clarity with population descriptors.
2.3.7 Influencing factors to become an SIE

A number of studies have investigated the range of issues considered important to SIEs’ in their decision to move, especially in comparison with the experiences of CAEs (e.g., Al Ariss, 2010; Froese, 2012; Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010; Myers & Pringle, 2005; Selmer & Luring, 2011, 2012; Thorn, 2009). Generally, studies to date have suggested five dominant themes that influence the decision to become an SIE: (i) family and partner considerations, (ii) life change and personal development, (iii) monetary issues, (iv) career, and (v) a sense of adventure. Within these four themes are sub-themes, as presented in Figure 2.4. The themes are presented in no particular order of rank although Richardson and McKenna (2000, 2002) and Richardson and Mallon (2005) found the theme of adventure/travel to be the most common reason for British SIE academics. Selmer and Lauring (2010, p. 175) in their study of SIE academics found that younger academics are more motivated by career opportunities and financial gain than older academics.

A sixth possible theme in the decision to self-expatriate, ‘location’, appears to be a relatively neglected topic in the literature. Richardson and Mallon (2005) found that serendipity often plays a major role in the career of SIEs, whereby the opportunity to expatriate has arisen by chance or as a consequence of ‘planned happenstance’ (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). However, Dickmann et al. (2008) argue that the reason individuals choose one destination in preference to another is more than likely the result of a consciously planned decision. Thus, although an opportunity to expatriate may arise through chance, it may be assumed that the individual will purposefully consider the location.
In summary, although the research to date has provided some insights into the influences and motivational drivers for individuals to self-initiate their expatriation, the research remains scant. In addition, the findings have been mixed, possibly due to limited and narrow samples.

**Figure 2.4** Dominant themes (motivators) in the decision to self-expatriate
Source: Developed for this research.
2.3.8 Differences between SIEs and other types of expatriates

A number of studies have emphasised the differences between SIEs and CAEs (e.g., Andresen et al., 2012; Biemann & Andresen, 2010; Cerdin & Pargneux, 2010; Doherty et al., 2011; Jokinen et al., 2008; Mo & Xia, 2010; Peltokorpi 2008; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Selmer & Lauring, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2001). The key difference is that unlike CAEs who are transferred by their employers for a set period (e.g., Peltokorpi & Froese 2009; Selmer & Lauring 2010; Tharenou & Caulfield 2010), SIEs relocate of their own volition. Thus, the impetus to move comes from the individual not the employer (Doherty et al., 2013a).

In one of the earliest studies to compare SIEs and CAEs, Suutari and Brewster (2001, p. 429), in their study of SFE Finnish engineers, identified five variables: (i) individual variables such as age, gender and marital status, (ii) employer and task variables, (iii) motives, (iv) repatriation and future career, and (v) compensation. The SIEs were slightly younger than CAEs with a significantly higher percentage of females, single or with a spouse working abroad, commonly employed on a temporary contract by a foreign organisation, and more willing to undertake another international assignment. Doherty et al. (2011, p. 606) found differences between SIEs and CAEs across a range of variables, including location, host country and career factors. SIEs appeared to focus on the ability to adapt to the location, whereas CAEs focused more on the job at hand and potential career benefits.

Another key criterion that distinguishes SIEs from CAEs is the issue of funding. A typical CAE package comprises three main elements: fixed or flexible pay, benefits and insurances, and allowances (Tornikoski, 2011). The most frequently mentioned criteria of relevance to the decision to participate in a CAE assignment are financial in nature (salary, housing, location bonus, flights home and children’s education), with
salary and housing frequently mentioned as ‘knockout’ factors (Warneke & Schneider, 2011). Cost of living payments and healthcare are also crucial (Sims & Schraeder, 2005). The practitioner literature suggests that attempts to control costs are resulting in organisations trimming expatriate packages (Brookfield GRS, 2013). The trend to localise expatriates, which allows organisations to phase out benefits when the expatriates remain in the host location after completion of their initial contract period, is increasing, as are the use of shorter assignments and alternative mobility patterns (Brookfield GRS, 2013).

In contrast, SIEs are typically responsible for self-funding their relocation including travel and moving expenses, as well as host country expenses, such as accommodation, health insurance and children’s education (Doherty et al., 2013a). Some SIEs may receive a degree of financial support such as relocation expenses, flight allowance, accommodation assistance and health insurance. (e.g., Altman & Baruch, 2012). This type of arrangement is typical amongst contracts for English language teachers and academics in higher education. For instance, English First, China's largest English language training provider, offers a benefits package that includes: a one-year working Z-visa, flight allowance, accommodation assistance, comprehensive health insurance, paid public holidays plus ten days paid vacation, and professional teacher development and training programs (http://www.englishfirst.com).

A final area of differentiation and one which has rarely been discussed is tax and salary issues and the distinction between the employee’s ongoing tax burden in the host country and the possible tax consequences, such as double taxation, triggered by living outside the home country (Egner, 2013, p. 141). Likewise, there are social security issues and concern for unemployment insurance, and state pension insurance.
2.3.9 Women SIEs: what do we know?

In the research to date on female SIEs, two general themes have emerged. First, according to multiple studies, women now account for about half of the professionals who self-initiate their expatriation (e.g., Doherty & Thorn, 2014; Tharenou, 2010). Second, women are more likely to self-initiate their expatriation than to be sent by a company Tharaneou’s (2010, p.75). Support for Tharenou’s (2010) proposition that women choose to self-initiate their expatriation more often than they are sent by a company, is confirmed by: Suutari and Brewster (2001) — 18 per cent vs. 4 per cent; Doherty et al. (2007) — 71 per cent vs. 29 per cent; and Napier and Taylor (2002) — 52 per cent vs. 20 per cent. There are no comparisons between SIE women and CAE women based on variables such as age, marital status and family responsibilities — factors typically identified in the literature as constraining women to take up an international assignment (Altman & Shortland, 2008; Linehan, Scullion, & Walsh, 2001).

In the context of an expatriate workforce that has always been predominantly male, the fact that an increasing number of professional SIEs are female is highly significant. It is a visible change to the composition of the expatriate community where, until recently, women appeared almost exclusively as trailing spouses. Second, Tharaneou (2009, 2010) contends that women are making a conscious decision to initiate their expatriation in order to overcome gender discrimination and inequality of opportunity in both the domestic and international arenas, as well as for family reasons. Furthermore, Tharenou (2010) found that during expatriation, women perform well in their careers and repatriate at the same rate as men. However, unlike men women repatriate more often for family reasons than for career reasons (Tharenou, 2010, p. 82).
In Napier and Taylor’s (2002) study of professional transferee and independent women working in Tokyo, Shanghai and Istanbul they found that women moved for better job opportunities (at the time) than in their home country. Myers and Pringle (2005) explored gender influences and found that single SIE women are no more reluctant to travel alone than are single men. The experiences of small interview samples of essentially single, childless professional SIE women (Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2008; Thang et al., 2002) highlighted the positive perceptions of career and future employability as a consequence of their SIE experience. However, little is known of the experiences of married SIE women, and of those with children.

In a study of SIE academics seeking job opportunities in universities outside their home countries, Selmer and Lauring (2010) found that men were more likely to take risks and were more motivated by finances and opportunities to change their life than were women. Conversely, women were more concerned with safety and security and more focused on stability and harmony than were men. Myers and Pringle (2005, p. 424) suggests that women ‘may be less likely to travel alone’ and ‘may avoid cultures that have negative attitudes to women travelling without men’. This was not the case in Bozionelos’ (2009) analysis of expatriate nurses living and working in Saudi Arabia. He found that women can attain successful outcomes in cultures that are sexually discriminatory provided that their work environment is not male dominated. In contrast, Stalker and Mavin’s study (2011, p. 288) of SIE women in the United Arab Emirates found that women were exposed ‘to gendered discriminatory values and practices without the protection of legal or procedural support’.
The notion of the empowered careerist’, as suggested by Inkson and Arthur (2001, cited in Peel & Inkson, 2004, p. 544) ‘liberated from the constraints of the “corporate ladder”, fostering and trading his or her career capital on the international labour market’, seems more credible and achievable for those who possess the requisite career capital. In reality for some female SIEs the experience may be less than satisfactory (as is also the case for women in domestic markets). They may in effect represent ‘marginalised casualties’ whose dream would be ‘to return to the ranks of full time, permanent employment in the big battalions’ (Warhurst & Thompson 1998, cited in Smeaton 2003, p. 5). This assertion also raises the issue of expatriation and underemployment (Bolino & Feldman, 2000), a little-researched but pertinent reality. For example, in his study of SIEs in Singapore, Lee (2005, p. 183) found that a ‘lack of job autonomy, suitability, and job variety’ led to perceptions of underemployment which in turn impacted on job satisfaction with negative personal and work-related outcomes.

Despite the scarceness of literature addressing female SIEs, it appears that steps are being taken towards gaining a greater understanding of their careers. However, the literature to date exposes some contradictions. Harrison and Michailova’s (2013) study of professional women working in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) found they had mainly positive career experiences. Myers and Pringle’s (2005) study of women and men SFEs demonstrated that the SFE experience was an important vehicle for career development. They conclude that the ‘SFE provides women with a de facto expatriate career experience and a gateway into global careers’ (Myers & Pringle, 2005, p. 430). This is a noteworthy outcome given that women still remain in the minority of the corporate expatriate population today (Shortland, 2014, p. 18).
On the other hand, Al Ariss’ (2010) study on the impact of ethnicity on the careers of Lebanese women living and working in France, found that the women were more vulnerable to the consequences of ethnic identity conflicts at work. Van den Bergh and du Pleiss (2013, p. 229 - 230) observed from their sample of 21 women living and working in the Netherlands that adaptation to the host country can influence identity transformation and self-esteem and thus impact on career choices and career outcome.

2.3.10 Summary

To conclude this section, I have investigated the ways in which recent research is investigating international careers and the emergence of different perspectives other than the traditional CAE outlook. Given the growth in international business and the rising number of expatriates, I was not surprised to discover that researchers have identified and developed research into a much wider range of expatriate options. Among these is the option of self-initiated expatriation. Simplistic understandings of SIEs in the early research have given way to a more developed understanding and appreciation of the heterogeneous nature of this type of expatriate experience (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Cerdin & Selmer, 2014; Doherty et al., 2013). Whilst research on SIEs is still in its infancy, we do know from the literature that it seems as many women as men are initiating their expatriation. This is in stark contrast to the situation with company-assigned expatriates, where women comprise barely 20 per cent.

I now turn my focus to the changing career landscape, specifically the new career in a global context. In addition, I explore the literature on women’s careers to discover whether our understanding of women’s career patterns in general can shed further light on the careers of SIE women.
2.4 The Notion of Career and Changing Career Landscapes

I begin this section by examining the concept of the traditional career and the challenges of a number of environmental and contextual factors that have led to the emergence of new forms of employment, commonly referred to as non-standard jobs. Second, I examine new career frameworks that began to emerge in the mid-1990s, specifically the protean and boundaryless careers, as well as what is commonly referred to as the next generation of career concepts (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), namely, the KCM (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). The concept of new careers sits well with the literature on self-initiated expatriation. Within this literature, a number of authors refer to the frameworks of the protean career (e.g., Hall & Moss, 1998) and the boundaryless career (e.g., Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Some compare the two concepts, discussing the relationship between them (Briscoe, Hall, & Frautschy DeMuth, 2006; Inkson, 2006; Briscoe & Hall, 2006) to illustrate the changing career landscape.

2.4.1 A changing career landscape

The traditional view of career, which has dominated much of the literature, is grounded in a ‘steady climb up the corporate ladder’ (McDonald, Brown, & Bradley, 2004, p. 109), via ‘a succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered, predictable sequence’ (Wilensky, 1960, cited in McDonald et al., 2004, p. 110). Within this context typically an individual moved through four distinct career stages during their working lives (based on the work of Super, 1980): establishment, advancement, maintenance, and withdrawal. The advancement career stage often involved new experiences, transfers and promotions to higher management commensurate with age, experience and tenure (Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman, 1992, Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Career success was characterised by
increasing salaries, promotions and recognition, always in an upward trajectory (Powell & Mainiero, 1992).

As a consequence of three decades of economic, technological, institutional and demographic forces shaping the workplace, a number of authors (e.g., Collin & Watts, 1996; Khapova, Arthur, & Wilderom, 2007; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009) suggest that significant changes have occurred in the career landscape. To that end, established axioms about the nature and notion of career are being challenged. There is evidence that career ladders are becoming more fragmented as individuals adopt idiosyncratic and heterogeneous career paths, characterised by career discontinuities, in order to find psychologically meaningful work and greater work-life balance (Arthur et al., 2005).

Thus, the notion of a uni-dimensional career is giving way to the notion ‘you are your career’ (Vinnicombe & Colwill, 1995, p. 3), characterised by ‘multi-directional’ self-managed career paths (Hall, 1996; Arthur et al., 2005), more transactional employee-employer relationships, and the economy’s growing reliance on ‘knowledge-intensive professionals’ whose allegiance is to their own intellectual capabilities (Powell & Snellman, 2004). While this widely cited, yet contentious proposition dominates it is clear that perceptions of career have shifted considerably (Blenkinsopp, Baruch, & Widen, 2010, p. 198). As Mirvis and Hall (1994, p. 377) note: ‘Managers are now as likely as other occupations to pursue their careers across organizational boundaries, consistent with the memorable description of modern careers as “just sex, not marriage”.

Eby, Butts and Lockwood (2003) argue that to realise the potential of a self-managed career, an individual must develop new competencies with both reflective and behavioural components. The reflective components refer to an individual’s own career
objectives and ambitions. The behavioural component builds on the notion of ‘proactivity’ which is defined as ‘making things happen, anticipating and preventing problems, and seizing opportunities… to bring about change in the work environment and/or oneself to achieve a different future’ (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010, p. 827). Blenkinsopp et al. (2010) link the notion of the proactive individual with the self-managed career to Weick’s (1995) work on sensemaking to explain how an individual’s career narrative unfolds. They stress that the process might appear to lead to repeated rewrites of the career narrative, however the cycle may equally lead to escalation or entrapment. Thus, in the context of the self-managed career, the notion of ‘career success’ is likely to be considered more in terms of satisfaction with one’s own defined career status, rather than the traditional factors of ‘track record’ and ‘desire to succeed’ (Arthur et al., 2005; Sullivan, 1999).

2.4.2 Non-standard employment arrangements

A growing body of opinion suggests that, as a consequence of current patterns of economic restructuring, stable employment relationships have given way to non-standard employment arrangements or contractual relations (e.g., Carré, 2000; Guest, Isaksson, & DeWitte, 2010; Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000). Such agreements include part-time work, temporary employment and contract work (Kalleberg et al., 2000). Non-standard employment relations have also been referred to as alternative work arrangements, market-mediated arrangements, non-traditional employee arrangements, flexible working practices, and atypical employment (Kalleberg et al., 2000, p. 341). Further, there are those who define themselves as self-employed, but who are not directors or partners in their own business, and who do not employ others; and there are those who define themselves as employees with some type of non-standard working pattern with jobs classified as non-permanent.
Figure 2.5 highlights different types of non-standard employment arrangements such as ‘limited’, ‘short term’ and ‘agency contract’.

![Diagram of non-standard employment arrangements]

**Figure 2.5** Different types of non-standard employment arrangements

At the same time there is an emerging trend towards independently created, self-managed livelihoods. Although, as noted by Golzen and Garner (1990, p. 9) ‘in a sense we are all self-employed now’. Mallon and Cohen (2001, p. 219) argue that self-employment is a multifaceted term embracing a range of employment possibilities and contexts including: company directors, labour-only subcontractors, small business owner/managers, and *portfolio careerists* (Handy, 1989, p. 183) defined as ‘qualified, skills oriented individuals who develop portfolios of skills and clients. Handy (1990)
further advanced the concept of portfolio careerists and ‘core’ and ‘peripheral’ business strategies and activities with the notion of a ‘shamrock’ organisation whereby the three leaves of the shamrock comprise core, contract and temporary employees. On the basis of this configuration he predicted that: ‘Less than half of the work force in the industrial world will be in “proper” full-time jobs in organizations by the beginning of the twenty-first century’ (Handy, 1990, p. 32).

Within the literature there is considerable debate on the nature and extent of alternative employment arrangements with several paradoxes and contradictions transpiring (e.g., Kalleberg et al., 2000; Smeaton, 2003). Explanations for the rising rate of self-employment would appear to have polarised along two diametrically opposed tracks captured by Smeaton (2003) in the title of her article: Self-employed workers: calling the shots or hesitant independents? Cappelli (1999), for example, identifies self-employed workers as having a preference for flexibility. In contrast, Ritchel and Wortham (2009) describe emerging employment patterns as forced entrepreneurship. Overall, irrespective of whether non-standard employment arrangements are an ‘explicit employment strategy or an unintended consequence of skill repositioning’ (Smeaton, 2003, p.381), the literature supports the existence of an increasing trend.

A number of factors have been cited as facilitating a move toward non-standard employment arrangements such as the changing nature of organisations and the changing nature of the workforce (Hellriegel et al., 1992, p. 6). The former include mergers and downsizing, expanding service organisations, global challenges, technology advancements (Hellriegel et al., 1992, pp 9 – 10) and job churn, defined as ‘strategies and behaviours that generate instability in the attachment of workers to firms’ (Cappelli & Neumark, 2004, p.149). Changes in the diversity and composition of the workforce include the increased supply of women, minority group members and
older workers into the workforce, increasing life spans, and changing family structures (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2010; Lyons, Ng, & Schweitzer, 2014). Of particular note here are generational issues and the aging and ultimate retirement of the baby boomers (those born between 1945 and 1962). For the next generations, that is Gen X’s (born between 1963 and 1980) and Y’s (born between 1981 and 194), the potential exists for blocked or stalled advancement by the presence of baby boomers either reluctant, or financially unable to afford, to leave the workforce (Dohm, 2000).

Thus, it is against this backdrop of change that Greenhaus et al. (2010) predict that ‘a long term linear career within a single organisation will continue to be the exception rather than the rule’ (p23); that ‘individuals who are just beginning their careers can expect to work for anywhere from seven to 12 different employers during their lifetimes under a variety of employment arrangements’ (p 10); and that the workforce will ‘become older, more female and more diverse’ (p 8).

### 2.4.3 Emerging career frameworks and theories

I now turn to the literature on contemporary perspectives on careers that reflect the changing nature of careers, and are relevant to this research. These perspectives may also help to understand the ways in which female SIEs appear to be shaping their own careers. I begin with a review of the two most widely recognised contemporary career frameworks, namely the protean and boundaryless concepts (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).

**The protean career**

Douglas Hall first applied the adjective ‘protean’ to careers in 1976, in *Careers in organizations*. (Hall, 2004, p.1). Drawing on the Greek mythical figure Proteus who had the ability to adapt and change at will, it highlights a psychological orientation in which a career may be subject to reinvention by an individual to reflect that person’s
individual needs. It may also change in response to wider environmental changes. In this career model, transactional relationships between the individual and the organisation are of greater importance than traditional loyalty and commitment to the organisation. At the same time a career may be subject to reinvention as individual needs and circumstances change in response to wider social, economic, political and technological factors. Thus, a protean career encompasses not only work experiences, but the diversity of career alternatives, individual choices and individual experiences.

Influenced by changes in the economic environment around career self-assessment (Hall, 2004, p. 5), Briscoe and Hall (2006, p. 8) redefined the protean career as one in which the person is: (i) values driven whereby a person’s own values guide and measure career success; and (ii) self-directed whereby a person is adaptive to performance and learning demands.

**The boundaryless career**

The concept of the boundaryless career first appeared in the mid 1990s in Arthur and Rousseau’s (1996) book entitled *The Boundaryless Career: A New Employment Principle for a New Organisational Era*. The term was defined as being ‘the opposite of organisational careers’ to reflect changes in the world economy impacting on organisational practices and traditional employment assumptions (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 3). Under this framework, individuals seek employment that represents ‘independence from, rather than dependence on, traditional organisational career arrangements’ involving ‘opportunities that go beyond any single employer’ (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 6).

Within the general meaning of the concept the authors identified six different types of careers to illustrate the concept of ‘independence from, rather than dependence on,
traditional organizational career arrangements’ (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 6). These are summarised as follows:

1. careers move across the boundaries of separate employers (e.g., the Silicon Valley career).
2. careers draw validation—and marketability—from outside the present employer (e.g., academics or carpenters).
3. careers are sustained by external networks or information (e.g., real estate agents).
4. careers break traditional organisational assumptions about hierarchy and career advancement.
5. careers involve an individual rejecting existing career opportunities for personal or family reason.
6. careers are based on the interpretation of the career actor, who may perceive a boundaryless future regardless of structural constraints.

**Career competencies**

In the context of the boundaryless framework, Bird (1996) argues that careers operate as ‘repositories of knowledge’, enabling individuals to become ‘career capitalists’ (Inkson & Arthur, 2001) as they accrue intangible value through their knowledge, skills and experience (their ‘career competencies’). In turn this career capital can be used to leverage an individual’s career development. As Thomas et al. (2005, p. 341) note: ‘The boundaryless careerist…is the highly qualified mobile professional who builds his or her career competencies and labor market value through transfer across boundaries’.
The idea of career competencies forms the basis to the intelligent careers framework (Arthur, Claman, & DeFillippi, 1995) which distinguishes ‘three ways of knowing’. These are knowing-how (soft skills and technical expertise, tacit and explicit knowledge); knowing-why (awareness of values, personal motivation) and knowing-whom (intra-firm and inter-firm, professional and social relationships).

Jones and DeFillippi (1996) extended DeFillippi and Arthurs’ three competencies to six with three further ‘knowings’: know what (opportunities, threats, and requirements), know where (entering, training and advancing), and know when (timing of choices and activities) (Jones & DeFillipi, 1996, p. 91). Waterman (1994) expanded the notion of an individual navigating their own careers, and added career resilience, whereby individuals in taking responsibility for their careers ‘stand ready to reinvent themselves to keep pace with change.’ The intelligent career theory and the notion of career competencies accommodate the previously described properties of the self-managed career (Khapova et al., 2007). Since its introduction, the framework has been applied to a number of different situations. For instance, it has been used to examine careers in the international arena (Dickmann & Harris, 2005, 2008; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007); and to investigate the phenomenon of senior women leaving traditional organisations, and how they were able to leverage their social and human capital to establish new business ventures (Terjesen, 2005).

The relationship between the protean and boundaryless careers

Of late, questions have been raised about the relationship between the protean and boundaryless career concepts (e.g., Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Briscoe, Hall & DeMuth, 2006) with calls for greater clarity between the two (e.g., Inkson 2002, 2006). Inkson (2006, p. 57) asks: ‘Are the protean and boundaryless concepts distinctive or similar metaphors, or does each “add value”? In response to his own question, Inkson (2006)
proposes that given the potential for disparities in interpreting the two terms, it would be more appropriate to encompass both under the label the *self-directed career*. Recognising the importance of the individual in determining the direction and meaning of his or her career, the protean career has more recently been characterised as:

> Being driven by the person, not the organisation, based upon individually defined goals, encompassing the whole life span… rather than objective success such as pay, rank, or power’ (Briscoe & Hall, 2006, p. 6).

Sullivan and Arthur (2006, p. 21) sought to expand on the boundaryless career by exploring both physical mobility—(i.e., making actual physical transitions across boundaries) and psychological mobility (i.e., an individual’s perceived capacity to make transitions). To that end they developed a model of boundaryless careers along these two dimensions. Accordingly, they redefined the boundaryless career as ‘one that involves physical and/or psychological career mobility’ (p. 22) to reflect having a boundaryless career ‘is not an “either or”’ (p. 23). Based on this classification, SIEs should score high on both physical mobility and psychological mobility since they may ‘make many physical changes…while also changing their psychological career orientation on a regular basis’ (Arthur & Rousseau, 2006, p. 24).

In more recent times Briscoe and Hall developed a scale to measure a person’s perceptions of boundarylessness called the *Boundaryless Mindset*, as well as an instrument to measure the protean orientation called the *Career Orientation Index* (Hall, 2004, pp. 7 – 8). Similarly, the authors brought together Sullivan and Arthur’s (2006) categories of psychological and physical boundarylessness with the protean orientation to present eight likely career profiles and orientations intended to present a ‘richer understanding of career experiences’ (Hall & Briscoe, 2006, p. 5). These eight profiles
are presented in Table 2.1. The probable career combinations represent hybrids between protean and boundaryless careers.

**Table 2.1** Career profiles of protean and boundaryless combinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protean: Self-directed career management</th>
<th>Protean: Values driven</th>
<th>Boundaryless: Psychological mobility</th>
<th>Boundaryless: Physical mobility</th>
<th>Hybrid category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>‘Lost’ or ‘Trapped’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>‘Fortressed’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>‘Wanderer’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>‘Idealist’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>‘Organisation man/woman’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>‘Solid Citizen’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>‘Hired Gun/hired hand’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>‘Protean Career Architect’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysing the protean and boundaryless career concepts**

Lyons, Schweitzer, Ng and Kuron (2012, p.336) suggest that ‘a casual reading of the new careers literature would seem to indicate that the traditional career is dead, having been replaced by new, flexible and adaptable forms of non-linear career’. Yet, there is a divided opinion. Baruch (2006, p. 65) cautions that ‘many organizations still have a core structure based on bureaucracy and climbing frames to enable relatively clear hierarchical mobility, mostly for a core group of staff’. For some the reality is that they may have limited skills to offer and may simply be unable or unwilling to navigate both physical and psychological boundaries (Blenkinsopp & Zdunczyk, 2005). In effect, they may represent ‘marginalised exploited victims whose dream would be to have a ‘real’ job’ (Eden, 1975, cited in Peel & Inkson, 2004, p. 544).
2.4.4 The next generation of career concepts

In the 30 years since the protean and the boundaryless career paradigms were advanced, a number of new frameworks have been offered as alternative lenses through which to view careers, reflecting on the changing career landscape and the need for individuals to be adaptable to uncertainty (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Some of these, identified by Sullivan and Baruch (2009), include: (i) integrated protean and boundaryless career frameworks such as Briscoe and Hall’s (2006) career profiles of protean and boundaryless combinations presented in Table 2.1; (ii) hybrid career frameworks characterised by elements of both traditional and non-traditional career concepts (e.g., Granrose & Baccili, 2006); and (iii) the KCM which is neither an extension of the boundaryless nor protean career orientation. For the purposes of this research I have nominated to explore the KCM, although I am conscious I could have nominated a number of other frameworks (for a detailed presentation of advances in career theory see Sullivan and Baruch, 2009).

The Kaleidoscope Career Model

The KCM is a relatively new concept predicated on the notion that individuals are increasingly defining their careers on their own terms (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). To that end an individual’s needs for challenge and self-worth are juxtaposed against the needs of work–life balance and authenticity (the need to be true to oneself). These three parameters or ‘mirrors’ of authenticity, balance and challenge will combine in different ways throughout the lives of an individual, reflecting the unique pattern of their career as defined by the individual rather than the organisation or the wider society (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Research on the KCM has found gender as well as generational differences in career enactment. For instance, Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, and Mainiero (2009) found that members of Gen X had significantly higher needs for authenticity and
balance than baby boomers with no significant difference in the need for challenge between the two generations.

### 2.4.5 SIEs and new career theory

In a recent review of the research stream on SIEs Doherty et al. (2013a, pp. 106–107) argue that connecting SIE research to career theory is a necessary and imperative step in order for the field of research to mature. They suggest that one starting point is to consider whether SIE researchers can make a contribution to the boundaryless career. Some inroads have been made in this regard with studies that include: graduates (Jokinen et al., 2008), managerial populations (Biemann & Andresen, 2010), skilled workers (Crowley-Henry, 2012; Thorn, 2009) and academics (e.g., Richardson, 2009, 2012; Richardson & Zikic, 2007).

Richardson (2012) reviewed four studies of SIE academics against Arthur and Rousseau’s (1996) six specific boundaryless career types and concluded that while there are strong synergies between each of the six they are not a direct fit. Above all else she concluded that that SIE academic careers can be ‘both bounded and boundaryless’ (Richardson, 2012, p. 218).

### 2.4.6 Career transition

It has been suggested that research into career transition enhances our understanding of careers more generally. Nicholson and West (1989, p. 195) argue that: ‘However we conceive of and study careers, it is essential that we understand their punctuation: the pauses and turning points that shape their course’. The emerging literature on career transition may have particular relevance for this research. Nicholson and West’s work on managerial job transitions (1989) and Arnold and Nicholson (1991) take as the starting point the relationship between structure and agency. In their view, it is at
transitions that this complex relationship is most visibly played out: ‘Transitions are critical incidents in the nexus between self-consciousness and social structure’ (1989, p. 195). Their transition cycle which explores the relationship between these dimensions, and incorporates a range of disciplinary perspectives provides a framework for understanding job changes.

The framework comprises four stages: preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation. In summary, the preparation stage is primarily concerned with psychological readiness, addressing such issues as motivation, personality characteristics, and occupational choice. From a sociological perspective, it involves the process of socialisation, structural inequality, and structures of opportunity. The encounter phase, focusing on the first few weeks of the job, is explained partly in cognitive terms—how people make sense of their new situation. Equally important, though, is the individual’s emotional response, and the use of coping strategies. Adjustment, the third phase, begins once a person begins to settle down; here the task is about ‘fitting in’, and the process of socialisation. Finally, the stabilisation phase focuses on issues such as leadership, management control and job satisfaction. For many, this stage may not represent stabilisation as such, but preparation for the next transition. Infiltrating the model are issues concerning career identity, in particular the simultaneous processes of personal and role development.

As far as this study into women’s moves to self-initiated expatriation is concerned, Nicholson and West’s (1989) transition cycle is revealing, as it highlights key themes, provides insights into highly complex, often ambiguous experiences and processes, and incorporates a range of theoretical perspectives. However, given its focus on managerial job change, it may not be entirely applicable to the women in this study. For example, the preparation and encounter phases concern the interface between
one’s expectations of the new job and the reality of that position. Whereas for the manager moving to another management position the future is, to some extent, concrete and visible, for the person moving to another country and often with no job to go to, it can be all very ambiguous.

More generally, although Nicholson and West (1989) do incorporate sociological perspectives into their transition cycle, the model appears to be decontextualised from its wider social, economic, and cultural context in that it does not appear to take account of the importance of structural factors, external to the employment context, which impact on an individual’s experience of career transition.

The research on career transitions also discusses identity change as a function of role change. Ibarra’s (2005) theory of identity transition in voluntary career change notes that individuals experiment with identity by observing others, determine identities that ‘match’, and imitate and adapt those identities to discover the self which is best suited for the new role. Further reference is made to Ibarra’s (2005) theory of identity transition in voluntary career change in Section 2.5: Identity and Career.

2.4.7 Career redefined

A review of the career literature reveals that there is no common definition of career to encapsulate the environmental and organisational changes impacting on careers (Greenhaus et al. 2010). This is in part because careers are studied from a number of different perspectives, and therefore open to differing interpretations. And yet Arthur, Hall and Lawrence (1989, p. 7) argue ‘the concept of career is not the property of any one theoretical or disciplinary view’. Nonetheless, a constant theme to emerge in the literature is that individual’s need to take responsibility for the type of career they wish to pursue and make career decisions that are consistent with these preferences (e.g.,
Greenhaus et al., 2010). Moreover, a general characteristic of the definition of the ‘new’
career is the omission of ‘advancement up a career ladder’ as a defining attribute.

At the time Hall introduced the protean career concept he defined career as ‘the
individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviours associated with work-
related experiences and activities over the span of the person's life’ (Hall, 1976,
of jobs’ can just be a happenstance, idiosyncratic collection through which individuals
pass during their lifetime, or they can have some apparent coherence because they fit
into a pattern expected of a particular kind of organisation or occupation. Greenhaus et
al. (2010, p10) present an all-encompassing definition of a career as ‘the pattern of
work-related experiences that span the course of a person’s life’, whereby an
individual’s career can move ‘upwards, downwards, forwards, backwards, sideways or
be idiosyncratic’ (Baruch 2004).

In a comparable vein Sullivan and Baruch (2009, p. 1543) define a career as ‘an
individual’s work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of
organisations, that form a unique pattern over the individual’s life span’. Arthur et al.
(1989, p. 8) adopt the definition of career as ‘the evolving sequence of a person’s work
experiences over time’. Each of these definitions recognises common features: work or
career is an individual construct, over a life-time with a fluid and changeable nature.
For the purpose of this research I adopt the definition offered by Arthur et al (1989).
2.4.8 Women’s careers

Arguably, one of the most difficult challenges confronting women is how they choose to view their careers, their career choices and the different visions of reality that bring them into the workforce. These choices are multifaceted and complex. O’Neil, Hopkins and Bilimoria (2008) suggest that the new careers’ frameworks should be more appropriate to the needs of women with their emphasis on self-management, flexibility, transferability of skills (Sullivan, 1999) and the changing ‘psychological contract’ (Boxall & Purcell, 2003).

In the past two decades there has been a significant increase in the number of women in the labour market of most western countries, yet, a number of scholars assert little has changed organisationally (e.g., Davidson & Burke, 2011; Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010; Wajcman, 2013). Women are increasing the talent pool and have made progress in both entering professional and managerial positions, however their career progress has been slow and unbalanced. Luksyte and Spitzmueller (2011) claim that as women are more likely than men to be passed over for promotion, they are likely to be overqualified for their position. Davidson and Burke (2011, p.1) note that while women tend to enter the workplace with similar credentials and expectations as men and with similar qualifications, their career paths quickly diverge. They still fall short of advancement and continue to be paid less than men doing similar types of work (Blau & Kahn, 2007).

Mavin (2001, p. 183) argues that as a result of the domination of management as a male paradigm women managers are out of place, in a foreign territory, and to use Judi Marshall’s (1984) words, they are ‘travellers in a male world’. Women in organisations have also been likened to ‘visitors from another culture’ (Kvande & Rasmussen, 1994). There are a number of women’s career theories (e.g., O’Leary,
which focus on the experience of women. However, Mavin (1001, p. 186) maintains that as they are not main-streamed in management policy and practice they have had little impact on the careers of women.

Following a review of women’s careers at the start of the 21st century, O’Neil et al. (2008, pp. 727 – 728) advocate the need for new theory to take into account the expanded and emerging career opportunities and choices now available to women, and explicitly address the lives, experiences, and issues of women in the workforce. The authors identify two driving forces that have influenced this assertion. First, the increased participation of women in the labour market as a result of equal opportunity legislation and policy and affirmative action programs. Second, the ways in which careers and career development are conceptualised.

The traditional view of career advancement based on linear, hierarchical, organisational models of ‘orderliness’ have not typically been favourable to or supportive of women (Blair-Loy, 1999, p. 1359). In contrast women’s careers might be considered ‘disorderly’ typically characterised by lateral moves within organisations, movements between organisations and more entrepreneurial venues, career interruptions, or changes in occupations (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005, p. 173).

Of significance in the relationship between the traditional career and women’s careers is the notion of the glass ceiling. Once conceived of as the barrier that keeps women from high-level management positions, the glass ceiling is now recognised as existing at the middle levels of management (Smith, Crittenden, & Caputti, 2012). An examination of the end of the managerial pipeline shows that very few women are actually moving up to top-level management positions. This is despite the fact that women comprise 50 per cent of all workers in the OECD (http://www.oecd.org), hold 50 per cent of all professional positions, graduate with 57 per cent of bachelor’s degrees
and 58.5 per cent of all master’s degrees, and constitute approximately 30 per cent of all MBA students (cited in O’Neil et al., 2008, p. 733).

2.4.9 Women’s career patterns: a contradiction in terms?

In the review of women’s careers O’Neil et al. (2008, p.729) identified four interrelated patterns that they believe characterise the current state of research on women’s careers. Associated with each pattern is a paradox, or disconnection, between the research literature and organisational practice. The four patterns are: (i) women’s careers are embedded in the larger-life context; (ii) families and careers are central to women’s lives; (iii) women’s career paths reflect a wide range and variety of patterns; and (iv) human and social capital are critical factors for women’s career success. These patterns and their respective paradoxes are summarised and presented in Table 2.2.

On the basis of the review the authors concluded that ‘women’s careers are complex and multi-dimensional, yet work practices appear to exist in a single dimension – the male-defined organizational dimension’ (O’Neil et al., 2008, p. 735), and that ‘women’s career development and outcomes in organisations continue to be challenging (p. 736). As Mallon and Cohen (2001, p. 219) maintain traditional career theory ‘has never adequately captured the rhythms of women’s working lives, nor moved beyond male career patterns as the implicit norm’.
Table 2.2  Women’s career patterns and paradoxes

<table>
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<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Paradox</th>
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| **Pattern 1:** Women’s careers are embedded in women’s larger-life contexts with careers and lives inextricably entwined and work and private life interconnected.  
Career decisions are ‘normally part of a larger and intricate web of interconnected issues, people and aspects that…come together in a delicately balanced package’ (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005, p. 111). | **Paradox 1:** Organisational reality demands separation of career and life. |
| **Pattern 2:** Family and career are central to women’s lives.  
There is support for the argument that women personally benefit from multiple roles, but there is more evidence to suggest that women’s multiple roles are not rewarded organisationally. | **Paradox 2:** A woman’s career is often in conflict with family responsibilities. |
| **Pattern 3:** Women’s career enhancement tends to be ‘zigzag’ in shape rather than ladder-like (Gersick & Kram, 2002, p. 31). | **Paradox 3:** Organisations, generally, reward upward mobility in terms of length of service, geographic mobility and progression. |
| **Pattern 4:** Human and social capital are critical factors for women’s career development. | **Paradox 4:** Despite accumulation of human and social capital women have not overcome the glass ceiling in terms of their proportional representation in feeder groups for high office. |
2.4.10 ‘Opt-out’ revolt

Recent attention has turned to the forces acting on, or within, women that are causing them to abandon corporate careers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). Termed the ‘opt-out revolt’ by Mainiero and Sullivan (2006, p. xiii) the increasing number of women moving into self-employment (Shelton, 2006) and home-based employment (Loscocco & Smith-Hunter, 2004) has generated a growing interest on gender and entrepreneurship (e.g., Mallon & Cohen, 2001). Research has focused on the reasons why women move into self-employment (Mallon & Cohen, 2001; Patterson & Mavin, 2009) and the factors that affect economic success (Loscocco & Smith-Hunter, 2004).

