Abstract

The increasing mobility of people and burgeoning diversity movements have led to an increase in the number of women pursuing global career paths. Female internationally mobile employees (IMEs) constitute a distinct group, characterized by their dual identities as both expatriates and women. While existing studies have acknowledged the various obstacles that hinder women's participation in the global workforce, they have often overlooked the agency of female IMEs—their individual capacity to navigate, leverage, and create career opportunities. Furthermore, the factors influencing female IMEs' decisions to settle in host countries for extended career development—particularly their agency, intersectional identities, and fit with the host country environments—remain largely unexplored.

This dissertation addresses this gap by providing a nuanced understanding of female IMEs, moving beyond the prevailing portrayals of powerlessness and dependence on organizational support for their career advancement. This is particularly true for those with specific gender-related characteristics, such as motherhood—a dimension noticeably underrepresented in current international business (IB) and international human resource management (IHRM) literature. The research objective is thus to understand the social construction of their identities (e.g., gender, profession, foreignness, motherhood) and the multifaceted experiences of female IMEs in the global work environment.

Employing a qualitative methodology, this research utilizes data gathered from online blogs and interviews. The research is based in Japan—a relevant research setting as the country's demand for foreign-born labor, which contrasts with its entrenched traditional gender norms. The dissertation consists of a review and two empirical studies, drawing on such theoretical perspectives as career agency, person–environment fit (P–E fit) theory, and identity work. First,

in order to deepen the understanding of the demographic of female IMEs, the first chapter presents a bibliometric analysis and qualitative review of 230 systematically-identified scholarly articles on women in global work, with a particular emphasis on the concept of "boundaries." The bibliometric analysis provides an overview of research trends and patterns, while the qualitative review analyzes emerging key topics, including gender and theoretical perspectives. More importantly, not only does the review examine and categorize the barriers that women face in global work, but also how they respond to these barriers, offering a balanced and more optimistic perspective on the progress of female IMEs in pursuing global careers.

The second study focuses on how female IMEs exert their career agency within the context of structural constraints. Using perspectives from career-agency theory and P–E fit as theoretical lenses, the study analyzed 113 blog posts by 19 female IMEs and conducted semi structured interviews with 11 female IMEs in Japan. The findings reveal that these women exercise career agency to address challenges related to foreignness and gender. They then engage in career-related agentic behaviors to improve their fit with their environments and build career capital while interacting with different aspects of structural constraints. It was also observed that global mobility stages influence mindsets towards foreignness and, consequently, career agency. The study proposed a theoretical framework for encapsulating the dynamic interaction between structural constraints and the agency of female IMEs, thus enhancing our understanding of women's career agency in the global workforce. Additionally, the study acknowledges expatriate residents as a distinct subgroup within the IME population, shedding light on the evolving and ambiguous boundaries between self-initiated expatriates and other related categories.

Finally, the third study explores the complex identities of expatriate working mothers by analyzing narratives of 27 Chinese women navigating both motherhood and professional work in

Japan. This study uses the concept of intersectional identity work to frame gender, maternity, and foreignness (expatriate status) as intertwined elements of identity. In so doing, it uncovers how these women's identities are shaped by a dynamic interplay between organizational practice and social norms in both their host and home countries (Japan and China, respectively). Furthermore, it examines how their intersectionality develops mechanisms to alleviate tensions between their various identities. The findings enrich our understanding of the intersectional issues faced by working mothers, incorporating an expatriate dimension to offer deeper insights into their experiences in a globalized work environment.

The findings highlight a range of strategies and responses that female IMEs employ in the face of varied societal norms and professional expectations, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of their intersectional experiences. Furthermore, the dissertation engages in an in-depth discussion on key emergent themes including intersectionality and organizational practices, individual-level foreignness, and temporal perspectives. It proposes conceptual frameworks aimed at elucidating the boundaries experienced by the broader IME population, as well as unpacking the dynamic interplay between societal norms, individual intersectionality and agency, and organizations. Moreover, in acknowledging its limitations, the dissertation offers recommendations for future studies. This research contributes to the existing understanding of women in the global workforce. It focuses on nuanced gender-related identity and on the proactive behaviors, seeking to foster a more positive cross-cultural scholarship. This dissertation can offer valuable theoretical contributions to the fields of IB and IHRM, management and organizational studies, and gender studies, while also suggesting practical implications for organizations in Japan, such as the implementation of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies and career development support.