Rehman and Frisby (2000) offer a two-pronged explanation to explain women moving into self-employment. First, there is the ‘liberation perspective’ which presents self-employment as an ideal work option offering self-fulfilment, stimulation and financial rewards that have been largely unattainable in more traditional employment (Rehman and Frisby, 2000, p. 41). In contrast, the ‘marginalisation perspective’ portrays self-employment as an unstable, low-paying form of work performed without the advantages of pensions, benefits or job security (Rehman and Frisby, 2000, p. 43).

To explain why women exit organisations, Hamel (2009) adapted Hirschman’s (1970) framework of ‘exit, voice and loyalty’. This framework, presented in Figure 2.6, reflects the sensemaking frames, barrier attributions, and communication strategies used by women in responding to career advancement barriers.
Figure 2.6  Framework of women’s responses to career advancement barriers

Drawing primarily on Gilad and Levine’s (1986) socioeconomic framework of push–pull factors Mallon and Cohen (2001) identified combinations of push-and-pull factors that draw women into self-employment. ‘Push’ is generally interpreted as factors such as unemployment, redundancy, the perceived increasing insecurity of organisational positions (Mallon & Cohen, 2001, p. 218) and a lack of challenging opportunities in corporate positions (Mattis, 2006). Pull factors generally relate to the appeal of independence and autonomy, the belief that self-employment might support an improved work–life balance (Mallon & Cohen 2001, p.218), as well as the ability to live by a personal value system not attainable in an organisation (Waumsley & Houston, 2009). Interestingly, these are common reasons given by women for embarking on a self-initiated expatriation.

Research has shown that women with children are more likely to be self-employed (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004), and work from home in order to maximise flexibility (Thompson, Jones-Evans, & Kwong, 2009). Ironically, Patterson and Mavin
(2009, p. 178) argue that self-employed women face similar dilemmas to employees: neglecting the business or their domestic/caring roles’, but ‘without the support of an established organisational infrastructure’.

In 1989, Schwartz ignited what has become known as the ‘mommy track’ debate. The central question of this debate is whether women who seek to balance career and family must sacrifice career advancement. Commonly referred to as ‘mumpreneurs’ (Duberley & Carrigan, 2013) and defined as ‘an individual who discovers and exploits new business opportunities within a social and geographical context that seeks to integrate the demands of motherhood and business ownership’ (Ekinsmyth, 2011, p. 105) these women are a growing group and awareness extends well past the academic literature. This is attested to by a recent web search I undertook in January 2014. Using the terms ‘mumpreneur’ and ‘mompreneur’ I found some 700,000 websites dedicated to ‘stay-at-home working mums’.

It could be argued that mumpreneurs reflect the present discourse on ‘lifestyle entrepreneurship’ defined as ‘individuals who own and operate businesses closely aligned with their personal values, beliefs, interests, and passions’ (Henricks, 2002, cited in Marcketti, Niehm, & Fuloria, 2006, p. 241). The notion of ‘mumpreneurship’ has been presented as a means of overcoming the role working mothers feel as they continue to take primary responsibility for home and family while working (Richomme-Huet, Vial, & d’Andria, 2013). Yet, Kelan (2008, p. 7) questions the term mumpreneur, suggesting that it ignores the fact that many women choose to establish their own businesses because of organisational barriers that do not allow them to reach their full potential. ‘What would be innovative’, she suggests, ‘is to stop viewing women as potential mothers and thereby as potential problems’ (Kelan, 2008, p. 7).
In a similar vein to the mommy track, Gross (2005) coined the phrase, the ‘daughter track’, to refer to women who often leave jobs, either temporarily or permanently, to care for aging parents thereby bearing a ‘disproportionate burden for elder care’.

2.4.11 Summary

For this study a career is defined as ‘the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time’ (Arthur et al., 1989, p. 8). A review of the career literature reveals the changing nature of career in response to macro level and micro level changes that are taking place within organisations and the effects economic restructuring and employment dynamics are having on the nature of jobs and internal labour market structures. In this context, revolutionary changes in organisations such as mergers, downsizing, and delayering has resulted in the reduction of permanent full-time employees in favour of larger cohorts of part-time and temporary workers. However, expanding service organisations and trend to outsourcing and contracting have increased opportunities for self-employment.

In reaction to these changes the nature of careers has changed, resulting in new ways of looking at careers and career management. Where once the defining attribute of career was advancement up a career ladder careers are much more likely be self-managed. New conceptualisations recognise the need for individuals to be adaptable as they navigate uncertainties. The two most widely recognised contemporary theories of career are the boundaryless and protean concepts. The research literature on women’s careers finds that their careers are complex and multi-dimensional and that a variety of environmental and personal variables may impact their career decisions.
In the subsequent section, I attempt to capture the essence of professional identity theory and then undertake a review of research that could be considered relevant to the professional identity of female SIEs.

2.5 Identity and Career

Historically, little attention has been given to the subjective careers of expatriates such as personal meanings and identity (Collin, 1998, p. 416), how they construct their identities as expatriates or how international assignments impact on identity (Kohonen, 2005, p. 31). The career identity of SIEs remains largely understudied and poorly understood. The question remains, in terms of their career identities: ‘Who are they?’

2.5.1 Conceptualising identity

Some two thousand years ago, the Greek philosopher Theophrastus asked: ‘Why is it that while all Greece lies under the same sky and all Greeks are educated alike, it has befallen us to have characters variously constituted?’ (cited in Eysenck & Berger, 1982, p. 1). It could be argued that it is because of identity which focuses on the ‘meanings comprising the self as an object, gives structure and content to self-concept, and anchors the self to social structures (Gecas, 1982, p. 4). These meanings are based on social identities (social roles and group memberships), as well as personal identities (personal and character traits) and their conduct (personal identities) (Gecas, 1982, Ibarra, 1999). In other words, identities are the repositories for much of what we take in, and they are filters through which we process and interpret our lived experiences (Oshana, 2010, p. 21). Thus, what we do and how we act contribute to how we see ourselves and the meaning we assign to ourselves.
Goffman (1959) describes identity theory as the presentation of self in relation to lived experiences. He suggests that humans identify themselves by the roles they play, and that they actively try to maintain the representation of ‘living up to the many standards by which they … are judged’ (p. 251). As Goffman wrote, ‘while personas are usually what they appear to be, such appearances could still have been managed’ (1959, p. 71). Thus, identity is understood to be the activities of ‘forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening and revising the constructions’ that are created from a sense of coherence and distinctiveness (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165).

The role of agency or the sense of responsibility for one’s life course (e.g., Bandura, 1989) is an important element in identity formation. In essence, personality traits such as the evaluation an individual makes of themselves (their self-esteem) and the extent to which they believe they can control events affecting them (their locus of control) influence who they are and who they want to be (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). Central to this notion are the actions and practices by which individuals seek to act upon their environments (Tams & Arthur, 2010, p. 637).

Erikson’s work on identity (1959) has traditionally dominated the discourse. He maintains that genetic inheritance influences the process of development, which occurs in an anticipated sequence of changes for most people within and across life stages (Erikson, 1959, 1963). The effects of close family, friends and others within experienced social environments are also implicated in this process. Thus, identity is not something one has, but something that develops over the course of one’s life (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2002, p. 107).

Underpinning Erikson’s framework is the process of confronting and resolving identity crises at each stage of development (Erikson, 1959). Accordingly, people face crises within each stage of their lives which they must endeavour to resolve to
adequately participate in their social world and to face life’s subsequent challenges (Erikson, 1959).

This view of identity also incorporates individuals developing within lived social environments which mediate structure and define individuals and their identities (Hall, 1992). Within this dynamic process, ‘the individual functions as the meaning maker through their experience and interaction in the social world, while identity is meaning made—the repository of self’ (Rodgers & Scott, 2008, p. 739).

Of late different understandings of identity have begun to challenge many of Erikson’s concepts with the concept ‘subjected to a searching critique’ (Hall, 2006, p.1). Much more emphasis is now placed on the ways in which people narrate their own identities through the lenses of language, culture and experience (e.g. Ibarra, 1999). Lived experience and individual responses are recognised as producing values and beliefs within individuals which guide identity development. This understanding of identity reflects contemporary society and the fragmented and diverse roles that individuals perform, the subcultures that they belong to, and the rapidly changing cultural and intellectual landscapes of societies on a global scale (Hall, 1992). In terms of career it is no longer assumed that individuals will occupy a position or remain in one occupation for the entirety of their lives (Greenhaus et al., 2009).

The challenges that characterise SIEs within the new career context are significant. How these experiences are interpreted and understood has implications for how they shape their identities and forge professional ones (Erikson, 1959). Consequently, professional identity provides a lens through which an enhanced understanding of female SIEs can be sought.
2.5.2 Professional identity

Gecas and Burke (1995, p. 42) define professional identity as ‘our professional self-concept based on our attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences’. Schein (1978, cited in Ibarra, 1999, p. 764) has a similar definition: ‘the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role. Ibarra (1999, p. 765) points out that as professional identity forms over time it will be ‘more adaptable and mutable early in one’s career. The extant literature suggests that professional identity is shaped in three ways. First, by the socialisation process and the meanings associated with, and assigned to, a profession (e.g., Hall, 1986). Second, the way in which individuals adjust and adapt their professional identity during periods of career transition (Ibarra, 1999). Third, the way in which individuals clarify their priorities and self-understanding (Schein, 1978).

2.5.3 Self-concept and mobility

‘Self-concept’ refers to a person’s self-evaluation of their self-worth or social value, skills, and abilities (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Individuals’ perceptions of self are subject to change over time and in relation to context. People’s self-perceptions are influenced by how they perceive themselves to have been in the past and how they can imagine themselves in the future relative to their goals, dreams, values, opportunities, threats and fears (Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002). ‘Possible selves’ are hypothetical ‘future-oriented’ aspects of self-concept or who I might be or become (Oyserman et al., 2002, p. 313). Thus, people create a possible self by merging how they perceive their skills and abilities and what is known or imagined about what it takes to become various future selves (Oyserman et al., 2002).
Brewer and Gardner (1996 pp. 83 – 84) distinguish three identity orientations: (i) the *personal self* or *individual*, based on traits such as a high need for achievement; (ii) the *relational self* or *interpersonal*, derived from connections and role relationships with significant others; and (iii) the *collective self* or *group*, represented in social identity theory and self-categorisation theory. In turn, each orientation is associated with a primary motivation: the personal self reflects self-interest, the relational self reflects concern for others, and the collective self reflects concern for community welfare (Brewer & Gardner, 1996, pp. 83 – 84). In the context of mobility Tharenou (2010a, p. 105) upholds that a professional has a multifaceted identity comprising three components: ‘career (a personal identity), family (a role identity) and cultural selves (a collective identity)’ which impact the decision to expatriate or repatriate.

Thus, for reasons of career (Tharenou, 2010) or self-interest (Brewer & Gardner, 1996), professionals may expatriate to meet their needs for achievement and gain career advancement and financial benefit (Carr, Inkson, & Thorn, 2005). On the other hand, if professionals strongly identity with the relational self or their family role, they may not expatriate if, for instance, it disrupts their partner’s career and/or their children’s education. By contrast, some professionals may consider an international experience to be of benefit to all family members (Tharenou, 2010).

Super’s (1980) life-span, life-space theory of careers or ‘life-career rainbow’ describes how an individual’s self-concept develops over time across different career stages: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and disengagement with each characterised by a specific set of concerns. Interestingly, following his retirement in 1975, Super reflected on the changes occurring in society and concluded that ‘life in the information age could not be grounded in occupational roles’ (cited in Savickas, 1997, p.251). In response to societal changes, Super proposed the ‘life-career rainbow’ (1990)
to account for how individuals make career choices based on a ‘personal assessments of the changing socioeconomic situation and of the social structure in which they live and function’ (Super, 1990, p. 223).

Building on Super’s work Savickas (1997) proposed a series of life stages representing differing patterns of developmental tasks. Savickas (2002; 2005) developed his career construction theory to explain how individuals impose meaning and direction on their vocational behaviour. As he explained ‘careers do not unfold; they are constructed as individuals make choices that express their self-concepts and substantiate their goals in the social reality of work roles’ (2005, p. 43). Thus, the emphasis is on interpretation and interpersonal processes. From a constructivist perspective, Savickas (2005, p. 44) regards career as a ‘moving entity whereby individuals impose personal meaning on past memories, present experiences, and future aspirations weaving them into a pattern that portrays a life theme’. In turn career stories highlight these themes that individuals use to validate their career choices to themselves and others.

Thus, self-concept is not a static entity as it continues to develop as a person acquires new knowledge while progressing through their life stages. The career construction hypothesis emphasises the use of narratives in identifying life themes which may shed insight on an individual's preferred future. Moreover, it embraces context and the subjective perception individuals’ may assign to their needs, interests, abilities and values. Simply stated individuals build their careers through the meaning that they attach to them. To that end career is personal and an integral part of the self with an emphasis on flexibility and mobility (Savickas, 2005).
Tharenou (2010a, p. 107) suggests that some identities are more predisposed to mobility at some life stages than others, therefore, personal, relational, and collective identities influence whether an individual is motivated to move internationally for work. For instance professionals may be in an exploring stage in their late teens to mid–20s motivated by a desire for adventure and personal growth (Inskson & Myers, 2003). From the mid–20s to late–30s they may repatriate to settle down, motivated both by their own needs and those of others (family). Equally, when expatriates reach a decelerating life stage (from the mid–50s on), they may repatriate to retire.

2.5.4 Identity transitions

Ibarra (1999) proposed a theory of identity transition in voluntary career change. The theory suggests three categories for creating and testing possible selves: direct action (activities), social interaction (relationships) and sense making (events). The theory also proposes a sequence of transition stages with characteristic tasks and dynamics. Ibarra’s identity tasks by transition stages are summarised in Table 2.3.

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<th>Stages of the Transition Process Over Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>Early</td>
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<tr>
<td>Core Identity Tasks</td>
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<td>Mechanisms that propel movement across stages</td>
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Table 2.3 Identity by transition stages
The relevance of Ibarra’s model framework to this study lies in the importance and value of narratives in creating meaning and negotiating identities. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010, p. 135) build on the concept of identity as narrative, and argue it is especially critical in understanding the dynamics during work role transitions defined by Louis (1980, cited in Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p. 136) as ‘passages between sequentially held organizational, occupational, or professional roles’. It is during these passages of change, such as entry into or exit from an organisation, that individuals will fashion a ‘culturally appropriate self’ with new stories in order to sustain feelings of authenticity (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p. 136). The authors maintain that ‘just as people construct identities through self-narration, they also reinvent themselves by telling new stories… and weave past and present into a coherent repertoire that allows them to communicate their identity to others’ (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, pp. 150–151). A broader literature on narrative inquiry is addressed in Chapter 3 within the framework of narrative research and the research approach, strategies, and methods utilised for this study.

2.6 Research Gaps and Research Questions

Although the literature provides some insight into the careers of SIE women, there is currently a lack of understanding of the ways in which their careers unfold, their career stories, and the way they make sense of their journey as an SIE. Notwithstanding the literature on women’s career patterns and the relationship between work and lifecycles, we know little of the career patterns that exist for SIE women. Recent literature, for instance, suggests that SIEs can make a significant contribution to the global talent pool (Farndale, Scullion, & Sparrow, 2010; Haslberger & Vaiman, 2012). Yet, is this proposition applicable to both men and women? This is particularly relevant in terms of current concerns regarding the supply of and demand for global staffing within
expatriate communities such as China (Farndale et al., 2010). Nevertheless, little is known of selection, recruitment and support strategies for SIEs.

Historically, an international assignment through expatriation has been considered an important vehicle for developing global managers, achieving strategic management control, coordinating and integrating the global organisation, and learning about foreign markets and competitors (Lane et al., 2000, p. 213), as well as providing for enhanced employability on repatriation (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). Today, the deployment of staff internationally continues to be an essential staffing strategy for building global talent (Kraimer, Shaffer, & Bolino, 2009). Yet, reintegration of expatriates back into their organisation after an international assignment so that the organisation can continue to benefit from their experience, expertise and networks has been proven to be problematic (McNulty & Tharenou, 2004). Stroh et al. (1998) cautioned that companies do not capitalise on the newly found skills and talents of repatriated employees, while the retention of employees who have completed international assignments continues to be a challenge (Kraimer et al., 2009).

Although, this literature refers to the CAE, it is interesting to consider the perceived career implications that SIEs hold as a result of their expatriation. Finally, in considering the relationship between SIEs and the new career theory, the question remains how boundaryless are the careers of the SIE women?
On the basis of the literature review the following research questions have been considered and formulated for the study.

**Research Question 1:** How do western professional women explain and account for their decisions to become an SIE?

**Research Question 2:** What are the career experiences of western professional SIE women?

**Research Question 3:** How do professional female SIEs make sense of their careers?

**Research Question 4:** What does it mean to be a professional female SIE in terms of career identity?

### 2.7 Summary and Conclusion

For many years the focus of research on international assignments has been on the traditional company-assigned expatriate. In this chapter I began by reviewing different forms of international assignments, paying particular attention to the growing importance and emergence of alternative or non-traditional forms. Formal investigation into self-initiated expatriation as a form of international mobility is comparatively recent and while there has been a surge in research in the past few years, our knowledge and understanding of SIE careers is limited.

The discussion on new career patterns within career research focussed on the two dominant frameworks: the boundaryless career and the protean career. These frameworks, along with similar concepts such as the KCM, might be summarised as
being fluid, flexible and dynamic and could be an appropriate lens through which to study the career experiences of professional SIE women. Another driving force in current career research has been the growing phenomenon of women opting out of corporate careers. Typically associated with women with children, the trend embraces older women leaving employment to care for elderly parents, professional women with no children, as well as professional men. Attention was then given to the concept of professional identity particularly in relation to the new career literature, the emergence of the subjective career and the fact traditional work roles are disappearing, those that survive, change; and new work roles are developing —for which there may not be a clear script (Hirsh, Kidd, & Watts, 1998). The chapter concluded with an identification of gaps in the literature and the research questions guiding the study.

The following chapter will map the methodology used in the study and provide a detailed account of the data collection methods employed.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

[T]he self does not know itself immediately, but only indirectly, through the
detour of cultural signs of all sorts, which articulate the self in symbolic
mediations that articulate action, among them the narratives of daily life.

PART 1: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter is framed as follows. I begin by outlining the philosophical and theoretical
principles that guide the research design. Consideration is given to an interpretive
narrative research design and how the interpretivist paradigm located in the domain of
qualitative research will guide the study. Thereafter, I explain the framework of
narrative inquiry, derived from the writings of Polkinghorne (1995), as the
methodological anchor for the study. Following this, I address the question of methods:
how I gathered the data, and my approach to data analysis. The chapter concludes with
a discussion on the nominated criteria used for assessing quality and value in the
research, specifically issues of validation in narrative research.

Methods or methodology

There is often confusion about the terms research method and research methodology in
the literature (Carter & Little, 2007). Methodology is defined variously as ‘the entire
research process—including its social-organizational context, philosophical
assumptions, ethical principles, and the political impact of new knowledge from the
research enterprise’ (Neuman, 2011, p. 2). Further, it involves the ‘analysis of the
assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to enquiry’ (Schwandt, 2001, p. 161) as well as ‘a way to systematically solve the research problem’ (Kothari, 2004, p. 8). Moreover, a research methodology has been called a belief system [Guba and Lincoln, 1989], a paradigm perspective [Sparkes, 1992], and an inquiry paradigm [Guba and Lincoln, 1988] (cited in Cresswell & Miller, 1999, p. 32). Thus, a research methodology provides a ‘philosophical base or frame of reference for approaching research’ (Cresswell & Miller, 1999, p. 32) and contains a ‘description, the explanation, and the justification—of methods, and not the methods themselves’ (Kaplan, 1964, p. 18). I have taken research methodology to refer to how researchers ‘know the world or gain knowledge of it’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 12).

This analysis of how research should or does proceed (see Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) provides the guiding principles that help to inform decisions about procedure and research strategy (Guba & Lincoln, 2011). In comparison, research methods refer to ‘the collection of specific techniques…to select cases, measure and observe social life, gather and refine data, analyze data, and report on results’ (Neuman, 2011, p. 2). Thus, the research methodology justifies, guides and evaluates the research method which produces the data and analysis (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1317). Silverman (2005) argues that the research methods only acquire meaning and vitality in their ‘embeddedness’ in a particular theoretical perspective or methodology. The choice of methodology should reflect an overall research strategy as the methodology shapes which methods are chosen and how each one is used (Silverman, 2005).
3.2 Research Philosophy

All qualitative researchers are philosophers in that ‘universal sense in which all human beings…are guided by highly abstract principles’.

The philosophical or theoretical lenses that frame a study range from broad perspectives, to ideological viewpoints, to more narrowly defined ‘theories’ (Flinders & Mills, 1993, cited in Creswell, 1998, p. 73). Theory has been defined in a variety of ways through different lenses. Craib (1992, p. 112) concludes that ‘we all think theoretically, but in a way of which we are often not aware’. Glanz et al. (1990), citing Kerlinger (1986, p. 21), for example, defined theory as ‘a set of interrelated constructs, definitions and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting phenomenon’. An alternative purpose of theory from the positivist view of predicting ‘general patterns of human activity’ (Neuman, 2011, p. 82), is to understand the meaning of behaviour and how people make sense of their everyday lives (Denzin, 1989). Anfara and Mertz (2006, p. xiv) cite Silver (1983) as defining theory as ‘a unique way of perceiving reality, an expression of someone’s profound insight into some aspect of nature, and a fresh and different perception of an aspect of the world’. In a similar vein Blumer (1970, p. 84) contends:

The point of developing theory is to outline and define life situations so that people may have a clearer understanding of their world through meaningful clarification of basic social values, modes of living and social relations.
Another function of theory is ‘sensemaking’ drawing on the work of Weick (1995).

Sensemaking is not interpretation: It is about the construction of social reality (Searle, 1995), and the ‘making of sense’ (Weick, 1995, p. 7). Weick (1995, p. 7) writes that it is ‘about such things as placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding and patterning’.

Adopting a theoretical perspective will determine the framing of the research questions, as well as the research design (Ridder and Hoon, 2009). However, Denzin (1989, p. 17) argues that:

Theory should not be pursued for its own sake; nor will theory alone provide interpretations of the phenomena in question … Theory and propositions are of use only when they yield interpretations of the process under study.

**Guiding beliefs**

The ‘principles’ referred to in the introductory quote by Bateson are a ‘basic set of beliefs’ or assumptions that guide qualitative researchers (Guba, 1990, p. 17). These assumptions are referred to as a paradigm, a concept defined and popularised by Thomas Kuhn in 1962 when he wrote *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (Neuman, 2011, p. 81). The principles combine beliefs or assumptions about ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the relationship between the researcher and the known), axiological issues (the role of values in a study), and methodology (the process of research) (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, pp. 12–13; see also Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, pp. 97–128). Creswell (1998, p. 76) added a further assumption, rhetorical structure, acknowledging the language and presentation of the research such as:
authorial presence, the use of quotations and writing for an audience. These five philosophical beliefs or assumptions, with implications for practice, adapted from Creswell (1998), are presented in Table 3.1.

Paradigms provide the theoretical framework for a study and influence the way knowledge is understood, studied and interpreted (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 15) speak about paradigms as ‘what we think about the world’ or beliefs that shape how the qualitative researcher sees the world and acts on it. Thus, the researcher is ‘bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which—regardless of ultimate truth or falsity—become partially self-validating’ (Bateson, 1972, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p. 30) the researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework, a theory—that specifies a set of questions that are examined in a particular way. Clearly, paradigms and theories reflect the personal concerns of the researcher and with those choices come guiding epistemologies. As Flinders and Mills (1993, p. xi) contend: ‘Few of us now claim that we enter the field tabula rasa, unencumbered by notions of the phenomena we seek to understand’.
Table 3.1  Philosophical assumptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumption</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Implications for the Research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td>What is the nature of reality?</td>
<td>The worldviews and assumptions in which researchers operate in their search for new knowledge (Schwandt, 2007, p. 190)</td>
<td>Use participants’ quotes and themes in words. Provide evidence of different perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>What is the relationship between the researcher and those being researched?</td>
<td>The process of thinking. The relationship between what we know and what we see. (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005)</td>
<td>Researcher spends time in the field with participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axiology</td>
<td>What is the role of values?</td>
<td>How researchers act based on the research they produce – also the criteria of values and value judgments especially in ethics (Merriam-Webster, 1997).</td>
<td>Researcher openly discusses values that shape research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>What is the process of research?</td>
<td>The process of how we seek out new knowledge. The principles of our inquiry and how inquiry should proceed. (Schwandt, 2007, p. 190).</td>
<td>Work with particular details before generalisations. Describe in detail the context of the study. Continually revise questions from experiences in the field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical structure</td>
<td>What is the language of research?</td>
<td>The language is personal, literary, and based on definitions that evolve during the study.</td>
<td>Use an engaging style of narrative. May use first-person pronoun.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The relationship between epistemology (the theory of knowledge), methodology and method is illustrated in Figure 3.1. As noted previously, research methodologies justify methods which in turn produce knowledge. Thus, methodologies have epistemic content which influences the methods of research in three ways (Carter & Little, 2007, pp. 1320–1322). First, epistemology shapes and influences the relationship between the researcher and the participant in data collection and analysis. Second, epistemology influences the quality of data and of analysis and the way in which it is assessed. Finally, epistemology determines how the researcher communicates with their respondents.

To determine the methodology most appropriate for this study an understanding of the major paradigms which guide current research inquiry is needed (Guba 1990). In addition the researcher’s ‘basic set of beliefs’ (Guba, 1990, p. 17) that will guide the research process need to be identified. The following section offers an overview of the major paradigmatic schemas used to conceptualise and classify the research.
Figure 3.1  Relationship between epistemology, methodology and methods to create knowledge
3.2.1 Issues of paradigm

A research paradigm sets the context for an investigator’s study.

As highlighted in the introduction the choice of research paradigm establishes the framework for the study based on the researcher’s basic set of beliefs and understanding of the world. At the most general level the four traditional paradigms are positivism, postpositivism, constructivism–interpretivism, and critical theory (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln, Lyhnam, & Guba, 2011). More recently, the participatory/cooperative paradigm (Heron & Reason, 1997) has been added. Alongside these paradigms sit a number of ‘perspectives’ each with its own criteria, assumptions, and methodological practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.91). They include: feminism, critical race theory, critical pedagogy, cultural studies, queer theory, Asian epistemologies and disability theories.

3.2.2 Major research paradigms

Table 3.2 outlines the major differences in the basic beliefs between the five paradigms. Recently, Lincoln and Guba (2011, p. 91) in the fourth edition of the Handbook of Qualitative Research suggest that ‘in the present moment, all paradigms must confront seven basic, critical issues’. To paraphrase, these issues encompass:

(1) axiology (ethics and values)

(2) accommodation and commensurability (can paradigms be fitted into one another),

(3) the call to action (what the researcher does in the world)

(4) control (who initiates the enquiry and who asks the questions)
(5) foundations of truth and knowledge in paradigms (whether or not the world has a ‘real’ existence outside of human experience)

(6) validity (the criteria for judging ‘reality’ and validity)

(7) voice, reflexivity, and postmodern representation (the meaning of voice, reflecting on the self as researcher, and the notion of what constitutes legitimate enquiry).

An outline of the different stances each paradigm takes on these topics is presented in Table 3.3. Neither Table 3.2 nor Table 3.3 present as complete summations as this is beyond the scope of this study, although issues of validity and reflexivity are explored further in later sections. However, I believe the significance of the synopses highlights the choices I, as a social researcher, have had to make on paradigmatic matters as I embarked on my doctoral research. Further, Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 95) maintain that there is ‘no single “truth” to which a researcher might ascribe. Thus, the researcher must understand the fundamental assumptions of each paradigm’. I now turn my attention to the choice of paradigm for this study.
### Table 3.2  Alternative inquiry paradigms: basic beliefs


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
<th>Postpositivism</th>
<th>Critical Theories (+ Feminism + Race)</th>
<th>Constructivism-Interpretivist</th>
<th>Participatory (+ Postmodern)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic belief</td>
<td>Realists, ‘hard science’ researchers</td>
<td>A modified form of positivism</td>
<td>Create change, to the benefit of those oppressed by power</td>
<td>Gain understanding by interpreting subject perceptions</td>
<td>Transformation based on democratic participation between researcher and subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td>Belief in a single identifiable reality that can be measured and studied. The purpose of research is to predict and control nature (e.g., Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>Belief in a single reality, but nature can never be fully understood because of hidden variables and a lack of absolutes in nature (e.g., Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>World is based on a struggle for power and shaped by social, political, cultural, economic ethnic, and gender values; crystallised over time (e.g., Bernal, 2002).</td>
<td>Multiple realities and constructions, socially and experimentally based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them (e.g., Guba, 1990, p. 27).</td>
<td>Participative reality—subjective-objective reality co-created by mind and given cosmos (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005, p. 195).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Belief in total objectivity. Researchers value scientific rigor and not its impact on society.</td>
<td>Modified dualist/ objectivist; critical tradition/ community; findings probably true.</td>
<td>Transactional/ subjectivist; value-mediated findings.</td>
<td>People construct their own understanding of reality; meaning is based on interactions with our surroundings (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 1985).</td>
<td>Critical subjectivity in participatory transaction with cosmos (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005, p. 195).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Experimental/ manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods.</td>
<td>Researchers should attempt to approximate reality. Use of statistics is important.</td>
<td>Search for participatory research, which empowers the oppressed and supports social transformation and revolution (Merriam, 1991, p.56).</td>
<td>Generally, meanings are emergent from the research process. Typically, qualitative methods are used (Angen, 2000).</td>
<td>Political participation in collaborative action inquiry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.3  Alternative inquiry paradigms: critical issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Issue</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
<th>Postpositivism</th>
<th>Critical Theories</th>
<th>Constructivism-Interpretivist</th>
<th>Participatory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Axiology</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>What is the role of values?</em> (Creswell, 2007)</td>
<td>Researchers remain distant from the subject so their actions do not influence the populations (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>Researchers attempt to gain a better understanding of reality through the use of statistics that explain and describe what is known of reality (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>Researchers seek to change existing education as well as other social institutions’ policies and practice (Bernal, 2002).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accommodation and commensurability</strong></td>
<td>All positivist forms are commensurable. The data produced are equal in measure to all other data created (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>There is a priority or rank order to data created by different forms of research (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>Incommensurable with positivistic forms; some commensurability with constructivist, criticalist, and participatory approaches (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Can the paradigm accommodate other types of inquiry?</em> (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action</strong></td>
<td>Researchers are strictly objective and not concerned with the action that is produced as a result of the enquiry (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>The objective of the research is to impart social change, change how people think, or serve as an examination of human existence (Creswell, 2007).</td>
<td>Intertwined with validity; inquiry often incomplete without action on the part of participants (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>Researchers must understand the social context and the culture in which the data are produced.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3.3  *(continued)* Alternative inquiry paradigms: critical issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Issue</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
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<th>Constructivism-Interpretivist</th>
<th>Participatory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
<td>Control is conducted by the researchers without input and/ or concern of the participants and/ or society (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>There is only one truth or reality (Blaikie, 2007).</td>
<td>Control can be shared by the researcher and subjects; ultimately he subject can have a say in how the research is conducted (Bernal, 2002).</td>
<td>Shared between the researcher and participants (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>Knowledge is tentative, multifaceted, and not necessarily rational (Kilgore, 2001, p. 59).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foundations of truth</strong></td>
<td>Validity is found in data that can be proven and replicated (Blaikie, 2007).</td>
<td>Validity is found in data that can be analysed and studied using statistical test (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>Validity is found when research creates action for positive social change (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>Extended constructs of validity based on the development of consensus (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>Validity is found in the ability of the knowledge to become transformative (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voice</strong></td>
<td>Only the researcher has a voice: any effort to include the voice of the participants would impact objectivity (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>The researcher has a voice, but also imparts the voice of the subjects.</td>
<td>Voices mixed, with participants’ vices sometimes dominant.</td>
<td>Reflexivity is serious and problematic (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>Reflexivity relies on critical subjectivity and self-awareness (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflexivity</strong></td>
<td>How does the researcher reflect on the self? (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
<td>Reflexivity is serious and problematic (Guba &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Research Choices for the Study

The researcher’s views of the nature of knowledge will influence the methodology and methods used in research.
— Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011, p. 97)

This study aims to add new knowledge, as well as adapt existing knowledge, to the study of western professional women who initiate their expatriation. In order to address the research objectives it was important for me to choose a research paradigm which was suited to the nature of the research topic, which addressed my position as a researcher, and which provided appropriate methods of data collection and analysis to achieve the research objectives. In seeking a research methodology that would provide an ontological and epistemological fit with my own beliefs I was led to the interpretivist paradigm and interpretive interactionism as the theoretical framework in which to position my study.

Figure 3.2 summarises the basic choices I made for this study. While they are presented and discussed in sequential order, in truth many months were spent exploring and contemplating different research designs and agonising over choices made. This is reality!
Figure 3.2 The research framework: an overview
Source: Developed for this research.
3.3.1 The interpretivist paradigm

The genesis of interpretivism can be traced back to the German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) and German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1883–1989) (e.g., Neuman, 2006, p. 87) and the distinctions between naturwissenschaften (the natural sciences) and geisteswissenschaften (the ‘sciences of the spirit’ or ‘human studies’) (Erickson, 2011, p.44). The central tenet in human studies was verstehen defined as ‘an empathetic understanding of the everyday lived experience of people in specific settings’ (Neuman, 2011, p. 101) rather than seeking ‘proof or prediction’ (Erickson, 2011, p.44). Thus, interpretive inquiry presents as a juxtaposition to positivism.

Interpretivism is predicated on the search for and understanding of meaning found in the social psychological theory of symbolic interactionism (Schwandt, 1994, p. 119). Drawing on the work of Mead’s (1934) fundamental premise that the self is socially constructed (cited in Callero, 2003, p. 121) Blumer coined the term symbolic interactionism in 1937. The framework is founded on what Blumer himself describes as ‘three simple premises’: (i) people act toward things on the basis of the meanings that they have for them; (ii) the meaning people ascribe to such things is derived from social interaction with others; and (iii) people think about themselves and others through an interpretative process (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). A central tenant is that that researcher is an active player in the worlds of the people being studied to ‘see the situation as it is seen by the actor, observing what the actor takes into account’ (p. 56).

There are a variety of genres considered under the label of interpretive research: hermeneutics, constructionism, ethnomethodology, cognitive, idealist, phenomenological, subjectivist, and qualitative sociology (Neuman, 2011, p.101). However, the predominant characteristic of such an inquiry is that it advocates understanding participants’ intersubjective, culturally derived meanings in order to
explain their behaviour in everyday social contexts through verstehen (Johnson et al., 2007). From this perspective, the researcher does not presume that there is a ready-made world available for discovery, but attempts to understand the process of ‘symbolic world-making’ (Schwandt, 1994, p. 125). Such philosophical commitments render positivistic questions about reliability and generalisability rather meaningless.

Later contributors to interpretivism (namely Winch, 1958, 1964) raised questions as to the relationship between social actors; concepts and meanings and the concepts and theories used in social theories (cited in Blaikie, 2007, p.131). Winch posed the question: ‘What is the relationship between “the world” and the language in which we try to describe “the world”? (1958, cited in Blaikie, 2007, p. 130) and argued in response that language determines what will count as “the world”. Moreover, the starting point of the ‘lived experience’ (erlebnis) (actions, language, values, customs, norms, and beliefs) is those who experience them rather than the researcher (Schwandt & Burgon, 2006, p. 100). Furthermore, Schwandt & Burgon (2006, p. 102) caution researchers that it is naïve to assume that a lived experience can be literally captured and made available — ‘at best they are able to render their own performances of others’ performances of their lived experience.

In summary, the following ontological views are associated with the interpretive paradigm: there are many truths and interpretations of reality, which are subjective and constructed; the social world is an emergent process created by individuals; and to understand an individuals’ construction of reality requires subjective interaction between the individual and the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.110). Thus, reality is multiple and pluralistic and takes a relativist stance (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Epistemologically, interpretivists believe that it is impossible to separate the interaction from the research so that the findings are ‘literally created’ as the investigation proceeds.
(Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). Thus epistemology is transactional and subjectivist. Methodology is hermeneutical and dialectical. The variable and personal nature of social constructions suggests that interaction between and among the researcher and respondents is the key to interpretation and understanding (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). Thus, ‘there is no way for the knower to stand outside the lifeworld to observe it’ (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 240). Schwandt (1994, p. 130) ‘somewhat artificially’ distinguishes between interpretivism and constructivism based on epistemological claims. However, the literature rarely makes such subtle distinctions and the terms are commonly used interchangeably.

In situating myself within an interpretive paradigm, I recognise meaningful social action and multiple realities and that social reality is ‘largely what people perceive it to be’ (Neuman, 2011, p. 102). The goal of my research is to better understand the careers of the respondents and what happened when they went to live and work in Beijing as SIEs. In essence, predicated on my own experiences as an SIE, I wish to ‘share other SIE women’s’ perspectives’. In sum, I am of the belief that the self-initiated expatriation represents ‘a state of affairs that begs for additional understanding’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp.226 – 227).

In addition to the interpretive paradigm, this study is also guided by the theoretical framework of interpretive interactionism (Denzin, 1989, 1994, 2001) and a qualitative and narrative methodology. At this point I direct my discussion to the rationale for a qualitative study.
3.3.2 The rationale for a qualitative study

A qualitative approach was considered appropriate for this study given that first, little research has focused specifically on the emergent nature of SIE females as a distinct phenomenon, and secondly, that the study of SIEs is growing (Doherty, 2013). The research objective was to explore (and learn from) the subjective experiences and realities of individuals immersed in the phenomena of interest (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3), an ‘umbrella term covering a wide array of interpretive techniques’ (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 520) that locates the researcher in the world of the researched and makes that world visible. In so doing the researcher attempts to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the actual meanings people bring to them (Neuman, 2006, p. 157). A basic feature of qualitative inquiry is ‘thick description’ symbolic of ‘deep, dense, detailed accounts’ (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). It creates verisimilitude, a space for the reader to feel that they have experienced, or could experience, the life events being described in the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129). In qualitative research, the researcher is interested in the words participants use to convey their experiences, and in reflections which can be grouped into patterns or themes and ultimately uncover meanings associated with a given phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Fundamental to an understanding of qualitative research are issues of nature, the context within which the research is conducted, questions of epistemology, and finally, the part theory plays in the research process. Miles and Huberman (1994) make a case for the strengths of a qualitative approach:
Qualitative data … are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts…good qualitative data are more likely to lead to serendipitous finds and to new integrations…the findings from qualitative studies have a quality of ‘undeniability’. Words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor (1009, p. 1)

As I scrutinised the fourth edition of Denzin and Lincoln’s (2011, p. 1) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* and examined the almost overwhelming array of models, paradigms and approaches to what they call, ‘this vast world of activity’, I was particularly drawn to two attributes associated with qualitative research. The first is the concept of the ‘qualitative researcher-as-bricoleur and quilt maker’, and the second is the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, pp. 4 – 5)

Addressing the first, Denzin and Lincoln propose that the many methodological practices of qualitative research may be viewed as *bricolage*, defined as ‘the poetic making do’ (de Certeau, 1984, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4). In turn, the bricoleur a ‘Jack of all trades, a kind of professional do-it-yourself[er] (Levi-Strauss, 1962/1966, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4) makes do ‘ by adapting the bricoles of the world’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4)—the odds and ends, the bits left over’ (Harper, 1987, cited in (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4). The authors liken the qualitative-researcher-as-bricoleur to a maker of quilts or a jazz improviser who uses montage as a constructing principle to stitch and edit slices of reality, to blend, overlap and form a composite, a new creation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011. pp. 4 – 5). It seems fitting that with a growing interest in treating narratives as an empirical source of information (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009) a multi-textual, layered montage can encapsulate the different voices, perspectives and styles of the respondents.
The second characteristic, the relationship between the researched and the researched, raised issues of how I would position myself within the research and interpret the lives of the SIE women living and working in Beijing. Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 5) suggest that we are now entering a research age of ‘multi-voiced texts’ in which the researcher’s voice and identity vie for space and visibility alongside those of the respondents. These issues are further dealt with later in this chapter. However at this stage it is suffice to conclude that as I was exploring ‘new ground’ quantitative research with its emphasis on cause, effect and proof and positivist and postpositivism paradigmatic assumptions would have been misplaced.

A further consideration in selecting a qualitative inquiry concerns the advantages a qualitative perspective can bring to the IHRM arena. Gephart and Richardson (2008, p. 49) state that ‘international human resource management research can be advanced by more effective implementation and use of qualitative research methods … and more extensive uses of interpretive perspectives’. Moreover, Harris (2004) suggests that qualitative research can ‘surface the specific issues that international working raises for work–family balance and adjustment for individual women and their immediate families’ (Harris, 2004, p. 828).

### 3.3.3 The theoretical framework

Interpretive interactionism is derived from interpretivism, and is influenced by phenomenology, hermeneutical interpretation, interpretive anthropology, symbolic interactionism, and radical and social constructivist thinking (Schwandt, 1994). It is most closely associated with Norman Denzin (1989, 1992, 2001) who finds several faults with the Blumer –Mead account of symbolic interactionism. In particular, Denzin (1989) is keen on developing an ‘interpretative interactionism’ that does not obscure the presentation of the lived experiences — the voices, emotions, and actions — of
respondents (Schwandt, 1994, p. 124). Thus, interpretative interactionism is a research tool to enable the researcher to ‘understand the lives of ordinary people, particularly during critical incidents or “turning points” (Denzin, 2001, p. 34).

Denzin (2001, p. 39) identifies the following six characteristics of interpretive interactionism. It is: (i) existential, interactional, and biographical; (ii) naturalistic; (iii) based on sophisticated rigor; (iv) can be both pure and applied; (v) anchored in the seventh moment of qualitative research and builds on foundations for social criticism and social action; and (vi) concerned with the social construction of gender, power, knowledge, history, and emotion. (Further explanations of each of these characteristics can be found at Denzin, 2001, pp. 39 – 45).

At an applied level, interpretation is understood to refer to an attempt to explain the notion of meaning. Meaning refers to ‘that which is in the mind of the thoughts of a person’ (Denzin, 2001, p. 119). Once experiences have been interpreted, their meaning can be understood. Researchers can direct their attention to focus on: identifying and interpreting different definitions of the research problem; the stories people tell about their experiences and the meanings they ascribe to them; the turning point moments of experience; how broader social structures and processes might impact on individuals’ experiences (Denzin, 1989, 2001).

A number of elements of the framework seem particularly relevant for the participants in this study. First, how the respondents interpret the underlying definition of the subject matter, that is, self-initiated expatriation. It is apparent from the literature that there is no prescriptive definition of an SIE (Doherty et al., 2013), although various definitions exist (e.g., Cerdin & Selmer, 2013). Furthermore, Richardson and McKenna note that the boundaries between all types of internationally mobile professionals are
‘blurred’ (2014, p. 2). Consequently, how do SIEs themselves understand and interpret the term?

Second, moving to another country to live and work as an SIE may well be a turning moment or an ‘epiphany’ for the respondent—‘interactional moments that leave marks on people’s lives...that ‘have the potential to create transformational experiences’ (Denzin, 2001, p. 34). Denzin infers that these are moments of ‘crisis’, implying a disaster or catastrophe. What is not known at this point is whether the respondents in this study considered their move to Beijing a defining moment in their life and how they interpreted the experience.

A third factor concerns the focus of the researcher writing about events they themselves have experienced or witnessed firsthand. In this case, experience is understood as individuals acting on things according to the meanings that those things have for them (Denzin, 1992). Thus, interpretive interactionists are involved in the ‘collection, writing, and performance of thickly described personal experience stories’ (Denzin, 1989, p.26).

Denzin (2001, pp. 51–52) described five phases of the interpretive process: (i) deconstruction and critical analysis of prior studies of the phenomenon in question; (ii) capturing multiple naturalistic examples of the phenomenon; (iii) bracketing or isolating the key or essential features; (iv) construction or interpreting the event; and (v) contextualisation or locating the phenomenon in the worlds of lived experiences.

Epistemologically, interpretive interactionism maintains the core belief that intersubjectivity is ‘at the core of human essence’ (Prus, 1996). Inherent in this epistemological perspective is an understanding that who we are, and what we think/believe will always influence how we ask questions, interact with others and
interpret data. Drawing on interpretive interactionism, I assume that women experience self-initiated expatriation according to the meanings they attribute to it, and that those meanings come from both self-indication and interaction with others. Further, given an interpretive approach maintains that ‘there is no way for the knower to stand outside the life world to observe it’ (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 240), I stand firmly in the world of my subjects. What I discover on this research journey is influenced by who I am and how I interact with the participants.

On a final note Denzin acknowledges that as researchers we are ‘interlopers’ and that what is told to us is given provisionally, if it is given at all. These lives and experiences remain, always, the lives and stories of those who have told them to us’ (Denzin, 2011, p. 55).

3.4 Mapping a Strategy of Inquiry

A strategy of inquiry refers to the assumptions and practices a researcher makes as they move from their theoretical paradigm to methods for collecting empirical material (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 14). There are multiple ways of engaging in the process of research and conducting qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2013). No particular research approach can be argued to be ‘correct’ since a researcher’s view of social phenomena affects how reality, knowledge and its value are perceived (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). It is also clear that there is ‘no single “truth”. All truths are partial and incomplete’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 95). However, it is essential for researchers to identify a strategy of inquiry that is compatible with the study purpose, the theoretical framework, and their own beliefs.
There are a number of qualitative approaches to social inquiry including ethnography (participant observation and performance ethnography), phenomenology and ethnomethodology, the case study, action and applied research, grounded theory, life history, historical method and clinical research (Creswell, 2013). Each has its own literature, history, exemplary works, and set of preferred ways of putting the strategy into motion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.246). I now turn to a review of the strategy of inquiry for this study and the rationale behind my choice of narrative inquiry.

3.4.1 The rationale for narrative inquiry

Within the interpretive paradigm there are four research approaches which were initially considered appropriate for understanding professional female SIEs and their career experiences: grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology and narratives or life histories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). These four methodologies seek to arrive at an understanding of a particular phenomenon from the point of view of the person experiencing the phenomenon. Creswell (2007) believes that by using one of these designs, a priori theories or generalisations are not imposed and the interpretations are more a reflection of the participant than they are of the researcher. Grounded theory with its focus on complex social structures and processes and on theory generation and ethnography with its focus on cultural knowledge resulting in micro or macro ethnography were rejected.

Phenomenological understanding, as described by van Maanen (1990), seeks to draw out the essential meaning of human experience and explore the lived experience of individuals. Conversely, Pinnegar and Daynes (2007, p. 4) define narrative inquiry as ‘the study of stories or narratives or descriptions of a series of events’ with the story ‘the fundamental unit that accounts for human experience’ in which meaning will change as time passes. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe the differences between...
the two approaches as seeing things in time, past–present–future, on a continuum and as in a place (narrative inquiry) compared to seeing things as they are in the present (phenomenology).

This study attempts to understand the experiences of women who have initiated their expatriation to live and work in another country, that is, China. This involves two distinct dimensions: the episodic—the events or episodes that are connected with the experience; and configurationally, the process of organising these events or experiences as a temporal whole within a plot (Freeman, 1997). In making my decision as to which approach I would choose to explore the careers of SIE women living and working in Beijing I was drawn to narrative inquiry.

‘Narrative inquiry embraces narrative as both the method and phenomena of study’ (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 3). It begins in lived and told experiences and involves the reconstruction of a person’s experience in relationship both to the other and to a social milieu (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Despite narrative growing in popularity as a qualitative research methodology there are only a few examples in the published SIE literature that use narrative as a research approach (e.g., Altman & Baruch, 2012; Crowley-Henry, 2007, 2012; Scurry & Rodriguez, 2013).

3.4.2 Positioning narrative inquiry

In positioning narrative inquiry I provide a summary of key historical influences, rather than a comprehensive chronological review. Narrative inquiry has several histories, however there is no one person to whom it can be attributed (Riessman, 2008). Undoubtedly, it can be traced to Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), Jean Piaget (1896–1980), Gordon Allport (1897–1967), and Erik Erikson (1902–1994), all of whom worked with narratives, although they would not have defined themselves as
founding fathers (Josselson, 2011). Riessman (2005) believes the trend towards using narrative started in the 1960s as the social sciences began to move away from discipline-specific and investigator-controlled practices. She suggests four movements of influence:

1. ‘the narrative turn’ away from the social science of positivist modes of inquiry, and their realist epistemology;
2. the ‘memoir boom’ in literature and popular culture;
3. the new ‘identity movements’ of people of colour, women, gays and lesbians, and other marginalised groups; and
4. the flourishing ‘therapeutic culture’ and the exploration of personal life in therapies of various kinds (Riessman, 2005, p.1).

Historically, prominent in the field is the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913 – 2005). His work was influenced by the philosophical tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology and the writings of Martin Heidegger (1889 –1976), and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 – 2002) tracing back to Wilhelm Dilthey (1833 – 1911) and Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938). Hermeneutic perspectives on narrative and life history have been taken to explore the relationship between life and story—life as a process of narrative interpretation and stories as interpretations of life (Widdershoven, 1993, cited in Atkinson, 2007, p. 229).

Many contemporary narrative researchers situate their work as emanating from ideas disseminated by psychologists Jerome Bruner (1986), Ted Sarbin (1986), or Don Polkinghorne (1988). Polkinghorne emphasised the dynamic aspect of the self-as-a-story and wrote: ‘We achieve our personal identities and self-concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story’ (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 150).
Some narrativists draw on ethnographic approaches, particularly the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz (e.g., see Geertz (1973) ‘Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight’, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 412 – 453). The 1980s saw narrative embraced by feminist studies and scholars (Riessman, 2008). *Interpreting Women’s Lives* appeared in 1989 edited by the Personal Narratives Group. The editors maintain that life history narratives as data in feminist research ‘are particularly rich sources because…they illuminate both the logic of individual courses of action and the effects of system-level constraints’ (p.6). Carol Gilligan (1982) together with her colleagues and students at Harvard, developed a ‘listening guide’ to investigate ‘voice’ and voices of experience as expressed in narrations (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

Since the 1990s, work in narrative research has flourished, building on the foundations detailed above, as researchers use narrative analysis to understand how people construct their lives. Inductive in essence, narrative inquiry is conducted within a postmodern frame in which knowledge is constructed rather than discovered; as such, it is assumed to be ‘localised and perspectival, occurring within intersubjective relationships to both participants and readers’ (Josselson, 2011, p. 66). Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber referred to a ‘narrative revolution’ as a consequence of the decline in an exclusively positivist paradigm for social science research (1998, cited in Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p.36).

### 3.4.3 Defining features of narrative inquiry

While there are many definitions of narrative, likewise, there is no agreed upon method through which narratives can be extracted or analysed. Rather, researchers use a number of research approaches, strategies and methods to position their inquiry in their respective field of study (Creswell, 2013). Indeed, Riessman and Speedy (2007, p. 428) note that the ‘field has “realist”, “modernist”, “postmodern”, and “constructionist’
strands”. They even go so far as to declare that the term has come to ‘mean anything and everything’, however they also maintain that ‘all talk and no text is not narrative’ (Riessman & Speedy, 2007, p. 428). Moreover, there are many different forms of narrative. Interpretive researchers are concerned with two types of narratives: personal experience stories that relate to an experience that has already occurred and self-stories that deal with the past, the present, and the future (Denzin, 2002, p. 60). Other types of popular narratives include a personal history or life history, a biographical study, a testimonio told by the witness to an event that is reported upon, an oral history and an auto ethnography written and recorded by the individuals who are the subject of the study (Creswell, 2013; Denzin, 2002).

In this heterogeneous vein Chase (2005, p. 651) defined contemporary narrative inquiry as ‘an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytical lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them’. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 20) defined narrative inquiry as: ‘a way of understanding… the stories of the experiences that made up people’s lives, both individual and social’. Implicit in these two definitions is the distinction between narrative and story.

Polkinghorne (1988, p. 16) differentiated between a story and a narrative by asserting that ‘a story is a single account, reviewing life events in a true or imagined form’. Bruner (1987) says stories are constructed in people’s heads and can direct the author’s life, as ‘we become the autobiographical narratives by which we tell about our lives’ (Bruner, 1987, p. 15). Sarbin (1986, p. 8) calls this the narratory principle, ‘in that human beings think, perceive, imagine and make moral choices according to narrative structures’. He believes stories provide the context in which people act, and they are also the causes of subsequent events (Sarbin, 1986). Denzin (2001, p. 59)
defined narrative as ‘telling’ and story as an account that involves ‘a series of events in a plotted sequence that unfolds in time’. Yet, he noted that story and narrative are nearly equivalent terms.

Shankar and Goulding (2001) maintain stories are the way humans make sense of the world, and that it is through stories that we learn about whom we are, our history, and our culture. Telling stories is universal, as people make sense of an experience by storytelling. Gergen and Gergen (1988, p. 17) are of the opinion that given the prevalence of stories in our lives they ‘serve as a critical means by which we make ourselves intelligible within the social world’. As Riessman (2002, p. 697) suggests, ‘storytelling is a relational activity that encourages others to listen, to share, and to empathise’.

In summary, narratives are not simply a register of experience. According to Riessman (2011, p. 315) narratives ‘do things; they are motivated and purposeful, if not always consciously. Moreover, in telling stories of an experience, be it at the individual, organisational or national level, narratives inextricably influence identity construction (Holstein & Gubrion, 2000). Consequently, narrative identity or ‘the self we live by’ are important considerations (Holstein & Gubrion, 2000, p. 3). Riessman (1993, p. 2) notes that to recount a narrative implies human agency and imagination to determine how the story is told, what events will be included as well as excluded, how events are plotted, and what meanings are ascribed to them. Spence (1982) refers to this as narrative smoothing whereby details may be omitted, condensed, elaborated or exaggerated in the process of producing a coherent story. Polkinghorne (1996) stresses the importance of time and context in terms of how the narrator wants to be portrayed. As Riessman (2010, p. 315) highlights ‘narrators can position themselves, for example, as victims to
one circumstance or another’… or champions in another; or give themselves ‘agentic roles in certain scenes, and passive roles in others’.

Clandinin and Rosiek (2006, pp. 37–38) mapped out some of these differences of opinion and observed one consistent theme that ‘narrative inquirers study experience’ in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience.

3.4.4 Three strands of narrative research

From the literature it is evident that there are three different strands of narrative research. First, narratives can form the research data as suggested in Polkinghorne’s (1995) ‘analysis of narratives’. Second, the research outcome can be the narrative, referred to by Polkinghorne (1995) as ‘narrative analysis’. Third, narrative can be both the phenomenon and the method with which to study it: ‘Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study’ (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). This is described as ‘living out a narrative’ which I now present.

3.4.5 Living out the narrative

There is no accepted view about how to conduct narrative research. Within the framework of narrative research there are a number of approaches, strategies, and methods (Lieblich, Mashiach-Tuval, & Zilber, 1998). Narrative analysis opens up an assortment of methodologies that researchers can draw upon and expand to suit the
needs of a particular study (Riessman, 2011). Nonetheless, Pinnegar and Daynes (2007, p. 4) note that there are ‘territorial markings that distinguish narrative researchers’. In the spirit of methodological diversity I developed my own amalgam of inquiry inspired by Polkinghorne’s (1997) ‘three stages of narrative structure’, Clandinin’s (2006) ‘methodology for studying lived experience’ (drawn from Clandinin & Connelly’s (1994) ‘personal experiences method’ and the concept of the ‘living story’ (Boje, 1991, 2007). The methodological framework for the study is presented in Figure 3.3. I begin by first appraising the salient points of each approach followed by the presentation of the methodological framework to guide this study.

**Polkinghorne’s three stages of narrative structure**

Narrative research takes as a premise that people live and/or understand their lives in storied forms, connecting events in the manner of a plot that has a beginning, a middle, and end points (Polkinghorne, 1997) with certain basic structural features including narrators, plots, settings, characters, crises, and resolutions (Denzin, 2001, p. 59). Polkinghorne (1997) described three stages in understanding narrative structure: reflective and pre-narrative review; emplotment; and narrative reconfiguration. These three stages are derived from Ricoeur’s description of *muthos* translated as ‘emplotment’ and the concept of *mimesis* which refers to a process by which art forms (in this case narratives) act as a form of imitation (Ricoeur, 1991, cited in Verhesschen, 2003, p. 452). The relationship between narrative and life is attained in what Ricoeur calls the triple mimesis.

The first stage of narrative understanding is considered the reflective and pre-narrative stage (mimesis 1). This stage integrates pre-narrative understandings of events with the understanding provided by the perspective of hindsight. The second stage of
narrative structure is emplotment (mimesis 2) which involves the telling of the personal narrative or the self-story. Emplotment involves the interpretation and understanding of ‘life as lived’ (Polkinghorne, 1997, p.43). Consequently, plots mark off segments of time in which events are linked together as contributors to a particular outcome (Polkinghorne, 1997, p. 14). According to Ricoeur the search for a superplot that contains all the plots is futile: ‘There is no plot of all plots’ (Ricoeur, 1988, cited in Verhesschen, 2003, p. 460). The final stage, narrative reconfiguration (mimesis 3), involves the reception and uptake of the textual interpretation produced through emplotment.

The essence of this theoretical approach is that narrative involves the synthesis and interpretation of all three stages into a unified and meaningful whole. This ensures that the narratives are not just simple recounts of past life events The narrative telling is not mimetic; it is not an exact representation of what happened, but a particular construction of events created in a particular setting, for a particular audience, for particular purposes, to create a certain point of view (Mishler, 2004). Therefore, the context (both relational and social) in which the narrative is constructed is important. In addition, the principles of reflexivity means the researcher’s findings are relative to his or her standpoint as an observer.
Figure 3.3  Methodological framework
Source: Developed for this research.
**Lived and personal experiences**

Clandinin’s (2006) ‘methodology for studying lived experience’ is predicated on the observation that ‘narrative researchers study experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives’ (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p 479). The view of experience to which the authors refer, and which is the cornerstone of the methodology, is entrenched in John Dewey’s (1938) pragmatic philosophy. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) drew on Dewey’s concept of ‘an experience’ and his criteria of ‘experience’ being ‘interaction’ and ‘continuity’, as well as his notion of ‘situation’ to develop their narrative view of experience. They developed a three dimensional narrative inquiry space comprising: (i) the personal and social (interaction); (ii) past, present and future (continuity); and (iii) place (situation) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 54).

Consequently, the researcher cannot ‘bracket’ themselves out of the enquiry. Rather, they too are part of the research landscape and are complicit in the world they study (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47). Clandinin and Rosiek (2006, p. 42) expanded on the ‘ordinary lived experience’ to include ‘the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individual’s experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted’.

**Living story theory**

The third pillar of my narrative inquiry is the *living story*. Boje (2007, p. 332) moves beyond what he refers to as ‘the linear plotline’ to illustrate storytelling as a ‘living story fabric’ comprising ‘strands of narrative and ante narrative interwoven, ravelling and unravelling, weaving and unweaving’. Boje (2007, pp. 334 – 335) defines the story fabric by four qualities along the landscape and time dimensions. First, storytelling is simultaneous, rather than stationary played out on a single stage. The key implication is
that ‘if there are a dozen stages and a dozen storytellers, the number of storylines an audience could trace is 12 fractional or 479,001,600’ (p.334). Second, within storytelling listeners fill the fragmentation, blanks, pauses, and silences with stories of their own.

Third, as stories move from past or future into future they may shed meaning along different places and across different temporalities. Finally, Boje concedes there is a morphing of the living story elements (choice of incidents, characterisations, and implications) that change from one performance site to the next as the story is assembled and reassembled. The notion of the living story resonates with the interpretivists’ view that individual lives consist of multiple narratives given ‘any one person can tell multiple stories about his or her life (Denzin, 2002, p.62).

3.4.6 Sensemaking and narrative

One element of enquiry pivotal to this study is the question of how do the respondents make sense of their narratives—the set of events and actions that see them working and living in Beijing as SIEs? As Polkinghorne (1988, p.1) has argued, narrative is ‘the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful’. Making sense of situations is a common everyday concept; ‘making something sensible’ (Weick 1995, p.16) refers to the process whereby individuals and groups interpret and reflect on ambiguous and uncertain events that occur in their organisations and environments (Weick et al., 2005).

Sensemaking is inherently social but is nevertheless linked to processes of individual identity creation and maintenance. Weick (1995, p. 22) maintains that the establishment and maintenance of self-identity is a core function of the sensemaking process as ‘sensemaking begins with the self-conscious sensemaker’. Moreover, he
argues that ‘any one sensemaker is a ‘parliament of selves’ and that the individual is constructed by shifting between definitions of self (Weick, 1995, p. 18). Individuals are driven by a need for a sense of identity and have a general orientation to situations that maintain the consistency of their self-conceptions (Erez & Earley, 1993). Self-identities can change if they are not confirmed, and a failure to confirm self-identity can trigger sensemaking (Weick 1995). The establishment and maintenance of self-identity is driven by a need for self-enhancement, self-efficacy, and self-consistency. However, such identities do not exist as external objects of reality but are ‘constituted out of the process of interaction’ (Weick 1995, p. 20). Identity construction is the interplay between how the individual sees themselves, a situation, and their perceptions of how others view them.

It seems reasonable to assume that self-initiated expatriation will create what Weick (1995) calls ‘surprises’ and Haslberger (2005) refers to as ‘chaotic fluctuations’ as individuals are subject to conditions of uncertainty encountered in a foreign country with multiple possible narratives. The question remains: What ‘webs of significance’ have the women spun that will emerge from their narratives (Geertz, 1994, p. 214)?

3.5 Summary and Conclusion

I began this chapter with an overview of the philosophical assumptions and frameworks behind qualitative research. In situating myself within the interpretivist paradigm I recognise multiple realities and value different constructs of meaning. Given the focus of the study, I was drawn to narrative inquiry for exploring the lived experiences of professional SIE women living and working in Beijing. Narrative inquiry’s attention to story, its focus on interpretation and the understanding of meaning, as well as transitional periods in people’s lives presents as a seemingly appropriate method and
methodology for this study. In turn, the acknowledgment of the relationship between the researcher and the researched suggests that my own experience as an SIE, allows me to stand within the research ‘enmeshed in the process’ (Cole, 1989, cited in Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 14) rather than ‘apart’ thinking of the subjects as ‘having an independent, object-like existence with no intrinsic meaning’ (Smith, 1983, p. 7).

In the spirit of methodological diversity I draw on three different narrative approaches to guide the research process. In the second part of this chapter I turn to the research process and matters of data collection, data analysis and representation.
PART 2: METHODS

One of the most puzzling aspects of narrative research is the almost irreconcilable breadth of definitions and approaches on the one hand … and on the other hand … what constitutes a story worthy of analysis for the aim of tapping into human experience. — Georgakopoulou (2007, p. vii)

3.6 Research Methods

Part 2 of this chapter introduces the research process: sample selection and recruitment, data collection and analysis. Models of narrative analysis suited to this study are explored and a description of how they guided the research is provided. The limitations of narrative analysis are discussed and issues of validation and ethics specific to narrative inquiry considered within the limitations of this study.

In summary, 31 western professional women, who had initiated their expatriation to live and work in Beijing, told their stories. The stories were prompted by open-ended interview questions. The analysis and interpretation involved the development of core stories from the transcripts by the configuration and employment of the women’s experiences of events. Following this, themes were identified through thematic analysis to identify commonalities and differences within the themes.

3.6.1 Research approval

Prior to undertaking my field research I sought and gained ethical approval from the Southern Cross University Research Ethics Committee (contained in Appendix A). This process involved submitting to the Committee a proposal that detailed the procedures of the study. My research was deemed ‘low risk’ and I was exempt from a lengthy review. I took care to consider my ethical responsibilities, starting with the initial planning stage (Patton, 2002, p. 405) to ensure my research methods were consistent with the ethical obligations outlined by The Southern Cross University Research Ethics Committee
Guidelines. These can be accessed on the Southern Cross University website (http://scu.edu.au/research/index.php/40/).

Material prepared for the participants to inform them of the study was prepared in accordance with the Australian Code of Conduct for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2007 and the Southern Cross University Guidelines (2011). Participants were not coerced into participating (Robson, 2002, p. 69) and had the right to voluntarily pull out from the study at any time. All participants’ names and any other identifying material were changed to maintain anonymity. There were no known risks identified in participating in the study.

3.6.1 Challenges and considerations

No matter the approach taken, narrative researchers work closely with individuals and their stories. As a result, narrative inquiry involves a particular set of issues concerning the research relationship, ethics, interpretation and validity (Chase, 2011, p. 423). As a student of research I wanted to better understand the challenges and concerns associated with narrative inquiry before embarking on my field work. To that end I was drawn to a chapter within the *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry* (Clandinin, 2007) entitled: ‘Looking Ahead: Conversations with Eliot Mishler, Don Polkinghorne, and Amia Lieblich’. One thread of conversation I found particularly helpful focussed on ‘Advice on Learning to Be a Narrative Inquirer’ (pp. 642 – 646). Three pieces of ‘guidance’ reverberated throughout my field research and I believe helped me to deal with the ‘astonishing’ the ‘bewildering’ and the ‘unforeseen’. Polkinghorne suggests that narrative interviewing involves an intense interaction with the narrator and requires patience to explore memories and deeper understandings of the respondents’ experiences (p. 646). Lieblich drew my attention to the need for emotional maturity, sensitivity, and life experience (p. 646), whereas Mishler spoke of the fact narrative inquiry is not something that can be
done by rules (p. 636). What particularly struck me in reading this article were the
tensions between the different ways of understanding narrative inquiry within the larger
field of qualitative research.

Further readings alerted me to specific ethical issues to consider (e.g., Newton,
2009; Josselson, 2007; Lieblich, in Clandinin & Murphy, 2007). One question that is
frequently discussed relates to: ‘How to honour and protect the participants while
maintaining responsible scholarship standards’? (Josselson, 2007, p. 538). I found the
insights offered by Josselson in her article The Ethical Attitude in Narrative Research
(2007) helped me to reflect on and anticipate the different dilemmas and contingencies I
might face during my research and prepare for them as best I could. These are further
discussed in Section 3.8.2: Ethical issues in narrative research.

As I boarded the plane to Beijing to begin my first round of interviews Robert
Atkinson’s words echoed in my head: ‘It is impossible to anticipate what a life story
interview will be like, not so much for how to do it but for the power of the experience

An overview of the research process, highlighting selection and recruitment of
respondents, data collection methods and issues of validation, is presented in Figure 3.4.
I now turn to the unfolding account of how I came to select and recruit my respondents
and the interview process.
Figure 3.4  Research process: an overview
Source: Developed for this research.
3.6.3 Selection and recruitment of participants

This research is based on data collected from narrative in-depth interviews with 31 western professional women living and working as SIEs in Beijing, China. My aim was to construct a small (but diverse sample). Probability sampling (Gilbert, 1993) and random sampling (Hornby & Symon, 1994) were neither possible nor appropriate. My approach can therefore best be described as *purposive sampling*, the intention of which was to select cases with a specific purpose in mind (Neuman, 2011, p. 268) complemented with snowball sampling. The first step in my approach was to consider the general profile of my sample. In summary I was looking for western professional women. ‘Western’ was defined as living in or originating from the West (loosely defined by myself as Europe, the Americas and Oceania – Australia and New Zealand). Consequently, for some women English was not their first language, although all spoke English fluently and the interviews were conducted in English. The women had to have been living and working in Beijing for at least one year. A year is the minimum time usually used to define self-initiated expatriation (see Inkson & Thorn, 2010; Tharenou, 2013). While there is no definitive time as to how long an SIE can remain in one country, I debated issues of migration and length of time and decided to include only those who had been 10 years or less in-country.

I did not confine my sample to a particular age group, as in fact I wanted to achieve as wide a representation of ages as possible. Additionally, I was keen to include a range of marital and family statuses. Finally, the women needed to be in some form of professional employment (defined previously as having ‘a skill or craft’), although I did not differentiate type of employment. During my initial contact with roughly five or six women to identify their willingness to participate in the research it became evident that the term SIE was subject to conflicting and confusing interpretations. In particular, the
word ‘expatriate’ caused some consternation. After grappling with the definition of an SIE I altered my introduction to define an SIE generally as a ‘freelancer’ and then described some of the key criteria attributed to SIEs within the literature. Thenceforth, potential participants clearly differentiated themselves from CAES.

I decided to restrict my sample to women based in Beijing. Although I was aware of the limitations of such a decision, I believed it had several distinct advantages. First, given that I wanted a diverse sample I believed Beijing would offer a wide range of potential participants. Second, because my aim was to gain holistic understandings, it seemed to me that my own appreciation of the context in which the women lived and worked was essential. Third, a Beijing-based sample made sense given my own local business networks and informal contacts.

The next step in my data collection approach was to gain access to potential respondents. Because of the ‘invisibility’ of female SIEs, and the fact that there are, to my knowledge, no relevant databases or useful directories specifically on SIEs in China, I constructed a multipronged approach comprising networking channels, chambers of commerce, and local professional and businesswomen’s networks. A copy of the initial email correspondence is presented in Appendix B. Follow-up correspondence to a potential participant to confirm interview arrangements is presented in Appendix C. At this stage the participant was emailed a research information package detailing (i) an outline of the study to communicate its purpose, (ii) my background and interest in the study, and (iii) a frequently asked questions and answers fact sheet drawing attention to matters such as the manner in which the research would take place and the commitment involved for the participant. It also proved useful to have the information package on hand when I was networking for contacts at meetings. A copy of the package can be viewed at Appendix D.
Recruitment channel 1: professional women’s associations

One fruitful means of recruiting participants for the study was through professional women’s networks. I was granted open access to recruit from one organisation’s membership by attending one of their functions. I was able to overlap my visit to Beijing with a monthly meeting whereby I gave a brief presentation about the study. Interested women who fitted the criteria approached me at the end of the event, at which point I took their contact details and circulated the information pack.

Consequently, from this channel I conducted nine interviews while in Beijing and three via Skype on my return back to Australia.

Recruitment channel 2: chambers of commerce

This proved to be the most disappointing source for participants. I contacted six chambers of commerce, however only one responded and circulated my information package regarding the research. I was able to acquire three interviews from this avenue.

Recruitment channel 3: personal referrals

Individuals who participated in the research used their personal contacts to alert others. This ‘vote of confidence’ was important in endorsing the research. I was able to acquire eight interviews.

Recruitment channel 4: personal contacts

Friends and colleagues were contacted by email and I asked them to forward details of the research to those whom they felt were likely to meet the criteria. I was able to acquire eight interviews this way.

A summary of the total number of respondents recruited through each channel is presented in Table 3.4.
Overall, I found that the recruitment process moved smoothly and quickly over the period from February 2012 to June 2012. My topic seemed to capture the interest of the women I contacted or was introduced to. I encountered little resistance after following up on leads. Only one woman declined to participate in the study although she did pass on details of my proposal to her network.

As I began to make contact with prospective respondents one vexing question arose concerning sample size. Charmaz (2006, p. 114) suggests that a small study with modest claims might achieve saturation quicker than a study that spans disciplines. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 136) advise that saturation is a matter of degree. Eventually, there came a point when I believed I had sufficient data to proceed to the analysis and thus settled on the 31 interviews.

Table 3.4  Recruitment channels for the respondents
Source: Developed for this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment channel</th>
<th>Total number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment channel 1: professional women’s associations</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment channel 2: chambers of commerce</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment channel 3: personal referrals</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment channel 4: personal contacts</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.6.4 Data collection

In qualitative research the processes of data collection and analysis are interconnected, often overlapping and sometimes happen simultaneously (Neuman, 2011). However, for the sake of transparency the key aspects of each are examined separately. This section will consider the stages of the interview and the issues arising in the course of that process followed by the approach to data analysis undertaken in this study.

The data collection method of choice for the study was in-depth, open-ended interviews—considered to be the most common source of narrative data (Riessman, 2008, p. 26). Freeman (2006) refers to the narrative material gathered from interviews as ‘big stories’. Conversely, some researchers argue for greater attention to ‘small stories’ (Chase, 2011, p.425). Georgakopoulou (2007, p. viii) defines these as ‘snippets of talk’ that cover a ‘gamut of under-represented narrative activities’, including ongoing events as well as allusions to tellings, deferrals or tellings, and refusals to tell.

The participants were happy to spend an hour or two of their time in an interview, but asking them to engage in other sources of narrative data, such as maintain a diary, was described by one participant as ‘an onerous task’. Following the interview some respondents chose to email me to share and divulge further thoughts.

3.6.5 Interview techniques

The different approaches to qualitative research have resulted in a diversity of perspectives on interview techniques. In particular, there are debates on the role of the interviewer, the interview structure and how far the content is set by the researcher or participant (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2005). Chase (2011) notes that narrative data gathering transforms the relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer into one of narrator – listener. In so doing, there is a shift from the conventional practice of
asking participants to generalise about their experiences to inviting narrator’s specific stories (Chase, 2005). Furthermore, it requires a shift from structured or semi-structured interviews to treating the interview as a guide that may or may not be helpful following the narrator’s story. I found Polanyi’s (1985) distinction between stories and reports provided a valuable starting point to the interviews. She writes that ‘stories are told to make a point, to transmit a message…about the world the teller shares with other people’ (p. 12). Further, in telling a story, the narrator takes responsibility for ‘making the relevance of the telling clear (p. 13). Conversely, a report is ‘typically elicited by the recipient’ (p. 13). As Chase concludes ‘if we want to hear stories rather than reports’ then our task as the interviewer is to encourage respondents to both tell their stories and responsibility for the meaning of their talk (Chase, 2005, p. 274).

To prepare for the interviews I developed a consent form for the participants to sign prior to the interview commencing. This is exhibited at Appendix E. At the same time I worked on a framework of questions or prompts that could guide the interview. I found that for the first round of interviews this guide provided a ‘safety net’ particularly in the early interviews when I was finding my level of confidence. I was reminded by Denzin (2001) that in open-ended interviewing, the interpretive researcher works from a general list of questions, however phrasing is altered to fit each respondent. Additionally, I read literature on social research methods and interview techniques. For instance, I found Holstein and Gubrium’s (1997) work on the ‘active interview’ to be beneficial, particularly in their reference to the interview as being an ‘active’ entity and likening the process to ‘prospecting’ (p. 143).

I now turn to an appraisal of the actual interview process.
3.6.6 The interview process

In this section I address the interview process: the timetable, practical field issues, challenges associated with the interviews of both a mechanical and ethical nature, and finally data storage.

Interview timetable

My first consideration addressed timetabling was when to schedule the interviews and how many times I would need to travel from my home in Australia to Beijing. In my initial planning I considered using a focused group interview which I would facilitate in Beijing as a means of exploring and clarifying my research strategy. A major impediment to this method quickly became apparent: the potential respondents I contacted were reluctant to take part in such an activity. In the end I decided to engage in a pilot study. I interviewed the five ‘reluctant’ focus group respondents and used my time in Beijing to build interest in the study. This first visit took place in March 2012. My second visit in September 2012 was founded on a number of practical considerations: timing of the forthcoming professional women’s association meeting to which I had been invited, availability of respondents and avoiding the Beijing summer (a time when many foreigners travel out of the city). A third visit was undertaken in August 2013 during which time I completed my field work.

Practical field issues

Gaining access to the respondents had its own challenges not the least of which was the location for the interviews. Not only is Beijing a large city, traffic congestion is widespread making travelling even a few kilometres time consuming. Although I had access to a meeting room located in the city proper, only one of the respondents met with me there. The remainder requested meeting in places that were convenient to them.
I met seven women at their offices and the others at a variety of agreed on coffee shops and hotel lounges. I was surprised how well this worked, although knowledge of unobtrusive settings was an important consideration.

A further issue related to the time of day when the interview was conducted. Some interviews took place during core business hours, some at the beginning and end of the participants’ business day, and some on weekends. These mechanical challenges highlighted two factors: the need to be flexible, as well as sensitive to the respondents’ needs, and how detached they were from traditional organisational systems in terms of place and time.

*The interview*

My initial face-to-face contact with a respondent I had only communicated with via email inadvertently helped to build rapport. The momentary apprehension of being recognised, the relief at being spotted and time to laugh about it over a coffee created an atmosphere of informality and ease that set the scene for the remainder of the interview. To begin the interview I explained that it would take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours, and sought permission to use a digital recorder. Some interviews were as short as one hour and some extended to three hours. Three interviews were not recorded. In two cases the respondents asked for the recorder not to be used and against all odds there was a technical malfunction in the case of the other one. In these instances I took notes during and immediately following the interview.

Participants were informed that I was conducting a research project to explore the careers of SIEs. As I have mentioned previously, this term was new to every participant. I found that if I talked about the ‘freelancer’, there was a common understanding that distinguished them from CAEs. I further elaborated that their
participation in the research was voluntary and confidential, and that they could withdraw at any time during or after the interview. They were also informed that I believed there were no anticipated risks to their participation and that they could freely contact me as well as my supervisors and/or the research ethics officer at Southern Cross University with any concerns. At that point I asked the respondent to read and sign the consent form. Even though the interviews were recorded (albeit for three) I took notes. This proved useful when I was transcribing the transcripts.

I engaged in interview techniques suggested by Charmaz (2006, p. 29) for gathering rich data whereby she recommends to ‘choose questions carefully and ask them slowly to foster the participant’s reflections’ since the objective of in-depth interviewing is ‘to explore, not to interrogate’. I noted her advice to develop framing questions to explore the topic that are sufficiently general to cover a wide range of experiences and narrow enough to elicit and elaborate specific experiences, as well as to keep the interview informal and conversational (Charmaz, 2006. P. 29). It was important that I did not interrupt or obstruct the narration, or indeed take-over with my own SIE stories. As an active listener I signalled with reinforcing ‘hm’s’ and by nodding that I empathised with the narrated story and the perspective of the narrator. In so doing my aim was to support and encourage the interviewee to continue their narratives until the end. Rienmann & Schutze, (1987, p. 353) suggest that a narrative interview began with a ‘generative narrative question’, followed by a stage of narrative probing and close with a ‘balancing’ question, in which the participant is asked questions aimed at balancing the story. I found that the generative narrative question served not only to motivate the creation of a narrative, but also to focus the narrative on the topic and themes at hand. My general narrative question was as follows:
I would like to ask you to begin in telling me how you came to come to China. Please take your time in doing this, and give as much detail as you can—everything you tell me is of interest to me.

Closing the interview was as important as opening it. I invited the respondent to reflect on the interview experience and ask whatever questions they might have, as well as acknowledging their contribution to the study:

*Is there anything that we did not discuss that you think would be important to add at this time? Do you have any other questions for me? I thank you again for spending this time with me. Your participation in this study has been very helpful. I appreciate your frankness and willingness to share your experiences with me in such a sincere way. I also feel I have learned a great deal from you that will help me in my study.*

Undoubtedly, the interviews were not without their difficulties. There was the dilemma of how to mediate between the freedom to disclose subjective viewpoints and the thematic direction of what was mentioned. I met some women who were reticent and shy, and some who were very talkative. I was conscious of the need to respect the dignity of the participants, and be sensitive to their concerns and vulnerabilities recognising their trust in me to reveal rather than suppress what were at times very personal stories. In some cases I just listened. In other cases where I too had experienced a similar situation as an SIE in Beijing I was able to validate the significance of the event to the respondent. From a personal standpoint there were times I found the interviews taxing and realised quickly the importance of ‘pacing’ myself.
Data storage

The consent forms have been retained by me and are kept in a secure locked cabinet in my office. Contact information for potential participants, as well as recorded interview files and transcripts or memo files are stored in electronic form on a password protected computer. The recorded interview files will be destroyed no later than one year after dissertation completion.

The next section provides an overview of narrative analysis and models chosen for the study. In practice, different approaches can be combined and are not mutually exclusive (Riesman, 2007).

3.7 Narrative Analysis

You have to be free to follow your data where they lead

Just as there are various understandings of the meaning of narrative as a methodological approach, methods and tools for analysing and interpreting narratives differ substantially. In narrative analysis the story itself is the object of investigation. It opens up forms of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers (Mishler, 1986). Riessman, (1993) reminds us to ask: ‘Why the story was told in that way?’ The study of personal narrative is a type of case-centred research (Mishler, 2000). What distinguishes it is that it begins with the biographical aspect of Wright Mill’s (1959) famous trilogy—biography, history, and society (cited in Chase, 2011, p. 421). Thus, the analysis of personal narratives can shed light on ‘individual and collective action and meanings, as well as the process by which social life and human relationships are made and changed’ (Laslett, 1999, p. 392).
There is considerable variation in how researchers utilise the concept of personal narrative and the strategies they choose for analysis. Riessman (2008, p. 11) refers to narrative analysis as a ‘family of approaches to diverse kinds of texts, which have in common a storied form’. The key features are sequence and consequence: events are selected, organised, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience. Storytellers interpret the world and experience in it as a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies. Riessman (2008) notes that a researcher’s definition of narrative leads to different methods of analysis, however all require the composition of field notes and the transcripts.

‘Narratives do not speak for themselves’, they require interpretation (Riessman, 2005, p. 2). Narratives can also be organised thematically and episodically (Riessman, 2008). Chase (2008) emphasises the complexity involved in deciding where the beginnings and endings of narratives fall. Further, deciding which segments of a story to analyse are interpretive actions shaped by the researcher’s theoretical position.

3.7.1 From interview to story

‘Overwhelmed’ and at times ‘at a loss as to where and how to begin’ encapsulates my feelings as I considered how to analyse the data (Kiesinger 1998, p. 84). What to do with the transcripts and how to make sense of and interpret the hundreds of pages of interviews presented a challenge. Moreover, a review of the related literature not only confirmed the diversity of narrative uses (Neuman, 2006, p. 474), but on the other hand, as Patton concedes, there is no formula for transforming data into findings. ‘Guidance, yes’. But no recipe’. (Patton, 2002, p. 275).
In the end, I found Patton’s directive to be constructive as well as encouraging: ‘Do your very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study’ (Patton, 2002, p. 276). This in effect became my mantra from this point onwards in the study until I finished writing the concluding chapter.

3.7.2 Getting started

My starting point was to consider the type of story I wanted to present. An entire life story (e.g., Myerhoff, 1979, 1994) or Denzin’s interpretive biography (2008)? A personal narrative encompassing large sections of talk and interview exchange (e.g., Mishler, 2000) or the relationship between people’s life stories and the quality of their life experiences (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly 2000)? Another question to contemplate was: ‘How did the respondents construct and interpret their ‘self-narratives’ (Bruner, 2004, p. 702).

The framework of analysis I developed for this study is located within an interpretivist epistemological/ theoretical perspective whereby ‘the story is a continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of experience (Bruner, 2004, p. 692). The framework represents a fusion of thematic analysis (the ‘what’) influenced by Charmaz’s social constructionist/symbolic interactionist perspective of grounded theory and Polkinghorne’s (1995, 1998) narrative inquiry framework: ‘analysis of narrative’ and ‘narrative analysis’. Charmaz (2006) emphasises understanding rather than explanation and assumes emergent multiple realities. The key to understanding the difference between Charmaz and ‘traditional’ grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) is that she advocates to ‘avoid imposing a forced framework’ (Charmaz, 2006, p. 66).
Polkinghorne’s narrative analysis framework is grounded in Bruner’s (1986, p. 11) ‘two modes of thought’ which provides distinctive ways of constructing reality: the paradigmatic mode and the narrative mode. In Polkinghorne’s framework the analysis of narrative represents the paradigmatic mode whereby the researcher seeks out stories as ‘data’ and then analyses those stories for themes. On the other hand, the narrative mode involves gathering descriptions of actions and events as ‘data’ that are then used to generate personal experience stories through a process of emplotment. The plot of the story defined as ‘the organising theme that identifies the significance and the role of the individual events’ (Polkinghorne, 1998, p.18) transforms a list or sequence of disconnected events into a unified story (Polkinghorne, 1995). The commentary is in essence what can be learnt from the plots.

A discussion follows of the data analysis framework I developed for this study comprising six phases in the lead-up to presenting the findings. This is exhibited in Figure 3. 5. Although I present the framework as distinct lineal phases or steps, this is for convenience only. In reality the processes of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are interrelated described by Creswell as the ‘data analysis spiral’ (Creswell, 2013, p. 182).
Figure 3.5 Phases of the data analysis: an overview
Source: Developed for this research.
3.7.3 Data analysis phases

_Phase 1: Data organisation_

In this first phase I transcribed the interview material. Riessman (1993) notes that this process is an excellent way to familiarise yourself with the data. I did not adopt a socio-linguistic narrative perspective therefore I omitted paralinguistic features. I was conscious of faithfully representing the data in the transcript, however I included punctuation to make the transcripts easier to read. I do not believe this addition negatively affected the subsequent analysis.

_Phase 2: Framing the data_

Initially I scanned the transcripts to get a feel for their content. While I was familiar with the respondents’ stories this was the first time I had seen them written out. During this process I transferred notes to the transcripts I had made relating to a respondent’s mood and emotions at the time of the interview and immediately following. In subsequent readings I considered the transcripts through multiple lenses: turning points, and context. It was at this stage, poised to begin the analysis, that I recalled another piece of advice from Patton (2002, p. 544) to be: ‘open to multiple possibilities’ or ways to think about a problem, engage in ‘mental excursions’, use ‘multiple stimuli’, ‘side-tracking’ or ‘zigzagging,’ change ‘patterns of thinking’, make ‘linkages’ between the ‘seemingly unconnected,’ and play at it, all with the intention of ‘opening the world… in some way’.
Phase 3: Coding

I now move to describe the data. Each transcript was read sentence by sentence to look for commonalities and differences and what Patton describes as ‘recurring regularities’ (Patton, 2003, p. 11). From there, the text was aggregated into initial focused codes. After this process of open coding I coded the codes to reduce the number to a short-list of tentative codes that matched text segments. I followed an integrative method in that I had both ‘prefigured’ categories from the literature review (deductive direction) and ‘emergent’ categories from the data (inductive direction). Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 58) note such a provisional ‘start list’ allows researchers to build on previous insights. Despite the fact the code structure did not follow a purely inductive approach I was conscious not to force data into the preliminary categories.

Phase 4: Classification of codes

During this phase I used different codes types. For instance, I found five code types identified by Bradley, Curry and Devers (2006, pp. 1763 –1764) useful in generating themes. These code types are: (i) conceptual codes and sub codes, (ii) relationship codes linking other concepts coded with conceptual codes, (iii) participant perspective codes, (iv) participant characteristic codes, and (v) setting codes. In addition there were three other types of codes: ‘in vivo’ derived from the exact words used by the participants, those drawn from the literature and names I composed for the study.
Phase 5: Themes


[Themes emerging] can be misinterpreted to mean that themes “reside” in the data, and if we just look hard enough they will “emerge” like Venus on the half shell. If themes “reside” anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them.

Within the lists of codes I began to look for themes or patterns defined as ‘recurrent unifying concepts or statements’ (Boyatzis, 1998) that reflected the purpose of the research. As Patton (2002, p. 453) notes, patterns ‘usually refer to a descriptive finding’ which ‘almost all participants reported, evaluated, perceived’. At this stage I found it helpful to organise the codes into theme piles and constructed a preliminary mind-map as a visual representation. Initially, I classified the themes into five groups: ordinary (expected), unexpected (the surprises), hard to classify (ideas overlapped with others), major and minor. Moreover, in addition to the identification of themes it was my intention to look for evidence as to whether there were patterns of different kinds of career outcomes for the professional women who had moved to Beijing as SIEs.

The final step in this phase consisted of reviewing the themes until there came a point when these refinements added nothing new or substantial. It was at this stage that core stories, plots and epiphanies began to emerge—the creation of the emplotment.
Phase 6: Quotes

Verbatim quotes were collected from the transcripts to corroborate the themes. I prepared an excel spreadsheet cataloguing the themes and then added corresponding quotes against each theme. I also found it useful to record verbatim quotes on 3 x 5 index cards. I used one card per quote and devised a simple coding system on each card to identify each theme.

Mechanical issues

The mechanics involved in handling the data became a trade-off between the level of training required to use CAQDAS (computer assisted qualitative data analysis software) and the level of automation revealed. With the benefit of hindsight, no doubt it would have been helpful to have undertaken training in the use of such software, however at the time this was not feasible. However, I found I was able to manually manage my data through a combination of spreadsheets, a card system, and using coloured pens and ‘post-it notes’ to identify segments of data. In summary, the transcripts were analysed manually with themes identified and codes attached to them using Microsoft Word and Excel. Key subject themes were colour coded with sub-themes highlighted and key words identified to produce a series of sidebar notations to identify emerging themes as codes.

I now turn to an appraisal of quality issues in narrative inquiry. In the next section I address two interrelated questions: (1) ‘Is the narrative valid, and by whose standards’? and (2) ‘How do we evaluate the quality of qualitative research’?
3.8 Standards of Validation and Evaluation

There are several ways to use, practice, promote, and claim qualitative research and in each there are issues of truth, validity, verisimilitude, credibility,trustworthiness, dependability, and confirmability (Altheide & Johnson, 2011, p. 582). In addition, there are various perspectives and terms used to describe standards of validation. In the debate over the legitimacy of qualitative research, the issue of validity continues to be central to both the qualitative and quantitative research communities (Polkinghorne, 2007, p.472). In quantitative research, validity is related to accuracy, relevance, and reliability of measurement, whereas qualitative researchers seek to understand, represent or explain social phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). However, even within qualitative research there is dissension with two poles of opinion. There are those who lean towards a positivist view, and those coming from an interpretivist perspective argue ‘it is time to dispense with traditional ideas of objectivity and truth and realize that we are “beyond method” (Smith, 1984, p. 390). Hammersely, (1987, p. 69) notes that qualitative research is valid ‘if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theories’. Yet these questions remain: ‘what is accurate representation’, ‘what is good research’ and ‘what is bad’?

A number of authors have developed different perspectives and terms to distinguish qualitative validation. Lincoln & Guba (1985), for example, use the terms ‘credibility’, ‘transferability’, ‘dependability’ and ‘confirmability’. Patton (1999, p. 1190) identifies three distinct but related elements: (i) rigorous data gathering techniques and methods, (ii) the credibility of the researcher, and (iii) a fundamental belief in the value of qualitative research. Creswell considers ‘validation’ in qualitative research to be an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, ‘as best described by
the researcher and the participants’ (2013, pp. 240 – 250). He identifies eight validation strategies and recommends that the eight procedures be examined as a whole and at least two of which should be utilised in any given study. The eight strategies include: prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer review or debriefing, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, member checks, thick description, and external audits.

Polkinghorne (2007) argues that in narrative inquiry the researcher needs to provide sufficient justification to their readers for the claims they make. Readers should be able to follow the presented evidence and argument to determine the level of plausibility, credibleness, or trustworthiness of the claim (p. 477– 478). Thus, the judgement of ‘worthiness’ lies with the reader.

3.8.1 Validation strategies

For the purpose of this study I am guided by Creswell’s eight validation techniques. I believe the study fulfils seven of the criteria which are now presented.

**Prolonged engagement.** Prolonged engagement involved conducting my field work over a period of 12 months with three visits to Beijing. On each visit I allowed at least three to four days more than I thought necessary to allow for rescheduled appointments or spontaneous interviews.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation involves a combination of different methods, study groups, local and temporal settings, and different theoretical perspectives (Flick, 2014, p. 183) to reduce the possibility of chance associations and systematic biases, thus allowing greater confidence in any interpretations made. However, Silverman (1985, p. 105) cautions that ‘multiple methods are often adopted in the mistaken hope that they will reveal the “whole picture”. I conducted data analysis triangulation (i.e., the use of thematic analysis (the ‘what’) influenced by Charmaz’s social constructionist/symbolic

*Leaving an audit trail and the research journal.* I have maintained documentation of records and data (including raw data—written field notes, recordings, and data process notes). From the research proposal stage until the writing up of findings, I endeavoured to keep a journal. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008, p. 4), keeping a research journal is ‘one way to ensure that you preserve your reasoning and are able to spell out the development of your ideas’. The journal also offered an opportunity to reflect on my journey as a doctoral candidate—the good, the bad, the challenging, and at times the sheer loneliness. Apart from writing my thoughts and reflections I used the dictaphone to record issues arising from an interview—for instance, what worked, what I thought I could do differently in the next interview. Patton likens the post-interview time as a ‘period for postpartum reflection’ as the researcher is ‘expectant’ to ‘what has been birthed’ (2002, p. 384). He says, ‘As soon as a child is born, a few basic observations are made and tests are performed to make sure that everything is all right. That’s what you’re doing right after an interview—making sure everything came out OK’ (Patton, 2002, p. 384). As a final point the journal was a convenient place to record quotes I came across that I felt reflected a particular stance, even a methodological perspective, or a moment of reflection, such as *Inner Silence:*

> Writing, Reflecting, Hoping
> Slipping into Truth
> Interviewing moments
> Take me by surprise
> Like Sunlight.
**Member checking/informant feedback.** Participants were given the opportunity to read the transcript of their interview to ensure a faithful representation.

**Checking for representativeness.** I looked purposively for contrasting participants, in terms of age, type of employment, reasons for coming to China and marital and family status to maximise the variation sample.

**Checking for researcher effects/clarifying researcher bias.** Qualitative researchers are mindful of the biases they bring to their research yet, the very nature of the relationship that develops in their inquiry implies eliminating bias and subjectivity entirely is unrealistic (Creswell, 2013, pp. 215–216). As noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 236), ‘the instrument of choice in naturalistic inquiry [qualitative research] is the human’, later adapted to the ‘human instrument’ (2005). Faced with this dichotomy of the researcher as the human instrument the researcher, Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) argue that the researcher needs to ‘position’ themselves in their writings, and to practice reflexivity at the outset, and throughout the research process (see also Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013).

Reflexivity in qualitative methodology refers to the researcher’s review of his or her research experience, decisions, and interpretations in ways that brings the researcher into the process and allows the reader to assess how and to what extent the researcher’s interests, positions, and assumptions influenced the inquiry (Charmaz, 2006, p. 188–9). Altheide & Johnson (2011, p. 592) suggest that one way in which researchers can makes themselves more accountable is to share their experiences and insights more fully with readers. In practicing self-reflexivity I believe there are a number of ethical issues related to conducting qualitative inquiry in general, and my own study in particular. These issues are considered in the following section, *Ethical issues in narrative research.*
**Peer debriefing.** Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 308) emphasise that the role of the peer debriefer ‘is in every sense the inquirer's peer’ …the ‘devil’s advocate’, who keeps the researcher ‘honest’ and poses the ‘difficult questions’. My supervisors certainly filled this role! As a requirement of the DBA degree I attend six monthly symposiums whereby I presented phases of my research to academic staff and fellow students from the Southern Cross University business school. Moreover, during the course of my research I was privileged to meet academics researching and writing in the field of SIEs, as well as attend two conferences where I presented my research findings (to date at the time). I found the feedback I received on each of these occasions to be productive and insightful.

**Rich and thick description.** A procedure for establishing credibility in a study is to describe the setting, the participants and the themes in rich detail (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p.128). Denzin argues that in interpretive studies descriptions need to be deep, dense, and detailed, as opposed to ‘thin’ which lack detail and simply report facts (Denzin, 2001, p.98). I trust that my writing and the presentation of my research findings go beyond mere facts and surface appearances and that the reader feels transported to the world of the professional SIE living and working in Beijing.

**3.8.2 Ethical issues in narrative research**

In preparing for the interviews I was drawn to two articles, one by Josselson (2007, p. 538) with its focus on the principles and practicalities of an ‘ethical attitude’, and the other by Lieblich (2006, p. 62) whereby she stresses ‘the relational and ethical aspects of the study rather than its findings’. Josselson (2007, p. 537) acknowledges that narrative research is an intensively relational form of inquiry as every aspect of the research process, from the initial contact with a participant to the final write-up, is touched by the ethics of the relationship between the researcher and those they study.
At the heart of ethical practice are the dual principles of protecting the privacy and dignity of the participants, their interests and concerns, while maintaining ‘responsible scholarship’ (Josselson, 2007, p. 537). Lieblich (2006, p. 63) notes that while the initial contact with a respondent may seem relatively straightforward ‘it is delicate, fragile, and rich with meanings and promises’.

In sum, in considering the ethical implications of the study I found it useful to divide the research process into its different stages and identify different questions pertaining to ethical practice and codes at each stage. These originate from Josselson (2007) and Lieblich (2006) and are presented in Appendix F.

3.9 Summary and Conclusion

The second part of Chapter 3 discussed the data collection process, interviews and data analysis. While certain aspects of each component might have been done differently to greater effect, reflections on this lengthy research process support the actions taken. At the same time this has been a significant learning curve and I am aware of my own significant growth in terms of acquiring new-found skills as a researcher. This chapter ends with a presentation of the procedures employed for determining the data’s validity (credibility) and integrity within the study. Finally, in considering the ethical attitude of narrative research it is apparent that reflecting on people’s lived experience is an inherently relational undertaking and to that end every aspect of the research process is touched by the ethics of the research relationship (Josselson, 2007, p. 537). In the next chapter the study’s main findings are presented.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS—A SWEET OR SOUR EXPERIENCE?

All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost.
—J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973)

As researchers, we come to each new inquiry field living our stories. Our participants also enter the inquiry field in the midst of living their stories. Their lives do not begin the day we arrive nor do they end as we leave.
—Clandinin and Connelly (2000, pp. 63 – 64)

4.1 Frame of Reference

The objective of this chapter is to present the core stories of the respondents and provide a sense of their careers on moving to China as SIEs. In striving to give the women a ‘voice’ inevitably some stories stand out. Taken as a whole, the highlighted stories weave a tapestry of the women’s unique lived experiences and spirit – rich in their pattern and texture.

To the extent that qualitative research is grounded in an interest in the meanings people construct in their social worlds, Chase (2003, p.79) acknowledges that ‘narrative analysis’ typically represents two viewpoints. First, narration brings meaning to our lives. It is the way in which people make sense of and validate their experiences, construct their identities, and create and communicate meaning. Second, stories are social entities. The form and content of a story must be socially recognisable if it is to be meaningful. In this vein, Chase (2005, p. 80) observes that narratives reflect the broader context (social, cultural, ideological and historical) in which they are told. Plummer (1995, cited in Riessman, 2000 p. 170) maintains that: ‘For narratives to
flourish, there must be a community to hear…for communities to hear, there must be stories which weave together their history, their identity, their politics’.

Nevertheless, the variety of approaches and range of possibilities for narrative analysis, as previously outlined in Chapter 3, reinforce the point that there is no single narrative; rather there is a multitude of different ways researchers can interpret and present the results of their research (Elliot, 2005). Further, because of the various applications across disciplines, there exist different and distinct ways of using narrative (Atkinson, 2007).

Polkinghorne’s (1988, 1995) model of narrative configuration provides direction on how to develop the plot of a narrative and uncover the themes or categories of the narrative. The story as a whole is organised by means of a plot in which the contextual meaning of individual events can be displayed (Polkinghorne, 1995). The plot creates the temporal boundaries of the story and the selection of happenings that are included in the story (Polkinghorne, 1995). The meaning created by the stories relies on the assumption that time moves from the past, to the present, to the future and those events, motives and interpretations can affect human actions. These assumptions are only known retrospectively; the plot synthesises these retrospective actions and outcomes into a storied form (Polkinghorne, 1995). Thus, the researcher looks for themes that experiences have in common, or typologies or genres of stories, characters or settings (Polkinghorne, 1995). Through the process of emplotment transitional or turning points, as described by Denzin (2001) can be identified. Polkinghorne concludes that when happenings are configured or emplotted they take on narrative meaning; that is, ‘they are understood from the perspective of their contribution and influence on a specific outcome’ (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5).
Themes drawn from the women’s stories are relevant for this study. Whilst the stories on their own provide a narrative of the individuals’ experiences, the paradigmatic analysis of the narrative can also be told. This provides some understanding of common experiences, patterns, themes, similarities and differences between the participants (Chase, 2005); however, this does not imply that the findings can be generalised beyond the setting (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 22).

The concept of ‘the life story’—the story that arises from ‘lived experience’ (Atkinson, 1998, 2007)—provides further guidance on how to create a core story or narrative for this study. The story is selective; it does not include everything that has ever happened (McAdams, 2008). As highlighted in Chapter 3, for the purpose of this research the focus of the participants’ core life stories is their *Beijing experience as an SIE* told in their voice, and their subjective meaning of their experiences. The notion of position and subjective reality is reflected on by B. B. King in his autobiography (King & Ritz, cited in Atkinson, 2007, p. 240): ‘Some may accuse me of remembering wrong. That’s okay, because I’m not writing a cold-blooded history. I’m writing a memory of my heart. That’s the truth I’m after – following my feelings no matter where they lead’ (King & Ritz, 1996, p. 2).

A life story arises from lived experience and to that end historical truth is not the main issue. What matters is that the narrative is deemed trustworthy more than true (Atkinson, 2007). The interviews in this study are representations of the meaning the professional SIE women living and working in Beijing have ascribed to their experiences, at a particular time and in the context of the interview situation. Interview quotations intersperse each theme and subtheme along with excerpts from the transcripts describing significant scenes where appropriate.
These excerpts reflect the women’s words and voices and provide rich portraits of their lives in China as SIEs. My voice, as the researcher, is reflected in the interpretation of the stories through the methodological framework chosen for the study which prioritises ‘understanding’ or verstehen and an appreciation of how the women make sense of their world as SIEs living and working in Beijing.

4.2 Story Structure

In terms of structure, stories characteristically have a beginning, a middle, an end and a point—an answer to the question: ‘Why the story was told that way?’ (Riessman, 1993). The study’s research objectives determined the overall plot or the boundaries of the story. Thus, the beginning is defined by the question: ‘Why did you come to Beijing?’, the middle by the career narratives of the respondents, and the end or future script by the question: ‘Reflecting on the next chapter of your life how do you see or imagine your future?’ Within each chapter there are significant scenes, each with a high point, a low point and a turning point. This framework is presented in Figure 4.1.

![Figure 4.1](image_url)  
**Figure 4.1** The narrative framework
Source: Developed for this research.
Within the analysis I identified six significant themes that reflect the subplots of the overall plot:

1. Reasons for moving to Beijing.
2. Stories of career: career opportunities and constraints.
3. Stories of career: living with the opportunities and constraints.

These subplots are presented as a storyboard in Figure 4.2 and form the basis of the narrative for this study described in this chapter and discussed further in Chapter 5. This arrangement is consistent with Elliott’s (2005) definition of a narrative as ‘a sequence of events organised into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to that whole’ (Elliott, 2005, p. 3).

To set the scene to the narrative I introduce the demographic profile of the 31 women who participated in the study to give an overall sense of who they are and the various turning points which led to their decisions to initiate their expatriation and move to Beijing. Subsequently, the participants’ career experiences, paths and patterns as SIEs in Beijing are considered. Thereafter I examine the ways in which the participants make sense of the terms expatriate and self-initiated expatriate and the extent to which they identify themselves as such. Finally, I propose and justify a four-quadrant typology framed in relation to two significant themes, boundaries and personal agency.
Figure 4.2  The six subplots of the narrative
Source: Developed for this research.
In telling their stories, escape, reinvention and opportunities to build on and consolidate already established careers emerged as significant themes. There were also tales of disillusionment, exploitation and despair. The work histories the women described are diverse. In coming to China many changed career direction, retrained or upskilled. Some of these changes were through choice, while some were beyond their control due to circumstances such as a redundancy or more personal reasons. Some were driven by their interest in Chinese culture and language. For others China represented a futile attempt to secure a ‘proper’ job or resulted in a lack of opportunity to advance in their careers. To that end those women felt their careers had stalled and in some cases had gone backwards. As will be illustrated, the decision to become an SIE was made by some of the women almost instantaneously, while for others it was a much more gradual process evolving over months and, in some cases, years. A significant number of the women spoke of the ‘right time’ in terms of both life and career stage.

In sum, ‘the experience of being an SIE’ was described not as a particular moment or event but as a dynamic process involving an assortment of factors. It was understood by the women in terms of a number of different phases, including pre-arrival decisions, career experiences and factors impacting the decision to repatriat.

4.3 Participant Demographics

Although it was not the intent of this study to quantify the experiences of the informants it is useful to present a demographic overview. The women represent a total of ten countries: Austria (1), Australia (6), Canada (4), Germany (2), Ireland (1), New Zealand (1), Russia (1), Switzerland (3), the UK (2) and the USA (4).
Typically the women worked in finance, law, marketing, public relations, accounting, HRM, and educational training and development. Over half described themselves as ‘single’ which included being divorced and in one case widowed. Three women were married to local Chinese and two to foreigners whom they met after arriving in China. Respondents had been in China for an average of six years and the average age of the sample was 42 years.

From the demographic information it would appear that a ‘typical’ professional western SIE female first came to China in her mid- to late-30s, either as an employee (who searched for a job and acquired one before arriving) or as a speculator (no job to move to), is single with no children, holds an undergraduate degree and has lived in Beijing for six years on average. Table 4.1 summarises the demographic profile of the women who participated in the study. Obtaining dependable data about the number of SIE women in China is nigh on impossible, not least because there is no formal entry data collection system in China. Further, for some of these women their official visa entry status did not represent their actual situation. However, the general characteristics of the profile are consistent with other studies of SIE women (see e.g., Bozionelos, 2009; Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2008; Thorn, 2009).

A profile for each respondent is presented in Table 4.2. In addition this table highlights dominant reasons participants gave for self-initiating their expatriation to China. These reasons are based on Richardson and McKenna’s (2002, 2007) classification of ‘self-selecting expatriates’. The reasons for moving are discussed in the following section.
Table 4.1  Demographic profile of respondents  
Source: Developed for this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of women 31</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status*</th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/partner</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* includes 7 women with dependent children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in China</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current employment status</th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed (no staff)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed (staff)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment status on arrival</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diploma/College</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous international experience</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 country</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 countries</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2  Profile of each respondent: dominant reason for moving to Beijing
Source: Developed for this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital/ Family status</th>
<th>No. of years in China</th>
<th>Employment status on arrival in China</th>
<th>Current work/position</th>
<th>Dominant reason for moving to Beijing</th>
<th>Classification (Richardson &amp; McKenna, 2002)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alana</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>Work not so good, looking for new opportunities.</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adele</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>Increase future career capital.</td>
<td>Mercenary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>Victim of European economic crisis, no future there; China presented new opportunities.</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronwyn</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Single Family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Self-employed (staff)</td>
<td>I wanted to set up a business that was in a cloud so I could be wherever I wanted to be on the earth and the cloud could follow me.</td>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathy</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Married Family</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Self-employed (no staff)</td>
<td>Feeling a bit burnt out. Had done the corporate thing. Husband had the opportunity to be posted to China, so I thought why not.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Self-employed (staff)</td>
<td>Came with husband—looking for new challenges and opportunities.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Self-employed (staff)</td>
<td>Looking for opportunities to cash in on China’s economic growth.</td>
<td>Mercenary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>I was in rut at home. It was a feeling of ‘now or never’. I thought I can always go back.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilary</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Self-employed (no staff)</td>
<td>I wanted to work full-time on my art. In China I can afford to do this whereas at home I worked to pay the rent.</td>
<td>Mercenary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Marital/Family status</td>
<td>No. of years in China</td>
<td>Employment status on arrival in China</td>
<td>Current work/position</td>
<td>Dominant reason for moving to Beijing</td>
<td>Classification (Richardson &amp; McKenna, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Married Family</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>Influenced by father to seek work in China. Increase chances of getting better jobs in the future with China experience.</td>
<td>Mercenary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Married Family</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Self-employed (no staff)</td>
<td>I met my husband and wanted to stay. To do that I had to consciously develop a business.</td>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>I moved to China for job opportunities. There are few jobs at home as a result of the economic downturn.</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jocelyn</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>Looking for new challenges and opportunities.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylie</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>Bored with work at home. No real challenge. Feeling restless and visited China many times before. Friend already living in China influenced decision.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Self-employed (no staff)</td>
<td>Interested in China and building my resume. Decided to come as an English teacher to give me a foot in the door.</td>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeline</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Self-employed (no staff)</td>
<td>I had friends already living in China and had visited many times. Their jobs seemed so much more exciting than mine. I had no ties, so I thought why not.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Married Family</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Self-employed (staff)</td>
<td>I saw China as an opportunity to start my own business—something I had wanted to do for some time.</td>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Self-employed (no staff)</td>
<td>I was swayed by the fact I already knew people in Beijing and secondly my job at home was not developing in the way I wanted it to. Rather than start looking for something else at home, I decided to come to China, I found a job before I came, but soon after set up my own consultancy.</td>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Marital/Family status</td>
<td>No. of years in China</td>
<td>Employment status on arrival in China</td>
<td>Current work/position</td>
<td>Dominant reason for moving to Beijing</td>
<td>Classification (Richardson &amp; McKenna, 2002)</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>At home I thought I was going places, but really, I was just comfortable. Idle. Not going forward and not even going backward. I needed to push the restart button on my career and initially I thought I would come for a year. A year’s contract seemed achievable.</td>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Self-employed (no staff)</td>
<td>Came with husband – looking for new opportunities.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>I wanted to build on my resume.</td>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauline</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Married Family</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Self-employed (no staff)</td>
<td>Former boss wanted to explore opportunities. Happy to relocate as looking for new challenges.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Self-employed (no staff)</td>
<td>I studied Chinese and came first to China as student. Once here couldn’t see myself going home.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Self-employed (staff)</td>
<td>My husband and I decided to throw caution to the wind and come to China. I had done some contract work here and it just seemed the right time to take the next step and make it more permanent.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>The corporate world is not for me. I have worked in different countries and I guess it was time for China.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Self-employed (staff)</td>
<td>I first came to China on assignment. After that I decided to return to explore new opportunities.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stella</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>I was looking for a different challenge. Something to add to my CV.</td>
<td>Mercenary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Marital/Family status</td>
<td>No. of years in China</td>
<td>Employment status on arrival in China</td>
<td>Current work/position</td>
<td>Dominant reason for moving to Beijing</td>
<td>Classification (Richardson &amp; McKenna, 2002)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>I needed a new opening. Something to excite me, to wake me up.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Local hire</td>
<td>Studied Chinese at university—wanted to continue the China journey.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thea</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Married Family</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Own business (no staff)</td>
<td>Looking for new challenges and opportunities.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicky</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Speculator</td>
<td>Self-employed (no staff)</td>
<td>I was made redundant and needed a break to rethink where to next. A number of my friends were already working in China so it just seemed an obvious way to go.</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4 Reasons to Move to China

The first subplot of the narrative, *reasons to move to China*, is explored in the context of Research Question (RQ) 1:

**RQ1:** How do western professional women account for their decision to move to China as an SIE?

Here the narrative concentrates on the decision to move to China as an SIE. Gilad and Levine’s (1986) socioeconomic framework of push–pull factors, as discussed in Chapter 2, has been recognised as a useful framework for examining the different forces that influence women’s career transitions, often in relation to the notion of ‘opting out’ (e.g., Belkin, 2003; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005), ‘corporate flight’ (Rosin & Korabik, 1985) and self-employment (Mallon & Cohen, 2001). Over the last decade opting out as a concept has gained traction and prominence in the academic literature as well as the popular media. Under this scenario women are typically said to choose family over professional accomplishment and leave corporate jobs to care for their children (Belkin, 2003). Yet there are women without children who may opt out to redirect their careers, as Madeline, one respondent in this study reported, ‘to trade a life of corporate security for freewheeling self-employment’.

Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) and Cabrera (2006) identified some of the more common push factors that influence a woman to leave the workforce. These include a perceived lack of opportunity for advancement, discrimination, harassment, inflexible work hours, inability to accommodate family needs or disdain for the corporate culture (Cabrera, 2006, p. 219), as well as services no longer required and changing career patterns and interests (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006, p. 38).
Two other widely recognised push factors are the masculinity of organisational cultures, characterised by competitiveness and hierarchical relations (Maier, 1999), and jobs are no longer meaningful or satisfying (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). There are no simple explanations for the women’s decision to move to China. The respondents gave a variety of reasons for being pushed out of their pre-China workplace and pulled to a particular destination; that is, Beijing, China. The push factors include: lack of opportunity and recognition, marginalisation, absence of career advancement, redundancy and an uninteresting job—similar factors given by domestic women who leave corporate organisations (e.g. Terjesen, 2005).

Several pull factors implicated in the decision to move were contextually China-specific: offered career prospects that were not available ‘at home’, opportunity to capitalise on China’s burgeoning economic growth, fascination with China, wanting to experience a different way of life and long-held desire to continue Chinese language studies while working in China. Although respondents could be generally placed in one category or another, the pull factors captured a number of more enduring universal themes that included: a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, right time–right place, another country–another assignment, influence of a (significant) other (such as friend(s) already living in China, a partner's change of circumstances, job security) and personal/lifestyle transition.

Some of the women (Diane, Kylie, Madeline, Megan, Sylvia, and Vicky) referred to taking time out, starting over and consciously interrupting their (pre-China) career to ‘get involved in something completely different’. These women were not permanently retiring from the workforce—they all (immediately or eventually) became reengaged in paid work—rather they were considering other ‘life’ issues, in particular
personal fulfilment (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). In sum, the decision to relocate to Beijing, as one respondent, Cathy, declared, could be considered ‘life-changing’.

In the main the data generated illustrate that the reasons for embarking on life as an SIE were complex, and involved choice and constraint, the planned and the unintended, as well as the accidental and the coincidental. There were multiple subthemes or issues in each story. This in itself was one of the study’s main findings and is consistent with findings from other SIE samples (e.g., Doherty et al., 2011; Richardson & McKenna, 2002; Selmer & Lauring, 2010).

Four dominant categories of reasons for the participants to move to Beijing are identified drawing on Richardson and McKenna’s (2002, 2007) metaphors to describe the various reasons why professionals become independently mobile. These are: explorer (n=16), architect (n=7), mercenary (n=5) and refugee (n=3). The dominant categories and subsidiary themes are presented in Figure 4.3 and described in further detail in the following section.

4.4.1 Reasons to move: the four categories

The four dominant categories for reasons to move are now discussed.

*The explorer (n=16)*

Predictably, a number of the participants were essentially motivated by the desire to explore new career opportunities and possibilities in what they perceived to be ‘an exciting environment’, as noted by Pauline: ‘*I probably saw it as a good career opportunity ... and it was [going to be] an adventure*’. This finding differs from Doherty et al. (2011, p. 601) who, in their study comparing SIEs and CAEs (48 per cent of whom were women), found that the most influential decision item for SIEs was that of adventure. For CAEs the impact on career was rated as most influential. If it was not
‘adventure’ per se that the respondents were after it was certainly acknowledged by all the respondents that they needed to have an adventurous spirit ‘to take on the cultural challenges of China’ (Bronwyn, study participant). A small number of respondents indicated that they ‘romanticised’ about the experience in that it would be one filled with new and exciting events and adventure:

I think I always pictured that it would be an adventure, that I would meet lots of interesting people, see interesting sites and maybe have a chance to do some really interesting work. I guess I romanticised about it a bit because it was something completely different to what I had ever experienced. Also my friends and family saw China as being very foreign and very different. (Sharon)

For three of the respondents China presented as a ‘blessing in disguise’ following a shock encounter in their home-country workplace. In one case the respondent, Sharon, was passed over for promotion. With no immediate plan in place she decided to ‘throw caution to the wind, take the plunge and try her luck in China’. In the case of Vicky her move to China came about following an involuntary redundancy:

Without warning one day my corporate career came to an unceremonious end when I was made redundant. As part of my package I had to sign a one year non-compete agreement, but they did offer me counselling. I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. Everyone kept telling me not to take the news personally but it was difficult. I had worked elsewhere in Asia and had friends in Beijing. They encouraged me to take a break and come and stay. So I did and the rest is history. This has been a huge life change as well as a career change. Now when I think back to that awful day I have to admit they did me a favour. (Vicky)
The architect (n=7)

In general the architects were women interested in career building and enhancing career prospects in the belief that their time in China would be beneficial to their future career. This finding applies equally to women with partners and children, single childless women, and women in early-, mid- and late-career. Linda typifies the architect with a boundaryless career mindset as she set about navigating what Sullivan and Arthur (2006, p. 9) refer to as ‘the changing work landscape’… ‘characterized by different levels of physical and psychological movement’.

*I think a lot of people see teaching English is for the 20 year olds travelling the world one classroom after another. I saw it as my way to get to China. I have an ESL [English as a Second Language] background and credentials. I applied online to a private language school, a week later I had a phone interview, and three months after that I was here. For the first year the language school was my safety net. I had the all-important Temporary Residence Permit and an income and time to build my guanxi [connections] while I considered my next move. (Linda)*

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Figure 4.3  Reasons to move to China: dominant themes
Source: Developed for this research.
The mercenary (n=5)

Six of the women were classified as mercenary. Normally this motive is associated with maximising rewards such as status and benefits (Richardson & McKenna, 2007, p. 311) and advantageous financial incentives including the opportunity to make and save money (Selmer & Lauring, 2012, p.670). Adele, in her early career, came to China with the express purpose of developing her Chinese language skills and professional networks before embarking on her PhD:

So I thought if I do this PhD I’ll have the time and the funding to get my Chinese to a place where it is fully workable. I can read and write and do business in Chinese. And I’ll have this qualification and these amazing networking opportunities. So I will graduate from this with these credentials and skills and a network. (Adele)

Two of the respondents, Hilary and Sylvia, distinguished ‘financial incentives’ as ‘being able to take advantage of the lower housing, basic foodstuffs and transport compared to home’.

The refugee (n = 3)

The refugee’s motivation is generally related to a desire to escape (Richardson & McKenna, 2007, p. 311). The idea of moving to China to escape ‘rising unemployment and an economic downturn’ was a common theme amongst the three refugees:

After the global financial crisis things were very bad at home [Europe]. A lot of my friends lost their jobs and I could see it was going to happen to me too. My father has a lot of contacts in China and suggested I come here. Initially I didn’t really want to do this... but he kept pushing me. (Jenny)
4.4.2 Turning points

In the previous discussion on reasons to move to Beijing a number of significant themes emerged that could be considered the respondent’s *turning point* or *epiphany*—‘the interactional moment that radically altered and shaped their life’ (Denzin, 2001, p. 34).

In a comparable manner Hall (2002, p. 8) poses the question: ‘What causes the person to move out of a comfortable routine and start explorations that may lead to a career change? What are the trigger events that cause a transition from one learning cycle to the next one? In Table 4.2 I identified the dominant reason to move to Beijing for each respondent or as Denzin describes them ‘those interactional moments that…have the potential to create transformational experiences’ (Denzin, 2001, p. 34). To further clarify the concept of turning points and triggers I present ‘Hilary’s narrative:

*I used to be an accountant and now I make jewellery...about five years ago I was working full-time in an accounting firm. I guess you would have called me a typical career girl. I was quite successful in what I did. Except—I was unhappy. Really what I wanted to do was design jewellery—full-time... then I came to China to visit friends. Up to that point I was resigned to being a full-time accountant. Gradually it dawned on me that if I moved here, financially, I could afford to stop doing that [being a full-time accountant]. I suppose you would call it my ’aha’ moment. I just knew I had to do this. My friends gave me the confidence I needed to realise my dream of working for myself designing jewellery and Beijing’s cheaper cost of living made it possible. I still work as an accountant to pay the bills, but only part-time. (Hilary)*

In considering the turning points that led the women to move to Beijing it became apparent that they related to the dimensions of time and timing. I identify three references to time: (i) a plan in the making, (ii) planned happenstance and (iii) right time, right place. These are presented in Figure 4.4. A discussion of each orientation follows.
A plan in the making

For at least half the respondents the decision to move to China might well be called ‘A plan in the making’, as they engaged in purposeful actions and efforts towards realising their plan. Two of the respondents, Christine and Bronwyn, share their plans to move:

My own journey to China started more than five years ago. Our company was doing a small amount of business here but it seemed that the only way to grow the company was to have an on-the-ground presence. But that didn’t happen straight away. I spent three years developing the business strategy and organising the necessary documents. It was three years of coming back and forth until I finally moved here. (Christine)

I didn’t just get here you know. I planned this for three years. I began to think about whether I could come and live here with my kids. I went to Beijing and Shanghai and I decided that I could. That was in 2001. I went back [home] and finished my degree and learnt the language to give me the best chance possible when I arrived... then we wrote to the Chinese and said we were ready to come! (Bronwyn)
There was a sense of embarking on their SIE journey with ‘eyes open’:

*Before I came here I read as much as I could and talked to people I knew who were living in Beijing. I even came for a few weeks to just get a feel for the city.* (Megan)

At the same time, for some women even a well-constructed, thought-out plan could not allay feelings of self-doubt and anxiety. This sentiment is reinforced by Sonia:

*Even though it was my decision to go to China, as the time got nearer to leave I became very anxious, so much so I would wake up in the middle of the night wondering ‘oh no, what if this doesn’t work?’ I was afraid I was going to fail, and fall flat on my face. In some ways I was more terrified about coming home a failure than actually failing in China.* (Sonia)

**Planned happenstance**

Consideration is now given to the role ‘chance’ played in the decision to move to China. The women spoke time and again of chance: ‘*a chance to do something else*, ‘*a chance to build my career*’, ‘*a chance to take advantage of China’s burgeoning economy*’. On the surface whilst this mind-set might suggest an element of providence, on closer inspection it reflects what is generally referred to in career planning as *planned happenstance* (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumbolz, 1999). Within this framework planned actions are considered learning opportunities at the same time that unplanned events are embraced. Planned happenstance is reflected in the stories of Kylie and Linda:

*I found myself feeling I was in a rut, not going anywhere. I didn’t feel I was stimulated professionally or personally in any way. At the same time one of my dearest friends was living in Beijing and for years he had been saying to come over for just a year—if you don’t like it you can always go home. It was the strangest thing. I was coming home one night from playing volleyball. I remember this as clear as day. It was raining and everyone said see you on Thursday [another volleyball night] and I just thought I can’t keep doing this. So with that I made the decision to come to China.* (Kylie)
One day I noticed a sign in a travel agent’s window that said ‘return flight to Beijing for £396’. I bought a Lonely Planet guidebook to Beijing and suddenly it did not seem so remote a possibility. I was really unhappy in my work and the more I read through the book the more my desire to go to Beijing grew. After I talked it over with my family I decided to make the leap. A short time later I had a plane ticket and a hotel reservation in Beijing. I was on my way. That was five years ago and I’m still here. (Linda)

In listening to these stories of planned happenstance it was apparent that the women were not only active players in bringing to fruition their chance events, they had the confidence to go through with them. As such, decision making appeared to be an art form shaped by well-developed personal qualities such as autonomy, agency, environmental mastery and experience, as noted by Jocelyn:

The idea of working and living overseas was not foreign to me. I have travelled extensively and worked internationally on and off throughout my career. I always had in the back of my mind that I would love to do something in a different part of the world. I have been fascinated with China’s growth and development for a long time and suddenly the time seemed right to go and do something really exciting and immerse myself in a different culture. (Jocelyn)

**Right time, right place**

Three themes emerged in terms of the right time, right place. Some respondents referred to life stage, others to a career transition and a third group to personal/family circumstances. Mainiero and Powell (1992, p. 217) suggest that time exists in women's lives in ‘the past, present, and future’. Past career successes and relationships with others influence levels of satisfaction in the present. In turn, present satisfaction influences what the future might look like. Consequently, individuals may choose to defer or discontinue one course of action (e.g., concern for relationships or others) and
focus on another at present (e.g., concern for career) in anticipation of greater satisfaction in the first realm at a later date. Or they may strive to find a balance between the two. The authors refer to this push-pull effect as the ‘cross-currents in the river of time’ (Mainiero and Powell, 1992, p. 217).

A number of women noted the element of time in their decision to move to Beijing. Christine, for example, talked about ‘the time seemed right’ in terms of both life and career stage, as well as wanting to ‘capitalise on China’s economic growth’. Conversely, some of the women noted ‘the time was not right’ and delayed the timing of their move to what they considered a more auspicious time. This response is alluded to by Madeline who had visited China ‘many times’ before settling on the ‘right time to come’:

> I had been coming to Beijing for years to visit friends. Although I flirted on and off with the idea of moving here to work it was not until a few years ago the timing seemed right. I wasn’t really enjoying my work, a relationship I was in had recently ended, but most importantly I could afford to. (Madeline)

### 4.4.3 Family matters: the influence of significant others

The relationship between family and assignment success is well documented within the expatriate literature. Tung’s (1982, p. 70) assertion that the ability of the family to adjust to different cultural or physical environments impacts the candidate’s performance continues to dominate academic and professional publications.

Furthermore, research has shown that when the family was unable to adjust to the destination culture the significant other ‘expatriate’ reported similar maladjustment (e.g., Black & Gregersen, 1991).
The 2013 Global Relocation Trends Survey (Brookfield GRTS, 2013, pp. 17 – 18) reports that the top ongoing issues to assignment success were: family adjustment (91 per cent), followed by children’s education (89 per cent) and then spouse/partner resistance to the international assignments (83 per cent), with 35 per cent of respondents reporting family concerns as the top reason for turning down an assignment. For married and partnered assignees 41 per cent of spouses/partners were employed before the start of the assignment, while only 15 per cent of spouses/partners were employed during the assignment. In a 2005 survey of ‘trailing spouses’, of whom 91 per cent were women, 64 per cent had to give up a career in order to relocate and 55 per cent were unable to continue a career or obtain paid employment due to work-permit/visa restrictions (McNulty, 2005, p.3).

It is estimated that the direct costs of a failed assignment can reach as high as $US250,000 per expatriate (Silbiger & Pines, 2014, p. 1170). Indirect costs, though not as easily quantifiable, are thought to be substantial as well (Harzing, 1995). These include lost business and goodwill in the host country, the personal career impact and loss of confidence of the ‘failed’ global assignee, possible damage to career, stress, burnout and potential health problems (e.g., Tungli & Peiperl, 2009).

While it can be concluded that international assignments affect the family as a whole (Brown, 2008), these facts and figures are attributable to CAEs. Little is known of the impact of family on the SIE other than family appears to play a strong role (Richardson, 2006). Further, there is an assumption in the literature on CAEs that the trailing spouse will be female (e.g., Linehan, 2002; Harris, 2004).

‘Significant others’, defined as those an individual holds in high esteem (Denzin, 1966, p. 298), play a central role in individual interpretations and related behaviour (Denzin, 1989). Similarly, in reflecting on the protean career orientation,
Hall (2004, p. 2) notes the influence of family and that career serves ‘the whole person, family, and “life purpose”. In the context of this research significant others refers to immediate family (spouse/partner and children), extended family (parents and siblings), friends and associates who were influential—even instrumental—in the decision-making process.

For the seven women who were in relationships prior to moving to China the decision to move was very much a family affair—regardless of whether the man or the woman was the ‘trailing spouse’. For the women who were deemed to be the trailing spouse there was a distinct sense that they ‘chose to move’, rather than their partner was ‘sent overseas’ by the company and they simply followed, as suggested in Cathy’s narrative:

*It was basically my husband’s work that brought us here. But frankly it’s what I wanted. I was feeling a bit burnt out... I was excited about coming to a new country and taking on a new challenge...I have never thought of myself as the trailing spouse, I have never felt poor me or I have been displaced. It was very much a mutual choice, a family decision to come to China.* (Cathy)

This sentiment of ‘mutual choice’ is equally applicable for the two women whose partners were the trailing spouse, with one exception—the reaction of others in discovering the man was trailing the woman:

*When we first came here it was quite difficult for my husband to find work. He didn’t seem too worried as it was his intention to have a bit of a sabbatical. What was interesting was how others reacted. Suddenly it seemed all our contacts were helping him to find work. I thought that was very interesting and at the time I kept thinking to myself I wonder if they would be rushing around helping me if I was the one without work. It seems quite acceptable for the woman to be unemployed but not the husband.* (Sophie)
For two of the women neither they nor their partner was deemed the trailing spouse. Rather, the ownership of the decision-making boundaries is somewhat blurred, as presented in Diane’s story:

\[\textit{Coming to China was my dream. I was always trying to persuade my husband we should give it a go. But he was not very enthusiastic. Then he finally agreed. The irony is we came here because of his contacts and now he talks about moving here as though it was his idea.} \ (Diane)\]

Three of the women came to China with children (under the age of 12) and four have had children whilst in China. The women acknowledged the benefits of the cultural experience for their children. At the same time they expressed a mixture of concerns at the loss of identity commonly attributed to ‘third country kids’—those children who spend significant time outside of their parent’s culture (Peterson & Plamondon, 2009). Pauline relates the story of her five-year old daughter who was born in China to western parents:

\[\textit{My child is half/half. She has a bit of an identity problem—she asks me sometimes ‘where am I from’? It’s very difficult. Sometimes when we go on tour people say ‘where are you from’ and she will say ‘I’m from China’. They say ‘but you don’t look Chinese, how can you say that’. So I tell her ‘you are half German, half Dutch and you were born in China’. It’s a long sentence. Living in Beijing there are so many of those families, those kids, so here it doesn’t matter so much. But if we move back [to Europe] it will be different.} \ (Pauline)\]

Ultimately, the overriding concern for these respondents is the dilemma of where to educate their children. By the time children reach the age of seven there are two options: the local Chinese system or international schools where the fees generally range from $US17,000 to $US33,000 a year. For three of the women their children’s education became a reason to return home. Bronwyn comments:
The biggest problem coming to China with children is the school fees. You need to earn enough for accommodation, health insurance, airfares and school fees. These are the four big killers. They [the independent expats] usually stay until the school fees become an issue. When you can't afford the international schools is the time you usually leave. When your children are around 7 or 8. (Bronwyn)

Turning to the single women several of the respondents attributed their decision to move to China to the influence of family and friends, as indicated by Kylie:

They [parents] are very much go, see, do... it has been like a mantra that has influenced me all my life. It has given me the courage and confidence to do things. They are very supportive of me. When I told them I was going to go to China my Mum said that sounds like it could be a really interesting adventure. You never know what might happen over there. I’ve gone with their blessing. (Kylie)

4.4.4 Beijing as a destination

It has been suggested in the literature that location factors are a consideration in whether or not to accept an expatriate assignment (Baruch, Steele, & Quantrill, 2002) and that there are gender differences in specific locations (Lowe, Downes, & Kroeck, 1999). Yet, Dickmann and Mills (2008, p. 118) contends that relatively little is known about specific attributes of destination cities, their influence on expatriate decisions and how context may influence an individual’s career capital. The findings in this study suggest three common reasons as to why the respondents chose Beijing over the other first-tier cities of Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen or even second-tier cities with large expatriate populations such as Dalian, Nanjing or Chongqing. These are established networks, receptivity of Beijing to western women, and personal security and safety. For some respondents these factors were interdependent. One respondent, Madeline, turned down a job offer in Guangzhou on the basis she ‘did not feel very safe
living there on my own’. Another respondent, Alana, chose Beijing over Shanghai as her ‘networks and contacts were Beijing-based’.

**Networks and contacts**

All the respondents emphasised, first, the importance of having an established network of social relationships on their arrival in Beijing and, second, once in Beijing, the opportunity to link up with other communities to expand social and work relations. Thus, *knowing whom*, described by De Fillippi and Arthur (1996) as abilities to make attachments, make contact and build relationships with others in all aspects of career, was a critical factor for all the respondents in the decision to go to Beijing, particularly without the support and backup of a sponsoring company:

*If I didn’t have friends already living here [Beijing] I’m not sure I would have come. I think it would be very difficult if you didn’t know anyone—the language, someone to explain all the cultural challenges, how to open a bank account.* (Madeline)

Moreover, networks and connections were perceived to be important in terms of the effect they could have on the respondents’ careers, as well as access to the job market. Embedded in every aspect of Chinese society is the concept of *guanxi* which governs business, social and personal relationships (Hutchings & Murray 2002). Loosely translated as ‘relations’, of the two characters that make up the term 关系, the first character means ‘a pass’ or ‘barrier’, and the second character as a noun means ‘system’ (Ying, 2002, p. 547). Thus, the term in reality, refers to a ‘web of connections to secure favors in personal and organizational relations’ (Park & Luo, 2001, p. 455). An individual is not limited to his or her own *guanxiwang* (relationship network) (Hutchings & Murray, 2002). Once guanxi is established each person can ask a favour of the other in the expectation that ‘the debt incurred will be repaid sometime in the
future’ (Yang, 1994, cited in Xin & Pearce, 1996, p. 1642). *Guanxi* are tiered, based on a Confucian hierarchy. The family is the foundation of Chinese society; therefore, familial relationships, long-term friends and school friends are the most important (Park & Luo, 2001).

Several other characteristics are identified as reinforcing the concept of *guanxi* and status, including *mianzi* (face), reciprocity, *xinyong* (trust) and *renquing* (favours) (e.g., Hutchings, 2002, p. 37). *Mianzi* is considered crucial to the cultivation and preservation of *guanxi*. *Face* is one’s ‘public image’ (Tsang, 1998, p. 66), therefore the size and power of a network determines the amount of face an individual has. Intricately linked to *guanxi* is the concept of *ganqing*, the measure of emotional commitment of the parties involved (Tsang, 1998, p. 66). The strength of the *ganqing* is dependent on the investment of time and effort expended by the involved parties in building that relationship. Typically, *ganqing* is cultivated when the parties involved work, live or study together.

All the respondents spoke of the need to understand relationships from the Chinese perspective in order to be able to operate effectively as a foreigner in Beijing:

> Before I came to China, I read about guanxi and understood it to be about relations. Build your network and you have guanxi. But that is only part of the equation. It was not until I was living here and my Chinese friends began to explain the intricacies that I realised just how complex the concept is. I also realise that as a foreigner I will never have real guanxi because I have no Chinese classmates. I’m amazed at just how much gets done between old classmates. (Megan)
4.4.5 Summary

This section has addressed the first subplot in the stories of the respondents’ lives in Beijing as SIEs. In sum, it was apparent from the narratives that moving to China was not the only option, but the best option at the time. Reasons to move centred generally on themes of career transition, openness to new experience and opportunity, with this term being broadly understood to include aspects of proactivity and providence or planned happenstance. Proactive behaviour is defined by Grant and Ashford (2008, p. 8) as ‘anticipatory action that employees take to impact themselves and/or their environments’, by way of ‘taking the initiative or by anticipating events’. The concept of proactiveness resonates with Tharenou’s (2010, p. 77) suggestion that women’s proactivity could explain why they self-expatriate. Openness to new experiences is implied in the notion of the protean career orientation where careers are reinvented from time to time and measured by continuous learning and identity changes (Hall, 1996, p. 9).

Furthermore, the data suggest that the respondents’ sense of personal agency enabled them to recognise and respond to chance encounters. Again, this theme resonates with protean career attitudes, in this case whereby individuals are ‘intent upon using their own values (versus organizational values for example) to guide their career (“values-driven”) and take an independent role in managing their vocational behavior (“self-directed”’) (Briscoe, et al., 2006, p. 31).

In the next section I explore the various career trajectories and experiences of the respondents following their move to Beijing.
4.5 Stories of Career: Opportunities, Constraints and Demands

The following section addresses the second subplot of the narrative, career opportunities, constraints and demands in the context of RQ2:

RQ2: What are the career experiences of western professional SIE women?

This narrative weaves together the career options and possibilities accessible to the women. What became apparent in analysing the narratives was the way in which the respondents’ careers developed according to their own intent and purpose. Further, not only does each individual story seem to have a logic of its own, certain patterns are repeated across the sample. Fundamental to the study is the notion of career as a dynamic process, constructed by the respondents through interactions with the wider social context in which their careers are enacted. The themes from this subplot are presented in Figure 4.5. There are three dominant themes: opportunities, constraints and demands each one comprising a number of subsidiary themes. A discussion of each follows.
4.5.1 Career opportunities, constraints and demands

Within the narratives there is evidence of what Richardson and Zikic (2007, p. 164) refer to as the ‘darker side’ of the often paradoxical nature of the SIE career experiences. For some women China represents a positive life-changing, land of opportunity story, as revealed by Madeline:

*Coming to China has had a huge impact on my career. I have had opportunities here I would never have had at home. I feel I am much more indispensable in my workplace.*

(Madeline)

Yet others spoke of the negative impact coming to China has had on their careers. In some cases opportunities have been restrained in part due to Chinese labour laws, visa regulations and issues associated with being a ‘local hire’. Some women presented a
more multidirectional career journey, a sideways move, a change of direction and a change of aspirations:

*I work in an area I had never thought about and I couldn’t be happier.* (Miranda)

Strategies to find employment included such activities as sending out resumes, looking at job advertisements and talking to friends and family about possible job leads. Ultimately, for the majority of women employment opportunities came about through their *guanxi*, networks and connections. Madeline’s experience highlights the reciprocal obligation and nature of *guanxi* described by Pye (1992, p. 8) as: ‘friendship with implications of continued exchange of favors’. Moreover, her experience highlights the importance of *xinren* (trust) once the *guanxi* opens the door:

*I undertook an intensive year-long Masters in international business. At graduation one my classmates, a woman from China, came to me and stated quite matter-of-factly: “You have something I need and I have something you need”. What she meant was we could do business together. She had the contacts and I had the skills. Yet, I’m very mindful of the fact that in a way my skills are dispensable. She could easily replace me tomorrow. Just like that. But I can’t replace her.* (Madeline)

For the most part the women who are employees worked in embassies, chambers of commerce and small-to medium-sized joint ventures. In general the respondents noted it was difficult for foreigners to secure a job with a 100 per cent Chinese-owned firm. As Tara and Cathy noted:

*The Chinese company might have wanted a Caucasian face to parade before investors. But even those types of positions are few and far between now. There are too many Chinese coming back home to work with excellent international connections and understanding of how the West does business.* (Tara)
Chinese companies don’t do market research, strategic analysis, and PowerPoint presentations; it’s too fluffy and theoretical. Business is happening on the ground; it’s about cash and relationships. (Cathy)

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly not one of the respondents was employed on a full-time basis by a multinational corporation (MNC), although some of the self-employed women had specific project contracts particularly in areas of training and development. For some this was by choice and for others there was a feeling that the MNC door was firmly closed to them:

I thought I would be an asset to a large company and tried very hard to get a foot in the door. I speak fluent Mandarin, hold an MBA from an international university and have more than 15 years in my field of work. In the end I was offered some contract work, but it was not what I wanted, especially when I was paid as a ‘local hire’. In the end I decided to set up my own business. To be honest I was tired of always feeling like some sort of second rate citizen just because I wasn’t sent here by the company. (Sharon)

There were clearly ‘glass walls’ between the SIEs and CAEs. These boundaries between roles that are not technically very different relate to the degree of HRM support each group can expect. As local hires, by and large, the women were not entitled to a number of support practices normally offered to CAEs such as: arrival and departure reception, accommodation, a health care system, language training, support with school/day care fees, help with legal issues such as provision of work permits, partner work arrangements, and family and social activities (Suture & Burch, 2001). For women with school-aged children unable to afford the cost of international schools there was a sense that they would be ‘forced’ to leave China, often at the expense of their career advancement:
I really don’t want to leave. I have a good job here. My friends are here. But I do not want my child educated in the Chinese school system and I simply can’t afford the international schools. This is a huge issue because if I go home I know my career will flounder. I have been away too long and lost contact with my networks. But at the same time my daughter will get the education I want for her and she will be able to connect with her grandparents. (Pauline)

The women were acutely aware that as SIEs they were often perceived to be ‘flight’ risks by potential and indeed current employers. They found this attitude discriminatory and annoying, particularly in light of ganqing and the fact the Chinese value commitment and length of time spent in China. As one respondent protested:

They don’t say to the corporate guy, ‘oh you’re only here for two years’. I’ve moved my whole family here and I’m not going anywhere, but still there is always an assumption I’m just going to up and leave. (Bronwyn)

### 4.5.2 Changing employment patterns

A common theme commented on by the respondents was the changing employment pattern for foreigners. This is reflected in the following commentaries:

There’s this perception that China is brimming with opportunities for foreigners, but this is not really the case. If you don’t want to teach English, there are few well-paying jobs. (Megan)

In the old days, maybe five, ten years ago ‘the foreign devil’ was in demand. It really didn’t matter what your skill base was. It seemed every skill was needed. But nowadays it’s a very different story. (Tara)

Even if you speak perfect Mandarin, nothing is guaranteed. (Sharon)
The novelty of being a foreigner has worn off. Demonstrating a genuine commitment to China is a must. You have to show you are willing to spend more than just one or two years here. (Christine)

A growing trend is that both Chinese and foreign companies are beginning to hire English-speaking candidates from Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore for middle-management positions for the reason that they have business and Mandarin language skills, yet lower salary expectations than other internationals, who usually command salaries at least 50 per cent higher than candidates from the region (Robert Walters Recruitment, 2014). Further, it would appear that the need for English-speaking generalists is quickly receding, especially as the local talent pool absorbs language skills and adopts the foreign education systems and qualifications once unique to outsiders (Zweig & Wang, 2013).

The Chinese Government has launched a range of policies and incentives at the national and regional level to attract Chinese citizens, who have studied and worked abroad, to return in order to contribute to the economy, particularly in light of China’s entrance to the World Trade Organisation (Antal & Bartz, 2006). From 1978 to 2008 China sent 1.39 million students and scholars to study abroad (People’s Daily, 2009, cited in Liu, 2012, p. 37). In 1990, 1,593 students returned and by 2010 the total number of returnees was more than 632,000 (Xinhua News, 2011, cited in Liu, 2012, p. 37). Often referred to as haiku or ‘sea turtles’ these national returnees with advanced education are becoming haidai (‘returnees from overseas waiting for employment’) or ‘seaweed’ as they face problems finding jobs in the current economic climate (Zweig & Donglin, 2010).
As China grapples with a shifting economic outlook and fierce competition for jobs several respondents spoke of some of the more colourful sentiments towards foreigners that have appeared on the Twitter-like micro-blogging site Sina Weibo:

*Foreign scumbags should go back to their countries. China is not the place for them to do everything they want. Cut off the foreign snake heads. People who can’t find jobs in the US and Europe come to China to grab our money, engage in human trafficking, and spread deceitful lies to encourage emigration.*

Yet despite these issues many of the respondents have managed to carve out a niche for themselves in China at different career stages. Here three women tell their stories: Adele who is in her early career, Kylie who is in her midcareer and Stella who is in her late career. The focus of Adele’s story is on high self-esteem and high inner internal locus of control, key factors in the protean career orientation:

*I have been very successful at getting jobs I’m not qualified for… I found if I approach a potential employer, with a lot of confidence and just say I don’t have experience doing this but I do have experience doing this and I think I could do that well and then I find I get hired. And then they train me and then you become qualified because you’ve done it. I notice a lot of my female friends look at the job description online and say I don’t have these qualifications and they don’t approach the employer and the job position goes unfilled… I hang out with my girlfriends and say I’m going in for this interview and they say don’t get your hopes up too much because you’re not qualified and you’re probably not going to get. And I’m like we’ll see. I really think it’s a woman thing. A guy goes for a job at a bank and gets it…but his only experience is using the ATM. They tend to have a lot more confidence.*

*You really have to believe in yourself and have confidence in this market. For example I have this job I’ve been doing for several months now writing for …this blog… When I heard there was an opening there I thought oh gosh I really want this job. The problem was at least when I took the job I had never read a Chinese newspaper in my life and couldn’t really…I said I’m going to apply and I’ll just tell them my Chinese reading ability is pretty slow but I can do it if I just take my time and have a dictionary with me.*
I had the interview and told him I was really interested in this but to tell you the truth this is where my Chinese reading ability is. He said OK we’ll just try it. And we tried it and it worked. And now I write it. I love it. It’s great. (Adele)

Kylie reflects on the importance of knowing the right people:

When I first got here I did some contract work and that kept me busy but when the four month slump came (as it does)...I knew I now had to figure out what I wanted to do. I also realised I was in a very different position moving here than many others as I already had close friends, social networks, friend’s mobile numbers I could put into my phone, and that made a huge difference...A couple of friends had seen an ad for a job and encouraged me to apply. There was a grocery list a mile long and I thought I won’t get this as I don’t meet some of the requirements. But my friends told me this was a weeding out process so the riff raff didn’t apply. So I sent them my resume. I had a second interview and then I was offered the job as a local package.

I wasn’t following a conscious road in terms of career development. What intrigued me about this job was the fact education was booming in China. This would be a foot hold into what was happening in the industry here. I knew there could be future cross-over opportunities so it was really a stepping stone, an opportunity to get my feet wet and most importantly to build my network in China. Part of the job was to represent the firm in different associations and chambers. It was not the ideal position—there was some challenge and I knew that in a year I would be bored, but it was an opportunity as a starting point.

I used this job to consciously build social capital in the knowledge that if I got bored or it wasn’t going to work out I at least had a network for the next stepping stone. I had the skills in terms of I know what to do, but I was light on the networks. I really needed to build the social capital. (Kylie)

Finally, Stella relates in more detail her reason to move to China:
I’m not a relic—although my company at home probably thinks so. And I’m not a grey nomad backpacking my way around China. At home I was successful in my job. Gradually I realised I was not assigned to projects and younger managers were being assigned to implement my ideas. I felt my career was spiralling downwards but I was not ready to retire. It was quite by chance the opportunity to come to China came about. Sort of right place, at the right time. I’m surprised I even got a visa. In a way I felt compelled to take the position as a way of saying to my old company, ‘look at me, working in China’. It’s a three-year contract and my time is almost up, but I feel I’m going out on a high. It has been a very rewarding experience and now I’m ready for the next challenge. (Stella)

The two must-have requirements noted by the women were language and networks, plus a large dose of self-confidence and a belief in oneself:

To succeed here you need to focus on your passions and on building your language skills. Find something you can specialise in. There are still plenty of niche markets. (Kylie)

In China it’s all about who you know. If you don’t know anyone and you have no connections you are going to fail. (Sophie)

I think the ones who do well are the ones that take the risk to get a foot on the ladder and then they build a network. They may not want to do what they are doing ...but they accept that the job may be beneath them and get on with it. Rather than thinking I have been the corporate woman and I have all the skills they come back at a lower level to build to a network. I think if you are good people will see that.

You need to be networking. Go to networking events where there are professional people. Have a card saying looking for a job. I know one person who did that and they now have a senior position. You have to believe in what you want to do and have that as your goal. Let people know you’re not so high and mighty that you wouldn’t be on a lower rail and get just a get a foot in the door. Try and get jobs where you get a massive amount of exposure. They may be lower than your skills but you will get noticed. Don’t complain, don’t whinge. You need to know how to sell yourself. People don’t want to hear in my other life I did that—so what you’re here now, just get on with it! (Bronwyn)
4.5.3 The push-pull to self-employment

Turning specifically to the self-employed women, two came to China as SIEs with the explicit purpose of establishing their own businesses. By the time I came to conduct the interviews 14 more had turned to self-employment. For these women becoming ‘their own boss’ was in response to a particular situation, as presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Reasons for self-employment
Source: Developed for this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant category</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Reason for self-employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capitalise on China’s economic growth</td>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>Business owner wanting to expand my business interests in China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Bronwyn</td>
<td>Provide for my future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>Hilary</td>
<td>Concentrate on my art fulltime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>I like the flexibility and the fact I can work hours that suit me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pauline</td>
<td>It enables me to have time for my daughter on my terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disillusionment with organisation</td>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>I like being my own boss and only answering to my clients. No office politics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal fulfilment</td>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>Starting my own business was a long time goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alana</td>
<td>At the moment t is the best option.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop gap/last resort</td>
<td>Vicky</td>
<td>It’s not my choice as I have had difficulties finding full-time employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>I’m using this time to decide what my next career move will be.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen from Table 4.3 there are two types of self-employment. First, those women who were in effect ‘contract workers’ and who have been described as ‘self-employed’ (both the incorporated and the unincorporated), ‘technical contractors’, ‘contingent workers’, ‘independent contractors’, ‘employees of temporary service firms’, ‘workers provided by contract firms’, and ‘freelancers’ (Barley & Kunda, 2004, p.16). Second those women who have established a business entity employing staff.

Some of the women talked about a transitional state of dual job-holding, commonly referred to as moonlighting (working in self-employment in addition to a regular wage job) (Budig, 2006, p. 2225) while waiting for the right opportunity to strike out on their own:

_There was no way I could go out on my own when I arrived. Basically I took the first job I could to pay my rent. Whenever I could I worked on my own business plan. Then I started doing a bit of my own business at weekends. It took me about a year before I had established enough contacts to go out on my own. It was very scary but I knew I had to finally take the plunge—no more safety net. This was it!_ (Thea)

Not all the ‘freelance’ women freely chose to be self-employment. More often than not it was a ‘last resort’ or ‘stop-gap’ measure as indicated by Vicky:

_Even though I came here on spec so to speak it was not my intention to do contract work. It’s given me a chance to look around but at the same time I feel very exposed. There are all sorts of issues to do with visas and tax. On the other hand I like the flexibility of contracting although it can be feast or famine. I’m now deciding whether to go down the road of setting up a WFOE. The set up costs are high but it will give me the legal entity I need to continue as a contractor._ (Vicky)

The reasons for becoming self-employed appear to be consistent with those described in the self-employment literature, including push motives (i.e. frustration with organisational structures or difficulties finding full-time employment in their preferred
field), pull motives (i.e. a desire for flexible work schedules, freedom from supervision, or an urge to create a personal practice or consultancy), or a push–pull combination (Cohen & Mallon, 1999; Fenwick, 2008, p.14). The greatest drawback to freelancing was seen to be from a logistical standpoint, with the main problem being issues associated with visa compliance and residency permits, as noted by Hilary:

Most of us live here on a year-to-year basis, terrified of not getting our visas renewed. In the old days you could go to Hong Kong and get a new visa—no questions asked. But those days have gone. (Hilary)

Historically, many freelancers unable to obtain an employment visa (called a Z visa) came to China on an F visa ‘issued to those who intend to go to China for exchanges, visits, study tours and other activities’ (). However, since September 2013 F visas can no longer be obtained or renewed in Hong Kong, so many people need to return to their country of origin to (re)apply. In some instances those caught working in China without a Z visa have subsequently been denied re-entry visas (The Beijinger, 2013). There is no doubt that visa status has a significant impact on emotional wellbeing, as well as on the types of jobs the women could engage in. For some the prospect of losing their jobs is a constant source of concern, not least because in most cases it would also mean having to leave China. This level of uncertainty they experience over their residential status has been likened in the SIE literature by Richardson and McKenna (2002, p. 73) to ‘tightrope walkers on a high wire, the smallest mistake would see them plummeting to the ground, marking the end of their career/job in the host country’. As one of the freelance women remonstrated:
Getting the proper visa now can be an awful process. The Beijing police are cracking down on foreigners working illegally. You have to carry your passports at all times or risk deportation. I’ve even heard that there will be strict restrictions on where we can live and travel, and where foreign businesses can be established. (Nina)

With respect to the two women who came to China to start their own businesses, these respondents described self-employment as a ‘way of life’. It was something they had always done, and they saw it as an essential aspect of their identity. China simply represented a new market and new business opportunities.

Six of the seven women operating their own business (employing staff) established a wholly foreign-owned enterprise (WFOE) or limited liability company wholly owned by a foreign investor (http://www.wfoe.org/). One woman was involved in a foreign invested partnership enterprise (FIPE). This term refers to a partnership between a foreign investor and a Chinese individual or company. This type of business entity requires very little capital and there is no minimum registered capital required. The freelance women operated as what would commonly be called ‘sole traders’; however, in China there is no legal entity for such an arrangement.

4.6 Stories of Career: Living with the Opportunities and Constraints

I now address the third subplot of the narrative, living with the opportunities and constraints, in the context of RQ3:

RQ3: How do professional female SIEs make sense of their careers?

Weick (1995, p. 31) suggests that people are very much part of their environments and that through their actions they create the ‘materials that become the constraints and opportunities they face’. Thus career can be considered to be an iterative and ongoing
process, involving both the reproduction of existing structures and at times their transformation.

In terms of living with the opportunities and constraints and how the women made sense of them six dominant themes emerged. These are illustrated in Figure 4.6 and discussed in the text that follows.

![Diagram of Living with Opportunities and Constraints]

**Figure 4.6** Living with opportunities and constraints: dominant themes
Source: Developed for this research.

### 4.6.1 Stories of self-enrichment

A number of the women spoke about their experiences of personal and professional growth and the opening up of their world after becoming an SIE. They felt they gained new perspectives as a result of their expatriation. Some spoke of a sense of pride, confidence and accomplishment having overcome the difficulties and challenges they encountered. In particular, each and every woman spoke of the cultural challenges they had encountered. Many of the women also made reference to the isolation they often
encountered as an SIE without organisational backing. Yet they felt they could handle ‘anything’ they might encounter in the future as a result of their ‘Beijing experience’:

*Learning a different language and learning how to function in such a different culture as China has been strangely an eye-opening experience. I have learned so much about myself. I think I have grown faster and more than ever before in my life.* (Linda)

*I feel proud of myself for doing something that’s so different and difficult. I think that’s how you grow, from doing things that are hard, but even though you kind of suffer, maybe in the middle of it … overall, I feel like I have increased my self-confidence, that I am learning how to talk to strangers, how to form relationships with people who I don’t know … getting outside my safety comfort zone. I feel like I have very much grown in those areas.* (Megan)

*To live and work in another country is mind-expanding and a rich experience … I do not believe that I would be the same person today if I had not come to China.* (Sonia)

Many of the women, such as Bronwyn, also spoke of the feeling of empowerment their SIE experience had given them and a belief that they could overcome future obstacles with a common expression of: *If you can deal with this [China], you can do anything.*

### 4.6.2 Stories of surviving not thriving

Marshall (1993, p. 90) adopted the term ‘failure to thrive’ from social work to describe women managers who ‘for no identifiable reason are failing to show satisfactory development … Their coping is directed more towards surviving than thriving, and may therefore be constraining in the long-term’. For some of the women there was clear evidence of ‘failing to thrive’. This applied predominantly to the self-employed
contract workers who explained how they often felt ‘exploited’ and ‘undervalued’ by what they saw as limited opportunities especially in terms of professional development.

Professional development was inextricably linked with ‘permanency’; but as the ‘free agent’ or ‘hired hand’ there was no sense of ‘permanency’, rather a sense of being ‘stuck’. Some of the women felt that in spite of their performance they lacked visibility, which they attributed to the fact they were engaged on a contract basis:

_They're very happy to have us as the workhorses at the bottom of the organisation, but they do not see us in terms of having a real future. Even if you're successful and you work at the weekends you will never be more than the hired hand._ (Miranda)

Further, there are those women who arrived at their current job via what was referred to as the ‘wrong path’, and hence lacked the necessary qualifications, experience, background or connections to progress further.

### 4.6.3 Stories of success and disappointment

The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (2008) defines success as ‘the accomplishment of an aim or purpose’. From this perspective it could be argued that all the women have been ‘successful’ since their objective was to live and work in Beijing and this they have achieved. Career success typically is defined as the ‘accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person’s work experiences over time’ (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005, p. 178). Subjective career success refers to an individual’s evaluation of their career, across dimensions that are important to that individual such as job satisfaction, the location of work, access to learning, and work/life balance (Van Manen, 1977, p. 9). On the other hand, objective career implies an external perspective of tangible indicators of an individual’s career situation such as income, job level, power, authority and salary (Van Manen, 1977, p. 9).
Career success may also be assessed by peer groups and in terms of accommodating work and family or other issues of life-work balance (Arthur et al., 2005, p. 178). It is interesting to note how the women viewed career success. For some, there was an acknowledgment of success defined in terms of the objective career reflecting status, power and position. On the other hand, for most of the respondents success was seen to reflect their own definition, with greater ‘independence from, rather than dependence on, traditional organizational career arrangements’ (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 6) characteristic of the subjective, boundaryless career world. Within the sample of women the depth of the subjective career success construct is suggested by Adele and Pauline:

*I think different people look at success for themselves in different ways. People need to be happy and yes I would like to be earning more money. I can’t pay off my student loans and it’s chewing my credit rating. I don’t have health insurance so if anything happened to me I can’t pay. But when people are able to feel that they are growing and for me it’s being able to contribute, not just what type of power, what type of title. It’s about am I contributing.* (Adele)

*Right now I feel I have been successful. There was a time I was not so sure but I have had the chance to build a lot of things here in China. That is something for me to measure that I am on the right track. I can see what I do. I go there. I designed that. Now it is finished and people are enjoying it. That is a good feeling.* (Pauline)

### 4.6.4 Stories of wandering

If we think of Coleridge’s ancient mariner, forced to wander the earth telling his story to pay for his crimes, there is often an association of ‘wandering’ as a form of punishment. The penalty is clear: never finding rest and never finding home. The ‘wanderers’ wander because they have failed. A number of women, including
Bronwyn, spoke of the perception of being deemed to be ‘aimlessly wandering with no direction’ by both associates in their home country as well as in Beijing. Yet they were quick to point out they are neither the victims of a curse or some adverse circumstance. Most SIEs are not lost; in reality they have chosen their circumstances. As Bronwyn compellingly put it:

"Don’t call me a wanderer. I hate it when people call me that. I planned to come to China. I didn’t just get on a plane and arrive here with no thought." (Bronwyn)

Yet another respondent says that ‘wandering’ for her is indeed a positive factor:

"With this way of life I don’t always know what’s around the corner, or where I’m going. But I like this way of life. I’m not sure I would have it any other way. Perhaps when I’m old and grey, but then perhaps that’s the time to really wander." (Penny)

Irrespective of the reason for moving to China a constant theme to emerge is that the response to the decision to move (rather than the outcome or result) depends on the individual. It appears that some SIEs may ‘wander’, searching for their nirvana or enlightenment. Some are driven by experience, others by know-how. Some only want to find meaning in their lives.

4.6.5 Stories of limitation and restraint

As there are stories of optimism and opportunity so there are stories of limitation and restraint. Earlier studies have found that a lack of job autonomy, job suitability and job variety will lead to perceptions of underemployment among SIEs (Lee, 2005). This was the case for some of the women in this study. On one hand there were those who were comfortable with their decision to temporarily ‘put careers on hold’ as it gave them the opportunity to focus on other aspects of their life:
I’m at the end [of my formal career] now ... I don’t really mind if I’m ever promoted again ... before I was very ambitious ... but I’m happy with my decision to come. This is an exciting life for me. (Stella)

On the other hand, concerns were raised regarding the impact of underemployment in the long-term and the impact it may have on overall career progression, employability and even reputation. This assessment was expressed by Sylvia:

I am the marketing manager in a small joint venture. But in reality the work I do is very basic. The title sounds impressive but the work is tedious. Hopefully a future employer will be impressed with the title and the fact that I have gained some understanding of how to work with the Chinese.

Some women spoke of the feelings of resentment, sadness and frustration they felt when their China career did not match their dreams and expectations. Clearly, this presented a dilemma: should I return home a ‘failure’ or stay and ‘tough it out’.

For some of the younger women starting families and developing careers ‘seriously’ remained on the periphery of their thoughts. Both Adele and Jane suggested that although they had chosen to come to Beijing as an opportunity to consciously ‘build their China experience’, they acknowledged that their lifestyle choices had ‘lifespans’ that would determine when ‘serious’ careers and families would eventually take precedence.
4.6.6 Stories of boundaries and barriers

The narratives suggested a number of boundaries including structural constraints, such as rules for residency, as well as cultural differences that led to feelings of *temporariness* and *foreignness*. The following quote from Jess illustrates this point:

*It is very difficult to stay permanently. There are ways and it depends so much on who you know. China isn’t very generous when it comes to handing out green cards. This is not my country but I am trying to make it my home.* (Jess)

For some women, particularly if they came from Europe, there were concerns about the current economic situation which they felt precluded them from moving on from China even if they wanted to. The following quote illustrates this finding:

*I really don’t want to be here, but the situation is so bad at home. At least I have a job here. It’s not much, but many of my friends are now unemployed. Some have even contacted me to see if I can help them move to China.* (Jenny)

For some women, their self-initiation weighed heavily particularly in terms of having to face difficult or challenging situations without the assistance or backing of a supporting organisation. Linda spoke of her concerns:

*I have a local contract, with local rules. The difference with the expat is they have a ‘home base’ and a safety net. If something goes wrong, I’m on my own. If something goes wrong with them, the company takes care of you.* (Linda)

One contentious question to emerge was: *Is Mandarin a must?* To many women who are not Mandarin speakers the language barrier is their biggest concern. On the other hand some non-Mandarin speakers had been able to secure senior positions on the basis that their client base tended to be foreigners:
Mandarin still counts as a skill and almost every job advertised requires fluent Mandarin. But I’m not sure how fluent a foreigner can ever be. I’ve been studying [the language] for eight years and I really only talk like an eight-year old. I have managed to carve out a niche for myself dealing mainly with foreigners and I rely on my local staff to deal with local matters. It may not be ideal, but somehow it works. (Sharon)

While there were differing opinions on language the women were unanimous about the need to understand cultural nuances and business practices:

You may be able to get by with limited Mandarin. But knowing how to do business is vital. Personally I have always found the Chinese very forgiving if you only have a few words of Mandarin. But they expect you to understand the protocol. Of course they won’t tell you this. But I have seen first-hand business meetings go belly up because the foreigner was disrespectful. He didn’t think so, but his behaviour to the Chinese was basically unacceptable. Of course the Chinese didn’t say so, but after lunch they didn’t return to the meeting. (Megan)

4.6.7 Images of career

In essence the focus of this study is the career experiences of professional western women living and working in Beijing as SIEs. To that end I was interested in how the participants might reflect on the concept of ‘career’ particularly in the context of contemporary ‘new’ career frameworks such as the boundaryless and protean careers represented in the research. When asked ‘what career means to you’ the women provided a number of different definitions and understandings of career and career success. The definition of career, as described by five respondents’, is presented in Table 4.4.

During the interviews I noted down the various words and phrases the women used to describe career. These are presented in Figure 4.7. These words represent what Denzin (2001, p.125) refers to as ‘seeds of interpretation’. While the women have assigned multiple meanings to the word career, the interpretation of the meanings
implies career as a concept to be diverse and dynamic encompassing a range of perceptions and meanings applicable to the individual. Thus, it could be concluded that the notion of career is a subjective one for these women.

**Table 4.4** A definition of career as understood by five respondents

Source: Developed for this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Definition of career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adele</td>
<td>It’s definitely multi-dimensional...Your career is a journey where you explore what you love and what you’re good at. Ideally those things are related to each other. You get better at it and through that process you can contribute to the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylie</td>
<td>Career is about finding some sort of challenge that excites you, makes you want to get up in the morning... that you feel you can really make a difference in terms of what you are doing and at the end of the day you enjoy it. If it doesn’t make you happy...then you need to reevaluate what you are doing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauline</td>
<td>Outside of my profession I think it is probably about making a lot of money which comes with a lot of responsibility. Something like that. But I have a bit of difficulty with that. People say ‘I need to work on my career’. Then they are 20 or 30 years in the one company not seeing their family. I don’t get that. I’m not too driven by the career. Or to spend the major percentage of my time on the job. If I have the chance to spend more time with family I will do that. I’m not 9 to 5. Sometimes I can go to the office very early but try to be back home by 3. It works out just fine for me. But it comes back to I just like what I do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alana</td>
<td>It is something that is constantly changing...you need to be constantly reinventing yourself, growing yourself, because where you are now in your career is now skills-dependent. It is not company-dependent. You need to grow your skills and market yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>I think career is somewhat definitive and I do think they end. I like the idea that a career is something you shape for yourself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.7  Images of career
Source: Developed for this research. (There is no relationship between size of the shape and the meanings of career conveyed).
4.7 Stories of Identity: Who Do You Think You Are?

This section addresses the fourth subplot of the narrative, *issues of identity*, and speaks to RQ4:

**RQ4: What does it mean to be a professional female SIE in terms of career identity?**

The dominant themes for this subplot are identified in Figure 4.8.

![Figure 4.8](image)

**Figure 4.8** Issues of identity: dominant themes
Source: Developed for this research.

This set of stories all share, at their core, a tale of pursuit, risks taken, dreams chased, a decided passion for experiencing the new and the unknown, and identities constructed. Having focussed on questions of how and why I was interested to understand how coming to China might have changed the women; in peeling back the layers of identity, *who did they think they were?*
Weick (1995) suggests that identity construction involves defining ourselves in relation to whom or what we are not and that not only do we react to the situations we face, we create our own environment, our ‘external conditions’. He further proposes that ‘the task of sensemaking resembles more closely the activity of cartography . . . The important points implied by the idea of sensemaking as cartography are the indefinite number of plausible maps that can be constructed’ (Weick, 2001, p. 9). From the data it is evident that the women have created a map — at least during their time in Beijing — they believe adequately represents ‘who they are’. These identity maps are now discussed.

4.7.1 Expatriate or foreigner

The women spoke at length about the concepts of expatriation and self-initiated expatriation and the meanings they ascribed to them. When asked how they understood these terms what emerged most clearly was that the respondents themselves did not identify with either the world of the expatriate, as it is commonly regarded, or the expression ‘self-initiated expatriate’:

*When I went back home, talking to old friends, I realised in their eyes I was an expat, but for me China was just another place to work.* (Kylie)

When asked if they considered themselves ‘expats’, from every respondent there was a resounding ‘no’. Bronwyn’s response perhaps best captures the women’s stance as a whole:

*Don’t call me an expat. You can call me a citizen of the world, but never, ever refer to me as an expat. I really hate that term.* (Bronwyn)
Perhaps most revealing were the value judgements implicit in the individual women’s understandings of the concept of expatriation. While it is not my purpose to provide an exhaustive coverage of definitions it is nevertheless important to look at commonly-held views of expatriation and the expatriate lifestyle. The word expatriate simply refers to ‘a person who is out of his/her country’. The connotations, however, are numerous and, in general, negative, with stereotypes of the western colonial expatriate on generous expatriate compensation ‘packages’ indulging in a lifestyle of ‘luxury, leisure and moral decline’ (Fechter, 2007, p.1). Another salient point is that some respondents saw the [western] expat in stereotypical terms, usually male, and possessing a range of negative characteristics, such as arrogant, objectionable, boys club, only dates Chinese girls.

In certain cases the word ‘expat’ or ‘expatriate’ has specific (usually favourable) implications for tax status and treatment and is seen as a sign of wealth and status (Fechter, 2007). On the other hand locally-engaged expatriates (who are also known as local hires and who are predominantly SIEs) are ‘unlikely to be compensated with a generous expatriate package’ (Neault, 2005, p. 150). For the most part the SIE women interviewed rejected the notion of being associated with the traditional expat world based on issues of ‘packages’ and thus perceived inequalities. As a local hire their packages did not include, for example, home leave airfares and, more crucially, international schooling for children. Those women with school-age children unable to afford the costly international schooling fees were forced to repatriate, often at the expense of their career advancement.

The women more often than not considered themselves as ‘a foreigner working in China’. They did not find it difficult to get to know locals; indeed most lived in ‘local’ Chinese areas rather than expat enclaves. They did, however, acknowledge that
no matter how much they immersed themselves in the local culture they would always be seen to be a ‘foreigner’. Sharon’s story exemplifies this viewpoint:

*My Chinese friends have this joke, how can you tell a foreigner in Beijing? Answer: They stand at the [pedestrian] crossing waiting for the cars to stop. Of course I laugh too, because that’s what the newcomers do all the time. I think it’s a great joke and I tell all my friends back home. But jokes aside, I know the Chinese are laughing at me too. No matter how long I am here I will always be the ‘laowai’, the foreigner. They don’t mean it nastily, it’s just what I am and always will be—the foreigner.* (Sharon)

When asked how they understood the term *self-initiated expatriate* respondents found it difficult to pigeonhole themselves as such:

*I don’t really understand this term [SIE]. I’m just me working here in China. I think of myself perhaps as a foreigner working in China or a citizen of the world.* (Pauline)

Some women were even dismissive of the term as reflected in Madeline’s response:

*I’m sorry to sound rude, but really I have no idea what you mean by this [the term SIE]. What does it mean?* (Madeline)

As SIEs are a fairly recent phenomenon it is not surprising that the definitions and terminology used in this field are contentious, even problematic. Although the term has remained fairly consistent in the literature since 2010, Doherty et al. (2013; p. 99) argue that further clarification and critique is now required. This is in part a reflection of the growing complexity of global mobility, as well as a shift in the underlying understanding and meaning of SIE as a concept (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Doherty et al., 2013a). It is a position that I also support.
4.7.2 The shengnus

Sheng nu 剩女 commonly translated to ‘leftover women’ is a derogatory term made popular by the All-China Women’s Federation in 2007 and refers to single, unmarried Chinese professional women in their late twenties and beyond (www.bbc.com.news ). Moreover, the patriarchal culture of China lacks positive concepts and values for describing independent career women who do not fit into traditional domestic roles (To, 2013, p. 1). While the term is not directed at western women as such, a number of the single respondents in their 30s spoke of inadvertently being felt to feel like ‘old yellowed pearls’:

It’s because I’m single, liberated and free that I have been able to travel and come to China. However, instead of seeing me as such I often feel caught up in the shengnu labelling. [Local] people want to know why I’m not married. They can be very direct and make me like a failure because I don’t have a husband. So here I am feeling a great success because I feel I have made it and the Chinese feel I’m a failure. Sometimes it’s annoying as though this is all there is to life. I feel sorry for my [Chinse] secretary as she is under enormous pressure to marry. Occasionally I go to the temple with her where she prays for a husband. (Christine)

4.8 A Western Professional Woman in Beijing

Historically, a commonly held view (myth) for the limited number of female CAEs has been the perceived resistance from ‘host country superiors, subordinates, colleagues and clients’ (Izraeli et al., 1980) to transact business with foreign women (e.g., Adler, 1987; Altman & Shortland, 2008; Izraeli, 1980). Yet research has appeared to dispel this belief (e.g., Adler, 1987, 1993; Harcar & Harcar, 2004).

The women commented on the impact of gender, indicating specific concerns where their gender could be a challenge as well as an advantage. In some cases they
noted that gender ‘really didn’t make a difference’ (Bronwyn), while in others they experienced advantages associated with being a female, including the ‘oddity’ of being a western female living and working in Beijing and the acceptance of females in their particular roles.

The main area where the women sometimes felt a sense of unease related to ‘corporate entertaining’. Their discomfort was further compounded by the fact that entertaining, drinking and banquets are all considered important ways to build guanxi. As Megan explains:

*The formal banquets are fine – they begin at 6.30 and are finished by 8/8.30. The problem is the more informal business entertaining. You start with dinner and then there is almost always something after, usually karaoke or a foot massage. I don’t mind karaoke but it can be quite awkward when it’s in a private room with hostesses and I’m the only woman. Usually, I sing my one song and then leave. That’s acceptable. To refuse to go is not.* (Megan)

Even dinners with the ubiquitous and countless toasts could be problematic. However, the women who were engaged in business roles found their gender could be an advantage when seeking to avoid the excesses of alcohol associated with the *ganbei* [toasting] during formal dinners with business associates:

*As a [western] woman it’s not too difficult to get out of ganbei-ing. As long as you avoid alcohol altogether at the dinners you can just toast with tea. I know this is almost impossible for the [western] guys and even my Chinese girlfriends complain they are expected to get involved in the drinking games.* (Nicole)
4.9  Time to Go?

This section addresses the final part of the narrative, the end. Or perhaps it should be rephrased as ‘unknown endings’. The theme of repatriation was not included in my original framework; however, during the interviews I was interested to know what would make the women leave China. Further, would leaving China signify the end of their SIE experience or the beginning? The respondents’ reasons for leaving China are listed in Table 4.5.

As the table indicates a number of reasons to leave Beijing were presented by the respondents. At least half the women said that they would leave for a better job or in search of new work opportunities. Five of the women cited ‘family reasons’ and for three there was a sense of ‘forced’ repatriation due to visa problems and the cost of schooling. Reasons to leave did not imply repatriation to the home country. Many of the women expressed a desire to continue their global journey. At the same time, some noted the difficulties they would face adjusting to their home country, both socially and professionally:

There comes a time when you have been away from home for so long, you cannot go back. Friends have moved on and you feel as though you have nothing in common with them anyway. (Penny)
### Table 4.5  Reasons for repatriation/leaving China

Source: Developed for this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant category</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Reason for repatriation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Further education</td>
<td>Adele</td>
<td>Continue with higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job untenable/lack of opportunities</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Work no longer meaningful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle/identity development factors</td>
<td>Bronwyn, Stella</td>
<td>Semi retirement/lifestyle choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hilary</td>
<td>Able to be full-time artist in another location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>Change in lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cathy, Claire, Maggie</td>
<td>More opportunities for business; lifestyle/opportunities for husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career advancement</td>
<td>Alana, Diane, Jane, Jess, Jenny, Kylie, Linda, Madeline, Nicole</td>
<td>Better job/career advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural barriers</td>
<td>Nina, Thea</td>
<td>Visa restrictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family matters</td>
<td>Pauline</td>
<td>Child’s schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Penny, Sharon, Sophie, Sylvia</td>
<td>Family reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different opportunities</td>
<td>Miranda, Megan, Sonia, Tara, Vicky</td>
<td>Looking for different career/work opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stories of the future

The women talked about their ideas both in the short and the long term—about their plans for the coming year, as well as their visions for ‘some time in the future’. While such issues would be central to a further longitudinal study, insofar as this study is concerned what is of greater concern is how the women's ideas about the future fit into their career narratives, and the patterns of thinking and sensemaking which have been explored thus far.

In talking about the future the women's ideas can be divided into four broad groupings. First there are those who describe their future in terms of their business entities—how they see their businesses developing and where they see them leading. In contrast, the women who fall into the second group focus more on their own professional growth using China as an opportunity to enhance their professional skills. The third group are those whose visions of the future have more to do with how they want to live their lives generally, about the balance of work, family, friends and self. Finally, the fourth group’s focus is on whatever makes them the happiest and most fulfilled, rather than on following a prescribed career trajectory.

4.10 A Typology of Career Types

In the preceding sections I have presented the six subplots that make up the narrative. Of course the typical career does not exist among the participants and is unlikely in a larger population of female SIEs. Nonetheless, commonalities in types of career outcomes transpired which led me to develop the following typology.
4.10.1 Constructing career identities through metaphorical stories

Formal career theory and everyday popular career thinking and dialogue abound with metaphors (Baruch, 2004). The most basic conceptualisation of career is as a journey (Inkson & Amundson, 2002, p. 100). Although Inkson and Amundson (2002, p. 103) argue that in the ‘less structured new career environment’ the more open-ended term ‘travel’ should perhaps replace ‘journey’. Images of career, such as career path, career ladder, fast track, window of opportunity, glass ceiling and story of my life, typically give physical or visual texture to abstract concepts and thereby provide a currency for understanding one’s own situation and those of others (Inkson, 2006, p. 49). In the context of the new careers the notions of the protean career and boundaryless career emphasise change and flexibility as individuals craft their own careers (Poehnell & Amundson, 2002). The career as a ‘self-designed apprenticeship’ describes how individuals self-customise the construction of their career rather than adhere to a prescribed blueprint (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999, pp. 45–47). In this instance the emphasis is on creativity and improvisation as the individual self-directs their learning and development pathway.

4.10.2 Metaphor in practice

Within this study two distinct images come to mind that might best describe the career experiences of the respondents as SIEs living and working in Beijing. First, each and every story exhibits a degree of self-designed apprenticeship whereby the respondents have been proactive in developing their own career. Second, the jazz metaphor has been used to describe new careers with an emphasis on improvisation, spontaneity and self-directed development (Arthur et al., 1999, pp. 45–47). The idea of each respondent moving ‘to the beat of her own drum’ seems particularly apt with the different national, regional and local musical cultures that give rise to the many distinctive jazz styles (Jackson, 2002).
The jazz legend, Duke Ellington, in an interview entitled ‘The art is in the cooking’ (1962) made clear it is not what goes into the music—the meat or how it is served—that makes the difference: it’s what the musicians do with the ingredients they have gathered (cited in Tucker, 1993, p. 332). There are many different examples of improvisation and what the respondents did with their ingredients. These range from greater opportunities with novel and fulfilling career outcomes to ‘boring and tuneless’ disappointing solos (Arthur et al., 2002, p. 46).

Inspired by Gareth Morgan’s (1986) landmark use of the ‘multiple metaphor’ to analyse organisations, Inkson and Amundsen (2002) identified ten ‘archetypal’ metaphors for career. The metaphors are the career as: *a journey, an inheritance, a fit, a sequence of seasons, a growth, creative work, a network, a resource, a story* and *a cultural artefact* (Inkson & Amundsen, 2002; pp. 102–105).

In considering the archetypal metaphors those that seem most applicable to this study’s sample are the career as: *a journey* (travel); *creative work*—composed and constructed by the individual; *a story* comprising high, low and turning points; and *a network* of relationships. As noted previously, the women’s networks (*guanxi* were imperative in a high collectivist society such as China, characterised by tight social frameworks in which people distinguish between in-groups and out-groups (Hofstede, 1980, p. 45).

**4.10.3 Types of careers**

Four recurring types of career emerged in the analysis of the respondents’ narratives. These ‘types’ represented two common elements, characterised by (i) varying degrees of structural constraints or boundaries and (ii) five multifaceted personality constructs. These qualities underpin the ‘boundaryless career model’ suggested by Sullivan and Arthur (2006), whereby mobility is viewed along two continua, physical and psychological.
For the purposes of this study boundaries are considered at the individual (such as financial constraints), organisational (such as employers and occupations) and national (such as legal barriers to work) levels. No single definition of personality is accepted by all schools of thought; however, a key idea is that personality represents personal characteristics that lead to consistent patterns of behaviour (Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman, 1992, p. 76). I acknowledge that generally personality psychologists (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991) agree that there are five domains of personality based on ‘Norman’s Big Five’ personality dimensions (extraversion, emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience) (Norman, 1963). However, from the women’s stories I identified five core personality dimensions that I believe better fitted their narratives and were common to the respondents in this study. These are:

1. High self-efficacy: the belief that one can perform adequately in a situation (Bandura, 1982).

2. Positive self-esteem: the evaluation an individual makes on themselves of their own behaviour, abilities, appearance and worth (Ellis & Taylor, 1983).


5. Persistence or resilience: related to either career or personal setbacks. An ability to survive adversities and setbacks (Siebert, 2005. p. iii).

The career identities are framed by the four metaphors: transformer, avatar, castaway and roadblock. It should be stressed that the typology, including the proposed boundaries and
personality dimensions, is but an initial mapping of what a professional woman’s career might look like as an SIE. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to test the validity of each of these dimensions as such the typology represents a step towards developing a framework for the careers of female SIEs. Moreover, it serves as a platform for a more robust discussion and understanding of the array of career patterns for female SIEs in particular and, possibly, SIEs in general. Further, the metaphors are not static. They were selected for their literal and figurative meaning (Inkson, 2006). However, they may well be refined depending on future research design and variables. To that end I concur with Andresen and Biemann (2013) that further research is needed to divide SIEs into subgroups so that what may be very different motivations, attitudes and behaviours can be separated.

The typology offered is presented in Figure 4.9 and shows possible linkages between ‘boundaries’ and the five nominated ‘personality dimensions’. These groupings are exemplars of their type rather than mutually exclusive categories. Both can range from high to low, giving the four career combinations.

![Figure 4.9](image-url)  
**Figure 4.9** A typology of professional SIE women’s careers  
Source: Developed for this research.
4.10.4 The four career types

Transformers

The word *transformation* is synonymous with the word *metamorphosis*. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary’s* (1978, p. 2346) definition is ‘the action of changing in form, shape or appearance’. Within this group there are noticeable examples of both a high ‘protean’ career orientation and a ‘boundaryless’ attitude characterised by high personal agency and few boundaries standing in the way of reinvention. The key personal resource is high self-esteem and the propensity to take more risks and persist in pursuing formerly unimagined or unconventional career plans. In a general sense, transformation is positively related to attempts to achieve or a willingness to expend effort to accomplish goals. In short, transformers could be perceived as jamming joyfully in the ongoing composition of their lives (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 2003, p. 46). Hilary’s comment exemplifies the transformers’ catchcry: ‘I used to be an accountant now I’m a jewellery maker.’

Avatars

In computing terms an avatar is the graphical representation of the user or the user’s alter ego or character (www.techterms.com/definition/avatar). However, the term is probably best known as the hybrid human-alien in the 2009 film of the same name. In the context of the study the word avatar connotes those individuals who build on their pre-China knowledge, skill base, career focus and even job title. Members of this group are focussed on finding ways to enhance their established (pre-China) skills and adapt them to the local labour market. To that end, unlike transformers, few physical obstacles stand in their way. The key personal resource is self-efficacy and the belief that they have the ability needed to continue to perform adequately in their nominated career. The avatars’ catchcry is exemplified by
Madeline’s comment: ‘At home I was a marketing manager and here in Beijing I’m still a marketing manager.’

**Castaways**

The term castaway implies ‘a person who has been shipwrecked and stranded in an isolated place’ (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2008). At the same time there is a suggestion of resourcefulness and of making the best of a difficult situation. For this group their careers as SIEs in Beijing have not developed. If anything their careers have, at best, stalled and even gone backwards. These are the women who tend to be underemployed and underutilised (Lee, 2005). In effect they have been cast aside. They are working in a temporary ‘survival’ mode rather than a ‘thriving’ job in the belief that one day they will be able to pursue their desired career path. The women in this group tend to be bounded by both societal and institutional circumstances, yet what is notable about these women is their high level of resilience despite their career set-backs. Often they talked about using their time to build a different skill set. Alana’s comment reflects the castaways’ catchcry: ‘*Here I am in China underemployed. Right now I’m looking for jobs and keeping busy.*’

**Roadblocks**

A roadblock is a ‘barrier or barricade’ (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2008). For the most part this group of respondents are the ‘economic refugees’—forced to initiate their expatriation to China in search of work. Unlike the ‘castaways’ who have been unable to find work in their chosen field the members of this group have done so. However, they are disheartened, even overwhelmed, by the challenges of the new environment. It could be argued that they have ‘given up’, hence their low level of personal agency. In effect they have
‘flat lined’, meaning their heart is not in it. The roadblocks’ catchcry is exemplified by Jenny’s comment: *I just want to go home.*

### 4.10.5 Postscript

From the analysis of the distinct career types it is apparent each is aligned with a different degree of personal agency: self-esteem for the transformer, self-efficacy for the avatar, resilience for the castaway and loss of personal resources for the roadblock. To further illustrate the different career outcomes I have selected four stories that speak to each career type which now follow. Bronwyn was selected to illustrate the avatar. She does not feel she could have achieved what she is doing outside China as she lacks formal qualifications in the area she has built her business in. Yet, she took a well-honed, pre-China skill base career which enabled her to consolidate and grow her current enterprise. Cathy is representative of the transformer. Her focus is on *not what you have done but more in what you are prepared to do now.* Alana represents the castaways. Since coming to Beijing she has had a series of jobs but nothing she feels matches her skills. Finally there is Jane, the roadblock, who followed her father’s advice and took a job in Beijing due to the economic circumstances at home. She clearly does not want to be in China but feels no way out especially as she now has a child.
Bronwyn’s Story: The Avatar

The ability to repackage her skills, talent and experience led Bronwyn to a new country and a reconstruction of her career. British by birth for 16 years she lived in France and for eight of those years she had, by her own admission:

*Opted out of having a career [while raising my family], though having said that I taught at university, and interpreted. But it wasn’t like a career.*

Once she and her family made the decision to move to Beijing she systematically set about acquiring and developing a range of skills she believed would bridge the divide between the old and the new. She enrolled in a Mandarin course and completed postgraduate studies in international business. Despite no formal qualifications in translation and interpretation within three months of arriving in Beijing Bronwyn secured a job based on her fluency and proficiency in French.

*In a way that is how I got my company going. It was a brilliant job. We worked in Chinese, English, French, and Spanish. I loved it - all these languages! Then I was asked if I would translate a document from French to English. The next thing I knew I was being sent a lot of work and I began to build a small business on the side. My boss knew it and it was like having huge amounts of pocket money.*

*Eventually, I got fed up with [the company] because the work was becoming very repetitive and everyone was saying you should set up your own business. So I quit and then spent a year freelancing. A year later I decided I was going to go for it. I set up a Hong Kong holding company and established a WOFE.*

Reflecting on her move to China Bronwyn contemplates the impact on her career:

*I missed out on getting on the career track so I’m doing this huge leapfrog here. That’s how I see it. I have a really bad CV but one day I hope to sell my business and catch up on all those other things [like a pension]. If you met me today you would think I had 30 years in the corporate world. My business has allowed me to do things I could never have done before. If I was outside China I could never have done these things. I don’t have the formal qualifications and nobody would have hired me. But here it has been different. Here all I had to do was prove myself. Once I did that and had the runs on the board there was no looking back.*
Clearly Bronwyn has become the architect of her future building on long-held language skills notwithstanding the fact she has no formal credentials. Her business model resonates with the concept of the self-initiated expatriation in so far as her employees are all ‘freelancers’:

Running my own company I depend on freelancers. Freelancers are often underutilised and underpaid. Because I have been a freelancer myself I feel I have a really good relationship with them. People freelance for many different reasons - a lot of it has to do with independence. Often they are not that interested in money but rather having freedom to write or make a film, and travel. Because I'm a bit rootless myself I can cope working with freelancers, but a lot of people can’t. I’m good for freelancers because I'm a buffer for them. They only have to deal with me. People abuse them and manipulate them and often they don’t recognise their true value. I pay my freelancers well. If there is someone like me who can say here is some work then it works for both of us.

Bronwyn’s future career is indisputably linked to building on and developing her core strength —her native-level fluency in another language, thus enabling her to undertake translation and interpretation work:

I've got some really good portable skills and I've made a real effort to develop those because I know it's going to be this life of moving around. Even if I'm not it's still great to be an interpreter or translator or an editor. I know a lot about websites and all those things that are very portable. This is my business model. I call it building my way out of China. I am building my way to wherever I want to be. I want to be able to go wherever I want. The nest will disintegrate and the mum will fly the coop by choice.

Bronwyn is clearly comfortable with her career management strategy of building on and enhancing a core skill set. Momentarily she contemplated an alternative route:

I have thought about going into the corporate world. But I wouldn't do it. I would have to change me and the essence that is me. I might be able to do it part-time as long as I was in charge of how flexible my hours were. I have enough skills now and runs on the board to patch together a job if necessary. I don’t worry because I totally believe in myself - in a humble way, not in an arrogant way. In a way I know that I can make it.
Cathy’s Story: The Transformer

By all accounts Cathy had the ‘perfect’ career. In her late-30s she had a strong corporate high flying background with a multi-national company. She had worked hard, travelled a great deal and was very well paid with substantial prospects for further advancement. Her husband enjoyed equal career success and their two-career relationship worked well. Their dual incomes afforded them a comfortable lifestyle. In effect it was her husband’s job that brought her to China. However, it represented a ‘right place, right time’ opportunity:

*I was frankly feeling a bit burnt out. I had travelled extensively and really done the corporate thing for a while. I had loved what I had done, but was also excited about coming to a new country and taking on a new challenge. As far as I was concerned the time was right to reassess where to now.*

Cathy stressed that initially she saw China as a chance to recharge her batteries. Her intention in those early days was to simply take in China. At no point did she feel that she was a trailing spouse and emphasised that the decision to come to China was mutually agreed to.

*I have never felt poor me nor have I been displaced. It was very much a mutual choice, a family decision to come to China, despite our daughter being only four at the time.*

Not long after her arrival in Beijing, Cathy began to get phone calls from associates at home seeking her help with small projects. This started the process of her competing for work for which she was well qualified and to which she could apply her intellectual capacity. However, by now she knew she no longer wanted to be part of the corporate world she had come from. She wanted a mix of freelancing and entrepreneurship. Yet, the challenge facing her was how to metamorphose from a structured corporate world to an entrepreneur world, especially in an alien marketplace, China.

As a starting point she accepted a position with a consulting company that enabled her to work with a large Chinese team:

*I had the comfort of visiting clients with a somewhat well-known brand and I was able to run an operation. It gave me the chance to roll up my sleeves and have a bit of security. I learned so much that year. But what happened was they went through a lot of organisational change. I was feeling much more confident and I was happy to part ways. It’s what I needed to have the confidence to move forward independently.*

This experience validated Cathy’s belief that she was capable of transforming her career.
I was now confident in terms of my capability and what I could deliver for the client. I was coming in with my brand (my company) but at that time very few people knew who I was. Also people were asking who are your clients and at that point I might have had three. It’s hard when you’re knocking on the doors of the multinationals. But having had the work experience, what it did was it validated my capability in a new market. I might be good working in North America, but am I good here?

Cathy’s makeover from corporate heavy weight to freelancer is now established.

I love the diversity of what I do. The complexity. Even the stress. I love that. I love the freedom. I don’t mind working the long hours, but I love the idea that on an afternoon I can get a manicure, pedicure and my hair done. I love the flexibility. I like the fact that I am not bound to particular client or particular project and I find that I’m now creating some of the best work I have ever done. In the corporate world you only get these opportunities if the company is going through a major change initiate.

A difficult decision now facing Cathy is at what stage does she upscale her business. Does she continue with her transformation – her conversion from corporate specialist to freelance ‘jacks of all trades’? Recently, she flirted with the idea of applying for a corporate job which was advertised worldwide. She was judged to be the best candidate but was offered a local package because she is already based in Beijing, even though the position is not a local one. She was particularly disappointed that there were no benefits offered. This proved to be a huge motivator to continue her own business. She feels that if she is going to work for a company again then the money talks—she knows what she is worth and she has already acquired the skills and experience. In short she wants a lot of dollars to give up the freedom of having her hair and nails done when she feels like it.
Alana’s Story: The Castaway

Alana is 41, single and holds postgraduate qualifications. She has had a varied professional background, although she acknowledges a traditional career has ‘never been me’.

*I never aspired to join a company and work my way up. It was never on my radar.*

Lifelong learning has typically been Alana’s career hallmark. At one stage she was the budget director for a large agency responsible for an expense budget of US$180 million and a capital budget in excess of US$1.5 billion. Despite a solid career progression she felt restless and at times unfilled. Then her career took a serendipitous turn. In 2005 she was at a conference in an Asian city and was offered a two-day stop-over in an Asian city of her choice en route home. She chose Beijing and within those two days she realised that China was a country she wanted to spend more time in.

*There was something in the air. So much change going on. The energy was electric and I wanted to be part of it.*

She returned home and set about trying to find a way back to the ‘Middle Kingdom’. She tried every avenue she could think of to get posted to China by a company, but to no avail. An English language school offered her a year’s contract, but she felt this was not for her. Eventually she applied for two weeks holiday leave from her job, packed her bags and went to Beijing. Once in China she set about looking for a job. She came across a company that needed a foreigner. As she explained: ‘It all sounded a bit dodgy, but they were offering a one-year visa and I got to stay in Beijing’. She returned home, resigned and three months later she found herself living and working in Beijing as an SIE.

*I was doing some fairly menial things, but I was job hunting and I was going to interviews. I’d worked in finance and managed large government budgets and understood legal issues. I managed to get a few finance-related interviews. But once in the interview I was quizzed about not having a qualification in finance. ‘You don’t know anything about finance’, they’d say. I tried to explain I worked with finance people who taught me. I took a few classes on the side, I took some accounting, and I worked very closely with our lawyers so I made sure I would understand the law. But it was obvious I didn’t fit the box. They [the HR department] wanted me to fit the box. In China they always want you to be able to fit the box which is odd because China doesn’t fit the box.*
With doors to the MNCs and joint venture businesses firmly shut Alana continued to network in the hope someone might offer her a ‘proper’ job. ‘In China networking is so very important. Although it is difficult I introduced myself to as many people as I could’. Eventually through her networks Alana heard about an international postgraduate program in business—something she had never considered, but she realised it would enable her to obtain the much sought after credentials she needed. Alana secured a job with a local agency; however, when her contract expired after nine months she decided not to renew it. At this point she had been in Beijing 18 months and had spent, by her reckoning, year job hunting. Later, after attending a career trade fair she managed to obtain a position with a university teaching business.

*It’s a semester by semester contract. In China the universities normally give the foreigners long-term contracts but this college likes to keep the foreigners on a short leash. So now I’m at the university and I’m still looking. I’ve been there two academic years and I’ve had my resume out there. I had a first interview the other day for a position that would give me a lot of internal and external exposure and I’d meet a lot of companies which would be really great exposure. With my background a lot of people look at my resume and they go hello. If it’s a Chinese hire manager they don’t know what to do with me. I don’t tick the boxes. I don’t fit into a box. If I did they would have more uses for me. So here I am in China underemployed.*

She continues: *I came with a vague plan. It’s: I want to be in China and I will find a job when I get here. I had no idea what I was going to be doing. I didn’t want to teach English because I had done that already and I didn’t want to do what I had already done. I’m bored now. I read a lot and I’m studying Chinese on my own. That’s certainly good, but I’m bored. I do a lot of volunteering and mentoring to keep me busy.*

As the interview drew to a close I asked Alana what advice she might give another woman considering a move to China.

*If someone were to ask me now about coming over I’d say line up your job before you get here unless you’re willing to teach English. Now with most of the multinationals it’s ‘we don’t want foreigners’. Now they’re trying to hire locals. They want sustainability. They want to localise their operations. You want your local executive to be Chinese.*

Despite the setbacks Alana has experienced she remains optimistic that a better job will come her way.
Jane’s Story: The Roadblock

Against her better judgement Jane followed her father’s advice and took up a job in Beijing. Her first choice was Hong Kong but there were no vacancies there. She was hesitant to seek employment at all this way as it was via her father’s network. She felt that whatever she did it ought to be of her own making. However, with the fall out of the global financial crisis hitting hard at least it was a job.

_I didn’t want to have my father’s help. I didn’t want to have to say my father got me this job. But at the same time I didn’t want to be too proud and miss an opportunity. I thought it would be a good stepping stone if I wanted to work somewhere else later on. It made sense as part of my career plan and to increase my chances of getting better jobs in the future._

From a somewhat reluctant start Jane has been with the company for six years. During this time she has married and has a four-year old child.

_The job has partly met my expectations. I have learned a lot since I started, but the way my life has turned out [getting married] I want to stay in Beijing and this job limits me in finding another job here. My current job is R&D [research and development]. I really want to do merchandising which is one of the most important parts of the industry. I can do the job but I don’t have the direct experience. This is a roadblock. I want to stay in Beijing but the industry is small. If I had had merchandising experience I would have other options. R&D is a dead end job but because I’ve done this job so long it makes sense for the company to keep me in this position rather than move me elsewhere where I don’t have the same level of experience._

Jane is disappointed the company won’t invest in her despite her loyalty. She also believes that her career has stalled because she has a child and her gender not because her job performance is actually different or lacking.

_It’s easy to jump ship and companies don’t want to invest in you. They have low expectations of people. I think it is also because I’m a young woman. I have seen a guy with same background as me, same age and he had 10 times more opportunities than me. He had way more opportunities but he wasn’t worth investing in. They should have invested in me because I could have done a whole lot more. Also I got pregnant soon after I came to this company. It played a role in how they felt about me. But it gave me more reasons to work harder. I have basically missed the boat._
I know a thing about demotivating. A colleague (male) who was hired after me and I had a conversation about our taxes. I found out he was a much higher bracket but his position was under me. In fact he was supposed to be assisting me. I think there is something fundamentally wrong when a company allows this to happen. Within three days I went and asked for a raise. I was so beyond angry that I would have left there and then and just gone and taught English. I knew I had to be prepared to leave if they didn’t give me the raise. They did and I was happy for about a year. I don’t want to think they did this because he was a guy, but what other reason do they have for paying him more.

Jane has been looking for other positions and has considered moving to Shanghai. However her partner’s work keeps him in Beijing.

I had two good prospects. I had an interview but it was a complete disaster and a complete shock for me. They offered me a salary of 3900 RMB (5,000 RMB a month). Because I am already in China I can’t be considered as a foreign hire. This is not realistic as my rent is 4900 alone and I have a child. I don’t know if they did this because they thought I was living off my boyfriend, but whatever it’s just a complete joke and makes no sense. I felt very disrespected. The position would have been interesting and I could have learned a lot more.

Jane further laments what she sees as the discriminatory nature of being a local hire.

I’m not the only one who has this issue [as a local hire] but it makes no sense. I’m already here. I’ve past the whole thing when people first come here and the period of adjustment. I have the language. I’ve proven myself. I’ve past the minimum three year requirement of experience. It’s not fair. I have everything but I’m just here [in her current position].

In an apparent state of dismay Jane concludes her chances of moving and finding another position are slim. In essence she feels trapped and disillusioned by the multiple obstacles she faces.

We have been without an R &D manager for a long time but they are not promoting me. They seem to have a lot of reservations. Basically I’m too young and a woman. But I’ve been doing the job. What’s the hold up here? How can I prove myself if they don’t give me the opportunity? I feel that once you pass from under that spotlight they will not give you the chance. It’s only if they are desperate they promote from within. They keep hiring from outside and that doesn’t make sense.

If I didn’t have a daughter I would have left long ago and made other decisions – leave China/move to Shanghai. So because of that I’m like a ‘sitting duck’.
4.9.1 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter focussed on the narrative of the research addressing the four research questions. The findings from the qualitative methodology were presented to build as full a picture as possible of the women’s careers as SIEs living and working in Beijing. The women’s evaluations of their experiences were presented by exploring six subplots and associated themes: reasons for moving to Beijing, career opportunities and constraints, living with the opportunities and constraints, stories of identity, what it means to be a western woman living and working in Beijing and finally stories of leaving. The reasons for leaving Beijing were presented with the caveat that these are conjectures only. Yet a significant number of the respondents were optimistic about their future direction and the value of living and working in Beijing both at a professional as well as personal level. The findings continued to support the suggestion that SIEs exhibit both protean and boundaryless career orientations. They were open to the challenges they encountered and adapted where necessary. The final section of the chapter presented four types of career outcomes that can be attributed to the women.

The next and final chapter reviews and discusses the findings in relation to the research objectives. Furthermore, the discussion focuses on implications for organisations and SIEs themselves as part of the contribution to knowledge.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Narrative creates its meaning by noting the contributions that actions and events make to a particular outcome and then configures these parts into a whole episode.
—Polkinghorne, (1998, p.6)

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter summarises the objectives of the study, the methodology chosen and the methods employed. Insights gained from the women’s stories address each of the four research questions. The practical and theoretical implications of the study are presented, as well as the research limitations and suggestions for further research in this area. Contribution to knowledge is framed in the context of professional practice given that I have undertaken a professional doctoral degree. Finally, my reflections on the research journey are presented.

5.2 Research Overview

This study sought to provide a greater understanding of the career experiences of 31 western professional women who had initiated their expatriation to live and work in Beijing, China. To that end it addresses Doherty et al.’s (2011, p. 608) ‘call to action’ for further research in the areas of global mobility and cross-border talent—one of the first papers I read in researching my topic. Additionally, the study takes up ‘career issues’ as a topic of future research proposed at the European Academy of Management conference (EURAM) 2012 (Haslberger & Vaiman, 2013, p. 6).
The women are a heterogeneous group with respect to age, marital status, family, pre-China career, employment arrangements in Beijing, years of work history, years of residency in Beijing and level of fluency in Mandarin. They are homogeneous with respect to career status (professional), socioeconomic status (lower-middle to upper-middle class) and countries of origin (all are from western countries). Prior to moving to China the participants were working in professional positions at middle to senior management levels, with the exception of one recent graduate. Over half the women in the sample chose to become SIEs in the middle of their already developed careers. One participant had had continuous international experience as an SIE since the early stages of her career.

The study was located in the interpretive interactionist paradigm in which interpretation is understood to refer to ‘the attempt to explain meaning’ (Denzin, 2001, p. 119). Meaning, in this sense, ‘involves the signification, purpose, and consequence of a set of experiences for an individual (Denzin, 2001 p. 119). To provide a greater understanding of the women’s careers as SIEs the study required a methodology that resonated with the aims and objectives of the research as well as myself as the researcher. Given my motivation in undertaking this study was influenced by my own life as an SIE, I wanted to get as close as possible to the participants. Further, Vance and Paik (2001) indicate that research regarding women expatriates could be enhanced by including women who are either under current assignment or have already completed their assignment as an expatriate. In addition, Stroh et al. (2002) comment on the importance of speaking directly to expatriates who have had first-hand experience of working abroad. I chose to focus on women who were currently living in Beijing as SIEs. I did not seek out repatriated SIEs but I did raise with the women issues of repatriation.
The qualitative research approach allowed for the representation of reality through the eyes of the women in their descriptions of their lived experiences. Narrative inquiry was chosen as fitting methodology for the following reasons. First, it lends itself to the storyteller and the listener sharing the common deep structures or common meaning of an event (Bruner, 1987). This deep structure or common meaning relies on the knowledge the researcher brings to the story and is increased by ‘an empathetic understanding of the “other”’—or in other words, having had experiences similar to those of the “other” (Franzosi, 1998, p. 547). Second, the study attempts to interpret and reconstruct the experiences of the participants in order to learn more about their career experiences as SIEs and narrative inquiry provided the best means of doing so. Third, the use of the narrative inquiry framework contributed to thick description, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research and of its account of the women’s experiences.

Fourth, narrative inquiry allowed the interpretation of individual narratives crafted against the understandings of career and identity explored in the literature review. These interpretations responded to the specific research questions and provided new knowledge about the women as SIEs. Additionally, narrative inquiry provided the analytic basis for the discovery of themes across the narratives. These themes were explored to better understand the career experiences of the women as SIEs.

Fifth, narrative inquiry enabled the telling of both the ‘participants’ stories’ in their own words and the ‘stories of participants’ in my words as the researcher. It can be argued that all research reporting is, in fact, the reporting of the participants’ stories, in that the researcher selects and (re)constructs what appears in the report. However, the use of Polkinghorne’s (1995) framework enabled the development of deliberately different narrative frames, keeping the constructed stories as close as possible to the context and to the tellers.
The stories appearing in the study address the purpose of the research, provide responses to the research questions and illustrate the professional lives of the participants.

5.3 Insights and Outcomes

The objective of this study was to offer new insights into an under-researched area, namely women who self-initiate their expatriation, and to understand the careers of western professional women who moved to Beijing, China, to live and work as SIEs. The study aimed to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the construction of their careers, the factors that affected their decisions to come to Beijing, and their career experiences.

Four research questions were generated to help answer and explain these issues. The first question sought to uncover the drivers of the women’s self-expatriation. Push–pull theory provides an important explanation: women weigh up the benefits of expatriation—they compare the career and economic opportunities in the host country with the advantages of escaping career barriers and other areas of dissatisfaction they are experiencing in their home countries. Also influential are proactivity, family relationships and life stage. The second question examined how women SIEs fared in their careers once in China. The results reveal that self-initiated expatriation can assist in the development of a woman’s career progression, but there can also be negative consequences arising from underemployment. The focus of the third question was on how professional female SIEs made sense of their careers, while the fourth question was concerned with exploring the women’s professional identities.

Evidence that the research aims and objectives were met is presented in the following appraisal of each of the research questions.
5.3.1 Research Question One

Beginning with the first research question: *How do professional western women explain and account for their decisions to become SIEs?*, the research findings indicated agreement with the extant literature. The factors that influence people’s decisions to become SIEs are complex and varied (Al Ariss et al., 2012). Simply put, SIEs are not all the same. This was clearly the case in this sample and it was evident that there were a range of contributing factors involved in the final decision to move to Beijing. Contributing turning-point experiences and influences included: *having no ties, dissatisfaction with current lifestyle, the right timing, desire for a challenge* and *seeking new horizons*.

What is evident in this study is the degree to which career emerged as an essential dimension of the women’s lives, disconfirming earlier studies that suggest the fundamental factor influencing the mobility of SIEs was primarily adventure and the desire to experience other cultures (e.g. Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Thorn, 2009). Doherty (2013, p. 100) suggests that while career might not seem to be a primary ‘driver’, it may well be the vehicle through which becoming an SIE is realised. For all the women in the study there was a strong focus on career as a factor influencing their decision to go to China. For some it was a stage in their career path when they were seeking to gain higher external marketability. For others it was to enrich their career through the acquisition of new competencies and abilities. For some it presented the opportunity to realise a long-held aspiration to establish their own business. Moreover, it appears that location was an important influencing factor in the decision to move as an SIE.

As a destination Beijing was a well thought-out choice and appealed on a number of different levels. Understandably there was an attraction for those women interested in Chinese language and culture. Paradoxically, it also drew in respondents with no Chinese
language skills. For some the city provided an economic sanctuary and for others it offered a platform to capitalise on China’s burgeoning economy. These findings relating to location are consistent with Dickmann and Mills’ (2010) assertion that city-specific pull factors influence relocation decisions, especially within the world of the boundaryless career where individuals are the owners of their careers. Thus, it is apparent from this study that while the decision to move to Beijing was driven largely by career aspirations a pivotal consideration was how the qualities of the location could enable those objectives and ambitions to be fulfilled.

In terms of pathways to self-initiated expatriation the SIE trajectory is not linear. The findings suggest that self-initiated expatriation represents purposeful direction and a sense of control over one’s life. Further, SIE experiences offer opportunities for individuals to learn how to adapt to their environment and to enter into journeys of self-discovery. In a new country the participants often felt a sense of anonymity that allowed them to branch out, take risks and test limits in a way that perhaps they may not have done elsewhere, particularly in their home country.

5.3.2 Research Question Two

Moving to the second research question: *What are the career experiences of western professional SIE women?*, it is evident that each participant’s career represented a unique assembly of self and social experiences, yet again supporting the notion that SIEs are a heterogeneous group. Whatever their reasons for going to China the women presented as individuals who were proactive in taking control of, and directing, their own careers, unfettered from traditional organisational career arrangements, as is characterised by the protean career concept (Hall, 1976). As active agents in their own career development (Hall, 2002), essentially their careers involved ‘opportunities that go beyond any single employer’ (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 6).
The findings also indicated that two thirds of the respondents had had no international work experience when they moved to China, although more than half had travelled to Beijing for short visits prior to their SIE move. This suggests that perhaps the women were receptive to living and working in another country, but not necessarily pursuing a global career and building global competence as suggested by Vance (2005)—a finding that also appears to contradict the CAE experience that points to the importance of international business skill development and work experience for securing ongoing career success (e.g., Bird, 2001; Suutari & Brewster, 2003).

It is important to note that the women had shaped their careers to fit their lives in accordance with their prevailing circumstances, yet there were clear life-span themes and patterns. Women in their early career phases saw their SIE experiences as opportunities brimming with unlimited possibilities. Their intentions were to build up ‘managerial’ and ‘China’ experience to take back home with them. Those in their middle careers were managing multiple responsibilities, both personally and professionally. For some their SIE experiences had culminated in the realisation of an original dream to work overseas/to go to China. For others, negative SIE experiences collided with the scaling back of their original dreams. For those women nearing retirement and in the ‘later’ stages of their careers, their experiences could be likened to a ‘rebirth’ and a chance to explore opportunities without restraint.

Examining the women’s careers through the lens of the KCM there is evidence of authenticity, balance and challenge across all career stages. Of significance is the fact that the respondents, irrespective of age and stage of life, wanted challenging work. By comparison, attachment to authenticity and work-life balance appeared, at least partially, dependent on factors outside the women’s control. For instance, often the meaning of balance was subject to family arrangements and relationships.
As previously noted, the women in this sample all chose to live in Beijing for career reasons. However, they held different views of their China career experiences, particularly in terms of the original ‘pull factor variables’. Some felt that, in one way or the other, becoming an SIE in Beijing would benefit their career prospects and their employability. However, for others the reality did not live up to their original expectations and they felt their professional career had stalled or even gone backwards. For some, in particular the speculators, there was the initial tentativeness as to what type of work they could obtain and what the outcomes would be. It appears that both structural barriers, such as visa status and market conditions, as well as planned happenstance or chance inevitably played a role in a number of the women’s career outcomes. Being in the right place at the right time with the right skills was a key element in opening career opportunities.

It is interesting to note that of the 31 participants not one was employed by a leading global brand company. Often referred to as ‘giant organisations’ these MNCs, predominantly headquartered in the USA, are typically associated with expatriation (Baruch, Steele, & Quantrill, 2002, p. 659). There was a suggestion from some of the women that these doors were ‘shut’ to the SIE as an employee, but open as a ‘contractor’; a topic that certainly warrants future exploration. At the other end of the employment spectrum many of the respondents noted the difficulty of a foreigner being employed by a Chinese company or state-owned enterprise. On the whole the women were employed by small subsidiaries, and small- to medium-sized joint venture enterprises. These organisations were also a starting place for the freelance women searching for project work.

In short, the career experiences of SIE women living and working in Beijing resembles what Gunz (1989, p. 226) calls career as an ‘individual-level phenomena’ (the subjective career), as opposed to an organisational phenomena (the objective career). There is also evidence of Hendy’s (1989) ‘shamrock organisation’ with potential employers offering a
range of subcontracted employment arrangements. Finally, there is a suggestion of fragmented career patterns implicit in the boundaryless career and in portfolio working.

5.3.3 Research Question Three

Regarding the third research question: How do professional female SIEs make sense of their careers? if there was an all-encompassing narrative for these women it might well be ‘it was the best of times and the worst of times’. Even though the women were active agents in their career experiences the extent to which they were constrained or unimpeded in their choices is open to debate. Within the literature the rapid growth in non-standard forms of employment has generated considerable controversy about the changing nature of work (in general), especially on the subject of job quality. Beck’s (1992) ‘destandardisation of labor’ thesis maintains an emerging division between standardised full-time employment versus a ‘risk-fraught system of flexible, pluralized, decentralized underemployment’ (cited in McGovern, Smeaton, & Hill, 2004, p. 226). Other commentators present non-standard forms of employment as new opportunities for recombining work, leisure, and family (e.g., Handy, 1994). Self-employment is often presented along two dividing lines: entrepreneurial growth versus the marginalised worker (Smeaton, 2003, p. 379). Where organisations are seen as rigid and inflexible, both professionally and personally, escape to self-employment is expected to provide professional freedom and the opportunity to learn and develop (Gold & Fraser, 2002). Further, it has been suggested that women tend to opt out of corporate life (e.g. Belkin, 2003) as they seek to cope with the multi-faceted worlds of home, family and career (McKie, Biese, & Jyrkinen, 2013).

Important questions remain about the nature of non-standard arrangements and their perceived boundarylessness. In examining the data it became apparent that the women’s work experiences did not always conform to their ideal. In seeking long-term contracts with
organisations (particularly as they could guarantee the much sought-after residential visa) they hoped to re-embed themselves within organisational worlds. Most of the women in the sample still judged themselves according to the codes of ‘traditional’ employment. Yet they defined career very much in protean terms. In contrast to this dichotomy between organisational employment and new career forms, in which one is seen as wholly good and the other as irredeemably bad, the experiences of these women suggest that the two are much more closely linked (and possibly more similar). For some of the women in the study non-standard work arrangements can be understood largely as a way of sidestepping what they perceive to be ‘different rules’ for SIEs and CAEs and the prevalence of ‘local hire’ policies. This finding resonates with a recent study by Tharenou (2013) who examined the suitability of SIEs as replacements for CAEs. She found that employers are unlikely to replace CAEs with SIEs because they want to retain control over running the foreign operation and management development. However, SIEs are likely to be employed for technical and lower and middle management positions that require more generic or specialist competencies, as well as for purposes requiring cross-cultural and host location-specific competencies.

There is a related issue arising from the literature which suggests that for some of the those women who pursued both standard and non-standard work arrangements there was a loss of direct and indirect benefits of tenured employment associated with being a ‘local hire’. Not all the components of the more traditional career—as defined by promotion and increasing authority (Guest & Mackenzie Davey, 1996)—may be desirable, but certainly the movement up a pay scale, apparent security, professional development and an eventual form of pension remain the focus of ambition for a number of the women. Kalleberg, Reskin and Hudson (2000, p. 257) claim that non-standard work arrangements may in effect be ‘bad jobs’ with ‘bad characteristics’—namely low pay without access to health insurance and pension funds—that lead to ‘dead-end jobs’. The irony is that some of the women crossed
national boundaries in moving to China with intent and purpose only to find they were excluded from gainful employment and encountered a series of structural boundaries that impacted on residency status and a loss of belonging and purpose. It was also apparent from the data that host country social and institutional constraints may pose significant limitations on the career outcomes of SIE women (Volpe & Murphy, 2011). As a result of both horizontal and vertical barriers women may opt out of the SIE career trajectory altogether.

Of interest in exploring the extent to which women are the architects of their careers as SIEs was the social context in which their career choices were made. This study sought to understand how the women make sense of their careers through the methodology of narrative inquiry. Narrative theory recognises that personal history continuously shapes our identity and our understanding of self (Polkinghorne, 1997). Narrative knowing centres on the interpretation of how our life stories have shaped our actions, experiences and identities. In the women’s narratives the choice to become an SIE was communicated as more than a decisive moment in time. It involved a complex consideration of extrinsic and intrinsic factors and experiences in which social networks were often central.

5.3.4 Research Question Four

In addressing the final research question: What does it mean to be a professional female SIE in terms of career identity?, narrative theory enabled the examination of how human meanings are interpreted through using life stories as a central form of self-interpretation (Polkinghorne, 1988; Ricoeur, 1991). As the findings demonstrate, the women’s stories reflected an understanding and created images of what it meant to be an SIE. Thus, the view that individuals can re-define their identities through the stories they construct about the self and about career is supported by the study. Similarly, the life story model of identity
development proposes that identity is not a fixed concept but is a life story which is constantly evolving through re-storying due to social interactions (McAdams, 2004).

The main storyline of this study is that 31 western women with fully-developed career and professional identities self-initiated their expatriation to Beijing. During their residency in Beijing their career experiences were part of an evolving life story which shaped their career identities. Situational factors played the biggest role in the women’s career development and career identity evolution in Beijing. Over time some of them realised that they had to modify their career goals and trajectories significantly as it was not possible to continue to work in their former professions. Some reported experiencing the erosion of their existing skills resulting in a loss of self-confidence, professional optimism and career identity. On the other hand some women were able to re-establish themselves in professions that were similar to the ones they were engaged in prior to becoming SIEs. Others eventually became established in a different profession. The members of yet another group were working in jobs that they saw as stepping stones to another occupation or self-employment.

Within the re-storying of career identity a process of compromise and constraint about career choices occurred. Over time some participants were seen to have multiple career stories that appeared to intermingle into one such as ‘my life before China’. While some developed dual career identities, identifying with the former career at a certain time in their life and with the Beijing one at other times. This was particularly the case where a participant had undergone a sweeping career transformation, such as Hilary who declared: ‘I was an accountant back home, now I’m a jewellery maker’. What was interesting about this statement is the fact that for all intents and purposes this respondent had slid down the ladder in terms of conventional career status but was clearly happy with her decision.

Career and work were the embodiment of the self for the women in this study. The relationship between career identity and global identity was also illustrated. Career identity
affected feelings about the self and their perceived social standing. Being excluded from preferred positions, due for example to not having a proficient level of Mandarin, heightened the contrast between formerly held self-images and recently developed self-images. The process of significant career re-orientation required lowering expectations to the point of accepting any work opportunities in order to prove one’s capabilities. This re-evaluation was also propelled by having to lower career goals and expectations, changing career reorientations and experiencing cognitive dissonance between internal career identities and current occupational identity. The re-evaluation was also associated with negative affect (e.g., sadness, frustration, hopelessness, feeling unworthy and feeling useless) and consequently lower self-esteem.

While the focus of the study was not on adjustment issues per se, the elements of cross-cultural adjustment, including cognition, emotions and behaviours (Kim, 1998), were clearly present in the women’s career identity change processes. The presence of all of these elements is suggestive of the occurrence of profound identity change as they formed their new career identities. It may be that the career changes they underwent occurred simultaneously with cultural change as adapting to their new career identity required cross-cultural learning. Of note is the fact that, first and foremost, the women stopped thinking of themselves in terms of their home country national identity and on no occasion considered themselves to be expatriates — rather they saw themselves principally in terms of being a ‘citizen of the world’.
5.4.1 Contribution to Knowledge

This study did not intend to generate knowledge which could be generalised to other populations. It sought to interpret the accounts provided by one group of western professional women working as SIEs and living in Beijing, China. Within those constraints it produced new knowledge about female SIEs and their career experiences. Drawing on Johnston (1997), I aimed for transferability in which this study will ‘allow these stories to resonate with other contexts with which readers may be familiar’ (p. 688).

This research contributes to bridging the ‘knowledge gap’ in understanding the career experiences of women who self-initiate their expatriation in a particular context (i.e. Beijing, China). With notable exceptions (see for example, Bozionelos, 2009; Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2008; Harrison & Michailova, 2013; Tharenou, 2010; van den Bergh & du Plessis, 2013) there is relatively little literature available that is specifically about female SIEs and their careers. This study contributes to that literature and its findings can add nuance to the general through the particular. The study also serves to illuminate the lived career experiences of a population noted as under-represented in the literature.

The study makes a contribution to knowledge in a number of ways. First, the findings extend what is currently known about SIE career experiences and motivations for expatriation (Chen, 2012; Doherty et al., 2011; Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010; Jokinen et al., 2008). Whereas Doherty et al. (2011) suggest that SIEs are motivated by adventure, exploration, excitement or life change, this study indicates that career issues were dominant reasons to move to Beijing. A second contribution is the fact this study clarifies and adds to what has been previously learnt of the careers of SIEs in general and female SIEs in particular.
Chen (2012) suggested that SIEs are motivated to ‘fearlessly pursue the self-endorsed decisions they have made with respect to establishing global work experiences’ and that this motivation stems from psychological security that results from SIEs’ ‘higher levels of relatedness’ (p. 60). However, this study finds that not all SIEs feel confident and secure prior to initiating their expatriation, nor in fact in Beijing. Indeed, for the economic refugees, whilst they had chosen to come to Beijing to work, it was not their preferred option.

An outcome from the study was the emergence of four career orientations: transformer, avatar, castaway and roadblock. This typology exemplifies an initial mapping of what a professional SIE woman’s career might look like. To that end it presents a possible platform for future research, discussion and understanding of the array of career patterns for female SIEs, and possibly SIEs overall. For instance, the four types could be replicated with other samples to analyse narrative frames. It could also be useful for looking back at the different types of self-initiated expatriation in terms of career experiences, as well as to the future in anticipation of new research questions dealing specifically with the careers of SIEs.

Finally, the results of the study suggest the fundamentals of a conceptual model which is depicted in Figure 5.1. Drawing on authors who have used push-pull factors to explain an SIE orientation (e.g., Froese, 2012; Ma, 2012; Richardson, 2006; Tharenou, 2010) the model suggests drivers of self-expatriation, career outcomes and employment arrangements in the host country and reasons for leaving the host country (although not necessarily returning to the home country). Push-pull factors and reasons to move and leave are influenced by life stage and personality dimensions such as self-efficacy.
Figure 5.1  Conceptual model
Source: Developed for this research.
5.5 Contribution to the Careers Literature

The findings of the women’s career stories do not fit with the traditional career archetype with its emphasis on continuous, full-time, long-term organisational employment. Rather as a group the western professional SIE women fit with the new careers literature, specifically a protean career orientation and a boundaryless orientation. Each is considered.

Protean career orientation

The respondents presented as examples of individuals whose careers are self-directed and independent making choices based on personal values and who do not necessarily follow pre-ordained career stages and positions. Such findings fit with the protean career description whereby ‘the person, not the organization, is in charge, where the person’s core values are driving career decisions, and where the main success criteria are subjective (psychological success)’ (Hall, 2003, p.1) … ‘and serving the whole person, family, and ‘life purpose’’(Hall, 2003, p. 2). Further, the pattern of findings highlighted opportunities for reinvention and renewal that are inherent in the multiple cycles that characterise this type of career.

A consequence of the findings in this study is that we have an understanding of why 31 western professional women moved to Beijing, China as SIEs. Understanding the turning points or kind of triggers that result in major career changes is central to the protean orientation with its emphasis on multiple (3–5 years) learning cycles (Hall, 2002). Briscoe and Hall (2003) suggest that openness to experience and emotional stability are personality traits which might predict a protean orientation. Although I did not undertake such testing the thematic descriptions suggest the women were open to new experiences by the very fact they initiated their expatriation to Beijing.
Hall’s preferred article on careers, and the one he believes best captures the spirit of a protean career is Shepard’s (1984, cited in Hall, 2003, p. 9), ‘On the realization of human potential: A path with a heart:’ in which ‘the central issue is a life fully worth living. The test is how you feel each day as you anticipate that day’s experience. The same test is the best predictor of health and longevity’ (Shepard, 1984, p. 175).

At the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management, Denver, CO, August 13, 2002, Hall appealed to the delegates for their contributions to research on processes that are ‘counter to the expedient, bottom-line-at-all-costs behaviours’ (Hall, 2003, p. 11). He went on to conclude: ‘Let us understand better how people can grow in their awareness of themselves and of the larger community in which they live and work. Let us discover what triggers people to positive change, to generous self-determination. Let us pursue the “path with a heart,”’ in our research and in our lives’ (Hall, 2003, p. 11).

In summary, I believe the women in this study are travelling a path with a heart with passion and intent and that they appeared to act out subjective careers which could be defined as protean. To that end the study adds to our knowledge not only of SIE women but to the protean career. Thus, the study has contributed to career theory by providing contextual first-hand influences and lived experience which have supported previously illustrated attributes of a protean career orientation.

**Boundaryless career**

The findings in this study concur with Richardson’s (2013) conclusion that SIE careers can be both bounded and boundaryless, rather than one or the other. It is evident from the study that while the participants were able to (a degree) cross national boundaries traversing institutional and structural boundaries was at times unattainable. To that end there is evidence in the study to confirm Sullivan’s argument that ‘the term “boundaryless career” is really a
misnomer, as systems need boundaries to define themselves’ (1999, p. 477). This is principally illustrated in reference to structural issues such as visas, work and residency permits, Mandarin language ability and networks (guanxi) at both a personal and professional level. In sum the study supports Inkson et al.’s (2012, p. 325) call for boundary-focused careers scholarship.

5.6 Practical Implications

The practical implications at both the individual and collective level captured in the stories of the SIE women in this study suggest a number of future discussion points and considerations for inclusion in HR programs. These findings may further contribute to understanding push and pull factors which affect SIE employee attraction, engagement and retention, and focus efforts on these areas. These are now considered in turn – first from an organisational perspective and second from an individual perspective.

5.6.1 Organisations

First there is a need to recognise the potential value of SIEs to MNCs, SMEs, joint ventures, and local host country organisations, particularly in light of the well documented recent focus of scholars and IHRM practitioners alike on human capital and talent management in a globalised world (e.g. Baruch et al., 2013; Vaiman & Haslberger, 2013). SIEs tend to be embedded in their local contexts and the breadth of their interactions with locals is known to be extensive. This assumption is referenced in much of the research literature (e.g. Carr et al., 2005; Inkson et al., 1997; Jokinen et al., 2008; Myers & Pringle, 2005). Organisations risk losing a valuable pool of talent if the career opportunities, as well as the compensation packages, benefits and support on offer, do not match the plans and expectations of the
individuals concerned. Furthermore, while ‘local hire’ packages may be the preferred option of MNCs as a means of minimising the costs associated with traditional expatriation packages to many SIEs this may simply be seen as a form of exploitation, a division between ‘us’ (the SIE) and ‘them’ (the CAEs).

The second implication relates to the fact that companies will increasingly need to recognise different groups of employees and make strategic decisions with respect to resourcing local employees, expatriate assignees (CAEs), and SIEs. Each of these groups has specific requirements regarding career development, learning and development, advanced opportunities, employment security and employment commitment. To that end organisations need to develop particular HR techniques and practices which take into account the values of each, especially in the fields of recruitment and job design. In practice such a realisation provides an opportunity for HRM professionals and line managers to help SIEs to integrate organisationally and reach their performance potential more quickly (e.g. Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010). These findings could prompt organisations to review whether their current work-related practices enhance or hinder the successful employment of SIEs. Diagnostic questions can be developed from: (1) the perspective of hiring managers and (2) the perspective of candidates for employment. These gaps need to be identified at the process, contextual and individual levels.

A third factor, corporate assistance in the development of on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness, can help to increase personal identification with the organisation. Howe-Walsh and Schyns (2010) argue that HRM practices need to be reviewed as to how far they enhance or hinder the employment of SIEs, arguing that it is important for HRM instruments to support the adjustment of SIEs to the new organisation and culture. For example, they recommend giving a clear job description and providing mentoring and co-working.
intercultural training and practical support. They also argue that when an organisation plans to take on an SIE it is important to learn about the SIE’s career plans and development interests and to support them. Those international companies, for instance, that manage to offer interesting development opportunities within the organisation might be able to retain SIEs for longer periods. Evidence that this area is lacking is further discussed in future research issues covered in Section 5.7.

The fourth suggestion involves adopting more inclusive proactive management styles towards SIEs to enhance the level of commitment SIEs feel towards the company. Expatriate employee tension between allegiance to the parent firm and their allegiance to the local operation has been extensively appraised in the literature. Black and Gregersen (1992) have written that when faced with serving two masters, many expatriate managers end up directing their allegiance too far in one direction or the other. SIEs are often viewed as having low levels of organisational commitment and allegiance to both the parent firm and the local operations and are assumed to be ‘flight risks’. An important issue is how organisations can integrate the experience of SIEs and their demonstrated specialised skills, such as language and local business practices knowledge, into their global strategy formulation process.

5.6.2 Selection and recruitment considerations

Research suggests that the average repatriation attrition rate for CAEs—those people who return from an overseas assignment and then leave their companies is 31 per cent within one year of return, 23 per cent between one and two years of return, 24 per cent more than two years after the return from assignment, and the balance (22 per cent) while on assignment. (Brookfield, GRS, 2013, p. 23). Further, with 44 per cent of MNCs reporting failures in the Asia-Pacific region and 63 per cent in Europe (McNulty & Tharenou, 2004), it would appear that the direct and non-direct costs associated with expatriation are substantial. Interestingly,
these figures are consistent with research findings from the mid 1960s which showed that approximately 30 per cent of overseas assignments in USA multinationals had been mistakes (Henry, 1965).

Of equal interest is published research by Miller in 1972 that shows people were selected for international assignments based on their proven performance in a similar job, usually domestically. Fast forward some 40 years and there is still an inference that the selection process is generally driven by technical skills (e.g., McEvoy & Buller, 2013; Widmier & Hair, 2013). This is despite the fact that there is abundant research to show that while technical competence is an important factor in the overall determination of expatriate success, there is a lengthy list of traits, skills, and capabilities that are essential for success in an expatriate assignment which can either be selected for or developed through training and development (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992).

These skills include: language skills, cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity, flexibility, sociability, open-mindedness, high tolerance for both stress and ambiguity, a collaborative negotiation style, a cosmopolitan orientation, and a sincere interest in learning about other cultures (McEvoy & Buller, 2013, p. 216). Tung (1981) for instance, found that relational abilities appear to increase the probability of successful performance considerably. Further, while recruitment presents as relatively formal, structured, and rational, some studies suggest it is unstructured and informal with often candidates identified by originating managers (e.g., Harris & Brewster, 1999). Conversely, international human resource managers note other challenges not well represented in the literature such as the dual-career couple environment; the challenge of balancing the needs of CAEs with those of host- and third-country nationals working in the same location at substantially lower pay and benefits;
and, the lack of interest in cross-culture training made available by the company (McEvoy & Buller, 2013, p. 216).

BRIC countries occupy four of the five top locations for assignment failure with China at the top of the list for locations with the highest rate of assignment failure (27 per cent) (Brookfield GRS, 2013). Failure rates are attributed to the inability to adapt to the culture, family and spouse/partner issues, and quality of life concerns. (Brookfield GRS, 2013). Notwithstanding a strong desire to understand and to adapt in order to be effective as a manager, nearly everyone experiences disorientation when entering another culture. This phenomenon, called culture shock (Torbiorn, 1982), or more appropriately acculturative stress, is entrenched in our psychological processes (Wederspahn, 1981). Most experts agree that some form of culture shock is unavoidable, and will even by experienced by long-term internationalists (Torbiorn, 1982). Lane, DiStefano and Maznevski, (2000) recognise that the period of adjustment to normal or above-average performance takes from three to nine months, depending on previous experience, the degree of cultural difference being experienced, and the individual personality.

While little is known of the repatriation or adjustment experiences of SIEs or indeed their families it is a fair assumption that they will possess a high degree of cultural exposure, that is, degree of integration and duration of stay (Mendenhall, Dunbar, & Oddou, 1987) that can be harnessed by foreign and local companies alike. With the growing incidence of human capital flows or ‘brain circulation’ (Tung, 2008) the time must be right for, as Tung proposes, a fundamental rethinking of issues that are salient in the expatriation literature, namely, acculturation, selection, training, development, performance appraisal and compensation (Tung, 2009, p. 13). Given the role of SIEs in the global economy as an important ‘source of scarce talent’ (Haslberger & Vaiman, 2013, p. 8) perhaps the time is ripe for new models to
help practitioners think differently about international assignments and further research on recruitment and selection policies and practice.

5.6.3 Home and host countries

Tharenou (2009a, p. 76) argues that self-initiated expatriation may help women to gain career opportunities and managerial positions that they would otherwise not gain at home, but it may not necessarily help them to break the expatriate glass ceiling and walls. The question remains whether, having obtained their global experience, a company will be any the more ready to employ them. There are still career barriers abroad for women, just as there are at home, but there are also career opportunities. Employers who seek to retain this valuable source of talent need to ensure equitable career opportunities for women, whether these opportunities are designed to encourage them to remain abroad or to return home.

5.6.4 Practical implications for policy

Several studies have called for the improvement and expansion of HR strategies in light of increasing globalisation, the rising costs of CAE deployment and the known foreign deployment failure rates (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010; Mintzberg, 2011). Current relocation trends indicate that 26 per cent of companies that have offshore employees do not prepare their employees for foreign transfers (Brookfield, 2013). Of those that offer cross-cultural training programs, many currently opt for web-based and self-paced training approaches to reduce costs (Brookfield, 2013). HR strategies and policies may benefit from an understanding of the environmental factors that naturally prepare people for foreign assignment and cultural engagement. The employee selection process is vital to ensure successful deployment.
SIEs are more often than not successfully integrated in-country and demonstrate cultural and emotional sensitivities as well as their adeptness in adapting to their host country environment and culture. Industries and organisations that face skills shortages can benefit from understanding that skilled SIEs are likely to be good candidates to lead culturally diverse teams. Company sponsorship for foreign workers is difficult to achieve and SIEs are often underemployed (Chay, 2005). This suggests that sponsored work placements are likely to be successful because SIEs are committed to being in the country. To hire people who want to work abroad, who are culturally and emotionally intelligent, and who are motivated intrinsically can positively impact on the success of the work placement.

5.6.5 China’s war for talent

In 2013 China was the number one emerging country for expatriate assignments, with the most challenges for international assignees attributed to difficulties in understanding how to adapt talent management strategies to the country’s unique business culture and values (Manpower China, 2006), as well as family adaptation concerns (Brookfield GRS, 2013). Moreover, Manpower China (2006) estimates that: two in every five MNCs find it difficult to fill executive positions with management-level attrition rates in China more than 25 per cent greater than the global average, approximately 50 per cent of expatriates leave after their first year, and replacing a high-performing manager can cost 300 per cent to 2,000 per cent of that individual’s salary.

In a recent article entitled ‘The War for Talent in China’ Jan De Silva (2012) begins with the announcement: ‘In North America and Europe workers are begging for jobs. In China companies are begging for workers’. By 2020, it is predicted that China may have 228 million fewer workers than required to operate effectively, a 22 per cent decrease from 2005 (De Silva, 2012). Further, as China shifts from manufacturing ‘Cheap China’ to ‘Sales China’
with an emphasis on higher value manufacturing and a service based consumer economy, there is an increasing demand for service sector skills and internationally capable experience. As the consumer market grows and expands to second, third and fourth-tier cities, the need for trained, informed sales and service staff has climbed sharply.

It is acknowledged that the growing need for talented managers in China represents the biggest challenge facing multinationals and locally owned businesses alike (Booz & Co, 2012) and that the greatest barrier to growth facing business in China today is the lack of people with the appropriate skills to manage business, lead others, create and innovate in a global market (Manpower China, 2006).

Concurrently, an interesting shift is occurring in the Chinese talent market. With the increased growth and prominence of Chinese global brands such as Huawei and Haier (Millward Brown Vermeer, 2014) an increasing number of returning Chinese graduates are questioning the merits of working at the China subsidiary of a western multinational corporation (MNC) when they could work at the global headquarters of a Chinese company (De Silva, 2012). Not too long ago, working for a multinational company, with a prestigious global brand, was the ultimate career goal for aspiring Chinese nationals.

Nowadays, Chinese companies are matching or exceeding MNC salary packages, offering enticing benefits and attractive career paths to senior management, including international expansion assignments (Manpower China, 2006). This disadvantages MNCs who have created a perceived glass ceiling as senior roles more often than not go to expatriates. While MNCs grapple with the challenges of attracting and retaining enough staff some 41 per cent of companies are considering localised ‘expat-lite’ policies or ‘tiered-hybrids’ to lower costs on traditional international assignment packages (Brookfield, 2013).
These challenges certainly present potential opportunities for SIEs, as well as providing HRM with future direction in practice and policy to counterbalance the current mismatch between demand and supply. Interestingly, in surveying the practitioner literature, such as Manpower Inc. and Brookfield GRS, two world leaders in expatriate employment services, there appears to be no mention of SIEs, other than in the possible guise of third-country nationals. In a report released by Manpower China (2006), ‘The China Talent Paradox’, the authors suggest that ‘the solutions are relatively simple…foreign-investment companies based in China need to adapt to the local environment and change their viewpoint to look from inside China out, rather than outside in’ (p. 15). Harrison and Michailova (2013, p. 131) in their study of female SIEs living and working in the United Arab Emirates note that in sourcing employees for emerging markets talent managers have ample opportunity to reach out to female SIEs — a position I agree with in relation to SIE women and the China market.

5.6.6 Past, present and potential SIEs

The everyday constructions and experiences of the women’s lives as SIEs living in Beijing can contribute to practical personal knowledge in terms of how individual women perceive and experience being an SIE. From this knowledge other women (and indeed men) can draw on those aspects of relevance to them as they compose their own SIE lives. ‘My life as an SIE’ type of stories can be a natural bridge between the telling and the living of the narrative. Atkinson (2007, p. 231) maintains in trying to understand another’s experience, ‘let their voices be heard, … let them speak for and about themselves’. As the women continue to recount their stories no doubt they will be recast into plights and prospects, plots and pilgrimages into possible worlds – a narrative projection of the opportunities, constraints and risks of embarking on an SIE journey to Beijing.
5.7 **Strengths and Limitations**

The purpose of narrative inquiry is to deepen the understanding of meaning conveyed in the narratives, drawing out implications and revealing the impact of social and cultural settings on human experience over time (Polkinghorne, 1987). In keeping with the original purpose of this inquiry this study provides an in-depth and contextual understanding of the career experiences of western professional women self-initiating their expatriation to live and work in Beijing. The use of narrative theory and methods was a significant strength of the study in that this approach elicited unique insights into the participants’ perceptions, understandings and expectations of what it means to be an SIE, all of which have implications for recruitment and retention. To that end this study provides rich insights into the career narratives of the selected SIE women.

5.7.1 **Limitations**

As an exploratory piece of research this study has limitations in its focus and scale. In particular, I acknowledge the following seven limitations. First, the size of the sample (31) and the fact that the study specifically addresses western professional SIE women living and working in Beijing does not allow for making significant generalisations, or for the formulation of general laws (Flick, 2014, p. 13). In that respect I recognise that the experiences and narratives reported in this study are concerned with a particular place and a particular cohort of SIEs and cannot be generalised to all SIEs (male, female and non-western). Further, the career experiences may not represent realities in other parts of China or indeed other countries.

Clearly no observations or interpretations that have been derived from a single context are ever perfectly repeatable or transferable to different contexts. As noted by Kemmis and
McTaggart (2003, p.357), ‘It is an illusion to believe that research methods and techniques provide secure paths to truth and certainty’. Fundamentally truth is shaped by particular views and contexts and can only be evaluated to the extent that seems accurate, appropriate and authentic from the reader’s own perspective. Nevertheless, a limitation on sample size was imposed for methodological reasons.

Second, data was gathered at fixed times. Thus, the study recognises that the respondents’ motivational drivers may be influenced by the type of employment they were engaged in at the time of their interviews. To that end the study would have benefitted from being longitudinal, which is also a consideration for further research. Third, as the sample self-selected there is no way to establish whether participants who declined to be interviewed differed in their views from those who were interviewed. Moreover, the nature of the sampling process and data collection cannot entirely eliminate my subjective biases or those of the women under study, and therefore the findings may be restricted to those contexts with identical elements (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Despite all the methodological controls influences from specific interests and social and cultural backgrounds are difficult to avoid. As Rosaldo explains: ‘All interpretations are provisional; they are made by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others … analyses are always incomplete’ (1989, p.8).

A fourth consideration is the fact that the field of narrative studies is theoretically and methodologically diverse. Riessman (2013) notes that as in all families there will be conflict and disagreement among those holding different theoretical perspectives The breadth of applications of the narrative concept gives freedom at the same time as it invites contemplation about where in the broad spectrum the research will be positioned. I have examined spoken (first person) stories of experience, mirroring the pattern in the field of
narrative research in general. However, I am conscious I could have embraced a wider range of empirical materials such as extended accounts and full-life stories, or even asked for written accounts such as journals and diaries. Further, gathering narratives can be problematic as a consequence of a phenomenon known as reminiscence bump. Rubin (2002) found that individuals may recall only positive memories, while some may provide stories that they believe the researcher wants to hear, thus glossing over or even eliminating the parts they do not wish to recall.

A further two issues to consider are first issues of time and second my ability as a researcher to draw out the stories. What more could have been gained with multiple interviews instead of one interview? Where there themes that I missed, other questions I could have asked? Would a different methodology and methods have yielded a different interpretation? The very nature of narrative inquiry produces the opportunity for layered stories—by and of participants and the researcher. Reflection on unexamined, partly-told and untold stories is yet another form of storying that can reveal gaps and shortcomings in the researcher and the research process.

5.7.2 Strengths

Just as there are limitations there are strengths of the study design which contributed to the generation of a new understanding of the career experiences and choices of SIE women—insights that can possibly be used to inform practice and contribute to additional topics for future research. One of the strengths of the study was, I believe, my own experiences as an SIE in Beijing which I shared with the women in the initial contact and study background package. I believe the disclosure of my own time in Beijing helped to build trust in the consent and assurances of confidentiality that I provided, and a trust that I implicitly understood some of the issues they faced in terms, for instance, of their often precarious
residency status. Reflexivity was central to the interpretive process and in the analysis I endeavoured to ensure that the emerging stories reflected the expressed, experienced meaning of the respondents.

5.8 Directions for Future Research

Exploratory studies such as this often lead to new areas of study. Recommendations for future research concern aspects of sample selection, subject areas, and individual and organisational perspectives. First of all, from the review of research literature in the field of SIEs it became apparent that samples in these studies are diverse, for example in terms of the professional background and nationalities of SIEs. This sample’s heterogeneity may explain differences between study results as well as differences in the reported demographics of the expatriate population; hence there is a need for comparative studies of different subgroups of SIEs and for a differentiation of research results according to their characteristics based on, for example, age, marital status, nationality and even length of stay in the host country. Future research could also contrast and compare the different types of work experiences.

The comparison of the career aspirations of respondents with comparable backgrounds in terms of profession is of special interest, since in studies that have focused on specific professions such as academics, engineers and managers clear differences were visible.

Second, research into host country adjustment needs to be understood. Third, a wider study which includes women from different countries and a longitudinal study of the current cohort would aid in an understanding of some of the issues raised in this study. A fourth area of investigation concerns repatriation and reasons SIEs leave a host country. This study demonstrates that there are multiple factors at play that impact on reasons to leave. This
information may also assist organisations to attract and/or retain SIEs. Equally, in terms of
talent management insights working with SIEs may require new HRM techniques and
practices. Finally, the study did not address male SIEs. Future research might therefore
compare the career issues and experiences of men and women. In all these proposed studies it
is suggested that narrative inquiry has a central role to play. After all:

Stories and narrative, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging in our
lives. They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with
threads of time, place, character, and even advice on what we might do with our lives.

5.9 Personal Reflections

This research project commenced with an exploration of my own career journey over some
15 years as an SIE. The choice of narrative methodology also provided me with an
opportunity to understand my own SIE journey. In keeping with the ontological and
epistemological stances of this inquiry the understanding derived from this research was
relative to the experiences of both myself and the women interviewed and was constructed
within our interactions together. As Polkinghorne (1988) attests, individual lived experience
is central to the interpretive process in narrative inquiry. It is through the act of storytelling
and the construction of narratives that individuals come to know both themselves and others
(Polkinghorne, 1995). In preparation for this study I returned to my own story and wondered
how many other women’s stories might reflect or contradict mine.

Travelling with each woman on her story revealed just what it can be like for a
woman traversing a landscape which, until very recently, few women have traversed—the
SIE landscape. As each woman told her story she spoke of the rewards and opportunities and
of the many life challenges she negotiated (the fears, frustrations, tensions, traumas and uncertainties) during her time in Beijing as an SIE. Certainly, these were stories I could identify with.

This study has told of the experiences of one particular group of western professional women. As it draws to an end I contemplate questions such as: ‘Will other SIE women in different locations identify with the experiences it describes as being relevant to them’? ‘Will it be of interest to men’? However, I have come to believe it can provide individual and collective knowledge about what the career experiences and subsequent outcomes for an SIE might entail. I believe this will be of interest to both women and men who are contemplating initiating their expatriation, whether as a speculator, an employee, or someone wanting to start their own business. It can also inform those already on an SIE journey. This research can provide all these readers with an added repertoire of 31 collective stories from which to draw.

Another part of the research journey is the issue of anonymity for researchers, participants and readers. Even with the best intentions and the most careful attention to detail can I really ensure anonymity? It is the choice of a narrative research process that gives this research its rich, thick description, but this very richness of information could enable participants to be identified. Who wants to be labelled ‘a castaway’ or ‘a roadblock’? Would it make a difference if the reader knew who those women were? For this research, apart from names, I removed other identifiers such as country of origin and current job title/industry.

The power of the narrative as a way of researching means that the stories can have the power to evoke intense and sometimes painful emotions, emotions that often only bubble to the surface as the narrative unfolds. Stories also have the power to inspire. In the world of the SIE where there is little sense of belonging, in Alana’s words: ‘sometimes just knowing that others have done it too helps to believe I can too’.
I am encouraged by the narratives that shaped this study. They represent the possible, the probable and the achievable. Some of the stories contain characters whose early experiences were marred, yet who courageously refused to be constrained by externally imposed structural and psychological barriers. Further, this research revealed that it is possible to ‘run away’ into growth, that escape need not be a source of shame, and a change of environment can offer a window to the hidden possibilities within.

5.10 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the career experiences of western professional women who of their own volition were living and working in Beijing. It is evident from the data that not all the women’s career experiences were positive. An impasse was apparent in several of the women’s stories. The experiences of the women suggest that SIE careers can be both liberating and constraining, ‘ad hoc’ as well as the result of strategic planning. What is significant is that we can now move another step forward in our understanding of the nature and dynamics of professional female SIEs’ careers. The stories told by the 31 women and shared in this study, underline the subjective nature of their careers and career experiences and the affinity of SIEs to their own career script (be that what it may). The findings collaborate with contemporary career literature on the protean and boundaryless careers and underline the requirement for different individual career alternatives to be discussed further in the career management literature, as well as the IHRM literature.
5.11 Epilogue

This study has taken me on a circular journey in that I began with reflections on my own experiences as an SIE. I then showed that as a narrative inquirer the horizons of knowing were inextricably linked to the relationships with the participants with whom I engaged. Some nine months since my last visit to Beijing I continue to receive messages from some of the participants. One such message worthy of mention is from Jenny. Her story lingered long after I had interviewed her. She clearly did not want to be an SIE living and working in Beijing. She has since returned to her home country and found employment with a company that values her China experience. Crucially, she was able to capitalise on the career competency ‘knowing-whom’ to secure her current position and increase her future promotional opportunities.

As this particular voyage of discovery nears its end I conclude with the words of Mary Bateson. It is these words that set me on the road to ‘telling’ the stories of the 31 remarkable women I met in Beijing:

We…created a circle, not just by sitting around a table but by watching one another and attending with respect, sharing something passed from hand to hand. We had each become a part of something larger than ourselves, unknown and unpredictable. There is no more powerful symbol of unity than a circle, and no more powerful symbol of the stages of life, cycling from generation to generation. “Let the circle be unbroken” in the words of the spiritual so that no one is lost or excluded. (Mary Bateson, 2000, p.46, cited in Craig & Huber, 2007, p. 274).
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY ETHICS APPROVAL
NOTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

To: Dr Don McMurray and Associate Professor Michelle Wallace/Melinda Muir
Graduate College of Management

From: Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee
Division of Research, R. Block

Date: 24 October 2011

Project: Self-initiated expatriation as a career model

Approval Number ECN-11-233

The Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee has established, in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research – Section 5/Processes of Research Governance and Ethical Review, a procedure for expedited review by a delegated authority.

This application has been considered and approved by the HRESC, Tweed Head/Gold Coast campus.

This approval is subject to the usual standard conditions of approval. Please see over.

Sue Kelly / Helen Wolton
HREC Administration
Ph: (02) 6626 9139
E. ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

Professor Bill Boyd
Chair, HREC
Ph: 02 6620 3569
E. william.boyd@scu.edu.au
APPENDIX B

SAMPLE EMAIL: INITIAL CONTACT
Making contact

Me

To Me

Dear Melinda,

Thank you for your email. I've spoken to the WPC leadership and am awaiting internal approval for reaching out to women within our community. Regardless, I am more than happy to help you personally. Please let me know how many women you are looking to interview, from what background, age, etc and I'll do my best to target outreach within my network.

Best,

Project Manager

Beijing 100022 PRC

From: Helinda Muir
Sent: Friday, March 16, 2012 7:32 AM
To: 
Subject: Making contact

Dear [Name],

I am writing to you in your capacity as support staff. By way of background I am undertaking a Doctor of Business Administration degree with Southern Cross University based in Australia.

The subject of my research is the exploration of women who have chosen to live and work in China as an independent expatriate, as opposed to those who have been sent to China by a company under a more formal expatriate arrangement. Such women may be working on a freelance basis as a contractor and/or have established their own business.

My own experience working on a contract basis in China, as well as interest in expatriation and why an increasing number of women are choosing to pursue international careers is a major impetus behind this study.

I am looking for a small number of women to participate in my research in the form of in-depth interviews which I expect to take between one to one and half hours for completion. To that end I wonder if there may be a way I could advise members of the Women's Professional Committee of my research.

I plan to be in Beijing for a brief visit between 30th March and 3rd April and again for a longer period at the beginning of June.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

Melinda Muir

Reply, Reply All or Forward | More
APPENDIX C:

SAMPLE EMAIL: PRE - INTERVIEW
Dear [xxxx]

It was very nice to meet you at [xxxxxxx].

Thank you for sharing some of your story and expressing an interest in my research. I am looking forward to hearing more.

I have attached some further background information on the study, as well as an Informed Consent form. However, I thought I should highlight a few issues in this email.

By participating in the study you will be sharing some personal thoughts, insights, and descriptions of your life and career experiences. Namely, the reasons why you came to China, how you make sense of an intentional move to another country in the context of your career and what meanings, values and interpretations you ascribe to your experience of expatriation in terms of career aspirations, career development, career stages, career success and long-term career consequences.

I would like you to participate in a 60 to 90 minute in-depth interview. Your interview will be recorded and transcribed, after which you will have the opportunity to review and comment on your transcript. While excerpts from the interview may be included in the final analysis all data collected for this study will be held in strictest confidence.

Please be assured that the confidentiality of your responses will be maintained through the following methods: 1) data will be kept in a secure location (locked filing cabinet); 2) you (or I) will select a pseudonym; and 3) the list of names of all participants and their pseudonyms (as well as your signed consent forms) will also be kept in a locked box and in a different location from any other data related to the study. Additionally, all audio recordings will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

If the results of my study are reported in journals or at professional conferences or meetings, the individuals who participated will not be identified.

Furthermore, your participation is strictly voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason.

The benefit of telling the story of how you came to be working in China may include identifying or validating your own career-related strategies and perhaps a greater clarification of your personal career needs and motives. Your participation is also a contribution to the academic research related to women’s career experiences, specifically within an international arena.

As I am returning to Australia on Sunday is it possible to meet over the next few days? Otherwise let’s connect after I return home and the interview can be conducted via Skype.

Once again, great to meet and I look forward to talking and hearing more.

Best wishes

Melinda
APPENDIX D

RESEARCH INFORMATION PACKAGE
INTRODUCTION

By way of introduction my name is Melinda Muir and I am currently undertaking my professional doctorate (Doctor of Business Administration) at the Southern Cross University Business School in Australia, under the supervision of Dr. Don McMurray and Associate Professor Michelle Wallace. To read more about my background, please see my attached profile.

To complete my studies, I am conducting research on women, who of their own volition, are choosing to live and work in another country as an ‘independent’ expatriate. In other words they have funded their own expatriation and have not been transferred by an organization. They may have relocated to a country of their choice to pursue cultural, personal, or career development opportunities and often with no definite time frame in mind, although they are not migrants or sojourners. They may be working on a contractual basis or established their own business.

My own experience working as an ‘independent’ expatriate throughout China between 1995 and 2008, as well as an interest in expatriation and why an increasing number of women are choosing to pursue international careers outside the traditional multinational organizational route is a major impetus behind this study.

Much of the literature on international human resource management has been devoted to the analysis of company assigned expatriates. However, considerable numbers of those working in another country are involved in independent or self-initiated expatriate (SIEs) experiences. Typically, they have made their own way to the country and the job.
The relevance of the expatriation literature to this group is limited and virtually non-existent. However, the lack of data and analysis is important: not only are SIEs a widespread and growing phenomenon, but they are, concurrently, widely used by many multinational organizations. This is an almost hidden aspect of the international labour market.

The objective of my study is to analye whether the motivation to expatriate independently is subject to different influences depending on a woman’s age, and the meanings, values and interpretations individual women ascribe to their experience of expatriation in terms of their careers.

A number of questions require answers, not the least of which are:

- what does it mean to be a female SIE?
- how do a group of women who have independently initiated their expatriation to live and work in another country construct meanings for their new found identities within a broader global narrative? ;and
- how do these women make sense of their global career journey?

Against this backdrop, the goal of my research is to arrive at a more adequately complex construction of the professional identities of professional females who have initiated their own expatriation.

The importance and appropriateness of this study underpins the contemporary career literature and the trend towards self-managed careers. To that end, there is an increase in the mobility of professionals (both men and women) who are choosing to independently pursue international careers for a variety of reasons. Interestingly, female professionals would appear to be proactively initiating their own expatriation more often than they are assigned by a company, and usually as often as men.

By giving a voice to this underrepresented often marginalized expatriate population I believe I can contribute directly to the evolving conversations surrounding women who initiate their own expatriation; conversations held in both scholarly and practitioner circles that are gaining momentum in the global landscape.

Key criteria for participation are women who are:

- Living and working in Beijing, but not sponsored by a company under a traditional expatriate arrangement.
- Self-employed and/or working as a contractor; own business entity.
- Intending to return to home country at some stage.

If you would be interested in participating in my study I can meet with you between xxxxx and xxxxxx.

On page 4 of this document you will find a number of frequently asked questions and answers for participants. Effectively the interview will take approximately 90 minutes of your time. Interviews could also be conducted via Skype if a face-to-face meeting is not convenient. All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researcher will have access to information on the participants.

Thank you in advance for your interest. I look forward to speaking with you.

Melinda Muir
The decision to explore the lives of women living and working in China as ‘independent’ expats is predicated on my own life and career experiences and to that end my studies represent a highly personal journey in more ways than one.

I was raised in a traditional expatriate family at a time when the company alone determined my father’s next place of work. My mother’s key role, trailing her spouse, was to help the family adjust to their new environment and we kids just straggled behind.

In 1994, after a number of years staying put in Australia climbing my own corporate career ladder, I decided it was time to undertake, as well as learn, new things. Armed with my newly acquired MBA with its focus on ‘managing business in Asia’ and strongly influenced by Nancy Adler’s work on women and international careers (Adler, N. ‘Competitive Frontiers: Women Managers in a Global Economy’, 1994) I decided to look to the emerging ‘East Asian Hemisphere’ for my career transformation.

I assumed I would be a much sought after asset to any company looking to expand their China business. However, much to my surprise, this was not the case, at least in the eyes of the multinational enterprises. They were suspicious of the fact, that if sent on assignment, I would be ‘unaccompanied’, or if my husband decided to join me, ‘what would he do’? It appeared that the world of the expatriate was still the realm of the married man with trailing spouse and school-aged children.

At the time, women accounted for only 3% of the expatriate population so perhaps I should not have been taken aback by the response of the companies.

Eventually, taking the ‘independent road’ seemed to be the only way forward if I wanted to pursue my new found career goals. It is a road I travelled for some 13 years working throughout Asia essentially in executive education in the design, delivery and management of educational, training and development programs for middle and senior level managers. Along this pathway I discovered my passion for teaching, acquired a multitude of new skills and had countless ‘aaaahh’ moments as I traversed many a challenging highway.

Just as Lewis Carroll’s ‘Alice’ pondered what she would find through the looking glass, so too, I am curious to explore the world of the self-initiated or independent expatriate that I first entered all those years ago. After reflecting on my own experiences, I wonder what motivates women today to up and leave one place to go to another, and whether their stories might resemble mine.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. How much time will participation in the study take?

The study involves the participation in an in-depth, semi-structured interview with the researcher that will be audio taped. It is expected to take between one to one and half hours for completion.

2. Where will the interviews take place?

The interviews will take place at a location of your choice in Beijing, or via Skype if you are not available at the time I am in China.

3. Can I withdraw from the study?

Being in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to consent and you may discontinue your participation at any time.

4. How do I know what I say will be reliably reported?

To ensure that the study accurately reflects what is reported, all of the interviews will be recoded and transcribed. Each participant will be provided with a copy of their transcript for review and will be invited to add to their comments or insights if they believe the additional information will be helpful or clarification is necessary.

5. Is there any feedback?

All participants in this research are entitled to feedback from the study. You will receive a summary of the results by email or mail.

6. Has this research been approved by Southern Cross University?

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Southern Cross University in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. This National Statement has been jointly developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), the Australian Research Council (ARC) and the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (AVCC). The approval number for the research is ECN-11-233.

7. What are the risks of participating in this study?

There are no physical risks associated with this study. There is, however, a small, but possible risk, that some of the questions may make you feel uncomfortable. You may refuse to answer any question and you may take a break at any time during the interview.
8. How will my privacy be protected?

Every effort will be made to keep your information confidential. All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researcher will have access to information on the participants.

A report of the study may be submitted for publication or reported at academic conferences and/or meetings; however individuals who participated in the study will not be named or identified. Neither the University nor the researcher will release any information about your research involvement without your written permission, unless required by law.

Your privacy will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and generalising descriptive details. In addition tapes and transcripts will be labelled with a code.

Furthermore, while Section 2.1 of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research states that all research data, including video and audiotape records, are safely retained for periods of at least five years, the Southern Cross University requires all research materials to be retained for a period of seven (7) years.

Any identification codes will be stored in a separate place from the data records to which they are linked.

9. How will the study benefit me?

You will receive no gifts or other compensation for your participation in this study.

The research is an academic study, and as such offers a theoretical contribution. However, in the context of increasing international mobility and expatriation it has potential operational and practical application to provide valuable data for those women who are considering expatriating independently and who are looking for some insight into the kinds of experiences they might expect.

10. Can I tell other people about the study?

In general terms, yes! However, please be mindful that this topic, like all doctoral topics, is original to the researcher. Given the amount of work I have undertaken to date it would be devastating to me if somebody else was to suddenly pursue my exact subject matter.

11. What if I require further information?

When you have read this information sheet, Melinda Muir will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please contact either Dr Don McMurray at don.mcmurray@scu.edu.au or Associate Professor Michelle Wallace at michelle.wallace@scu.edu.au

12. What if I have a complaint or concerns?

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research and/or the researcher, the following procedure should occur.

Contact: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

All information is confidential and will be handled as soon as possible.
APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Name of researcher: Melinda Muir (Approval Number: ECN-11-233)

I, …………………………………………………………………………………………….. give consent to my participation in the research project, *Self-initiated expatriation as a career model: Exploring the career narratives of self-initiating female expatriates living and working in China.*

In giving my consent:

(Tick the box that applies, sign and date and give to the researcher)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I agree to take part in the Southern Cross University research project specified above.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand the information about my participation in the research project, which has been provided to me by the researcher.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to be interviewed by the researcher.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to participate in an in-depth interview.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to allow the interview to be *audio-taped and/or *video-taped.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to make myself available for follow-up interview(s) if required.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that my participation is voluntary.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that I can cease my participation at any time.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that my participation in this research will be treated with confidentiality.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that any information that may identify me will be de-identified at the time of analysis of any data.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that no identifying information will be disclosed or published</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that all information gathered in this research will be kept confidentially for 7 years at the University.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware that I can contact the researcher at any time with any queries. The researcher’s contact details are provided to me.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that this research project has been approved by the SCU Human Research Ethics Committee</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant's name: ______________________________________________________

Participant's signature: _________________________________________________

Date: ______________________

☐ Please tick this box and provide your email or mail address below if you wish to receive a summary of the results:

Email: ________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX F

RESEARCH ETHICS GUIDELINES
### Ethical principles and practicalities

Source: Adapted for this research from Josselson (2007) and Lieblich (2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research process stage</th>
<th>Ethical issues</th>
<th>Guiding practicalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial contact</td>
<td>Build trust and rapport</td>
<td>The participant reads subtle interpersonal cues that reflect the researcher’s capacity to be empathetic, nonjudgmental, concerned, tolerant and emotionally responsive (Josselson, 2007, p. 539).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The contract (consent form)</td>
<td>Assurance of confidentiality and privacy</td>
<td>Be aware of vulnerabilities and consequences that participants may not recognise (Josselson, 2007, p. 540).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freedom of the participant to withdraw at any stage</td>
<td>Be prepared to obliterate any public use of their material in such a case (Josselson, 2007, p. 543).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The interview</td>
<td>Beyond disguise</td>
<td>Change all names – participant, friends, family, and companies – that could identify the participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potential for harm</td>
<td>Josselson emphasises the dilemma faced by the researcher to follow institutional requirements and alert a participant to potential harmful effects of the interview (e.g., emotional stress) without creating an atmosphere of fear that could impinge on the trust and collaboration between the researcher and the participant (Josselson, 2007, pp. 543 – 544).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ending the interview</td>
<td>End on a positive note.</td>
<td>Return to less emotionally saturated ground that may have been present earlier in the interview (Josselson, 2007, p. 544).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity and the relationship in the interview</td>
<td>The nature of the relationship that develops is emergent and cannot be predicted.</td>
<td>What aspects of what is ‘observed’ derive from the researcher, what from the object of observation (the participant), and what from the interaction between them (Josselson, 2007, p. 545).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The write-up</td>
<td>Every narrative contains multiple truths.</td>
<td>Josselson (2007, p. 551) cautions that the narrative that emerges in the final report is a construction of the interpreter, and the writer needs to make this plain in the presentation of the results.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


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