

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Young Chinese Share Their Parents' Views on the Decision of Embarking on Working Holidays in New Zealand

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**Abstract:** Working holidays have become increasingly popular for young Chinese to gain overseas work and travel experience. Against this background, this research aims to explore the attitudes and perspectives of Chinese parents towards the decision of their children to embark on working holidays in New Zealand and how culture affects these attitudes and perspectives. Through face-to-face interviews, this research recruited 30 Chinese WHMs in New Zealand. Three themes have been developed from analyzing the interview transcripts to uncover the views of their parents, namely, Chinese parents being supportive, Chinese parents urging children to settle down, and Chinese parents not wanting children to undertake “low” jobs. The findings of this research offer a rich and in-depth understanding of how Chinese parents reacted to an unconventional overseas journey. This research advances the academic inquiry into how parents react to their children’s decisions to undertake long-term travel by probing into the conflicting attitudes towards working holidays among Chinese parents. Also, this research advances the individualistic dimension of Chinese culture illustrated by young Chinese independently choosing their life paths rather than following the traditional ones expected by their parents and the society. By considering cultural and social factors of Chinese society, this research further challenges the dominant position of Western-centric perspectives in the current tourism discourse.

**摘要:** 海外打工度假因其能带来工作和旅行经历的原因正在中国年轻人中越来越受欢迎。在此背景下，本研究探讨了中国父母对子女赴新西兰打工度假的态度和看法，以及当代中国社会和文化因素对父母态度和看法的影响。通过面对面访谈的方式，本研究采访了三十位在新西兰打工度假的中国青年。通过对采访文本的分析，本研究深入地剖析了中国父母如何看待子女远赴新西兰打工度假，并得出了三个主题：对子女的支持；敦促子女安定下来；不希望子女从事低端工作。通过探讨中国父母对此所呈现出的对立态度，本研究推进了现有文献中关于父母对子女长期旅行的态度的学术探究。通过展现中国青年独立选择自己的生活轨迹，而非父母和社会所期望的既定路线，本研究推进了对中国文化中的个人主义维度的探究。通过结合中国的社会和文化因素，本研究进一步挑战了当前学术届以西方理论为中心的主导地位。

**Keywords:** working holidays, working holiday makers, Chinese youth, Chinese outbound tourism, Chinese culture, New Zealand

Embarking on a working holiday has been an informal rite of passage among Western youth, which can be traced back to the 1960s (Cohen, 1973). The first official working holiday scheme was established between the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth countries, including Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, to facilitate youth mobility and migration flow (Wilson et al., 2009). In recent years, the concept of working holidays has also become increasingly popular among Chinese youth, which allows them to financially support themselves by undertaking temporary employment while having an extended stay in the host country.

Young people from Mainland China have joined the community of working holiday makers (WHMs) since 2008. New Zealand was the first country in the world that provided Chinese youth with a working holiday program upon signing the Free Trade Agreement with China (Zhu et al., 2020). Since then, 1,000 eligible young people from Mainland China each year can combine travel with work through working holidays in New Zealand. Following the step of New Zealand, Australia offered a Work and Holiday Arrangement in 2015 to allow up to 5,000 eligible young Chinese each year to take part in this scheme (Fang et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2020). With more opportunities offered to Chinese youth, they have become more visible among the WHMs community, though only in New Zealand and Australia at the moment. Given the short time that Chinese youth engaged in working holidays, the phenomenon of Chinese WHMs is still at its nascent stage.

The concepts of “gap year” or “working holiday” are becoming more popular among young people but still are not a mainstream phenomenon in Chinese society, or in a wider context, Asia (Bui et al., 2014) as young Chinese are very likely to be influenced by traditional culture and values (Zhu et al., 2021). In particular, Chinese youth are expected by their parents to follow certain norms and values embedded in Chinese culture and society that lead to a particular path of life, which is to find stable employment upon graduating from university then moving on to get married (Bui et al., 2014; To, 2013; Wu et al., 2015; Zhu et al., 2020). The social environment in China is not gentle to women who remain single in their late 20s or early 30s and are likely to be labeled as “leftover ladies” (You et al., 2016). Therefore, the emerging phenomenon of working holidays has offered an alternative path for

Chinese youth who do not want to be stuck by the traditional path and societal expectations. Also, China has been undergoing tremendous progress in all aspects of life in the contemporary era, resulting in the co-existence of traditional values and modern concepts (Ho et al., 2012). There has been a conflicting trend in China where the future paths for young Chinese have become much more diversified (Deutsch, 2004), whereas their parents still have the same or similar expectations of their children (Zhu et al., 2020).

In recent years, working holidays have become a feasible and popular alternative option for young Chinese. According to the most recent statistics released by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (2018), Immigration New Zealand approved 8,805 working holiday visas filed by Mainland Chinese as of June 2017. According to the annual “Working Holiday Maker Visa Program Report” (Department of Home Affairs, 2020), more than 23,000 young Chinese were granted a working holiday visa so that they could embark on an overseas working holiday experience in Australia. The working holiday scheme is extremely popular among young Chinese, and the annual quotas were met within a very short period after being released (Custer, 2015; Yang, 2014). However, there is scarce knowledge regarding the attitudes and perspectives of Chinese parents towards the decision of their children to embark on working holidays in a foreign country and how culture affects these attitudes and perspectives, which are the objectives of this research. Addressing these questions will offer an in-depth understanding of how Chinese parents reacted to an unconventional overseas journey, as well as the conflicts between generations and the changes among Chinese parents affected by the social-cultural context in China.

## Literature Review

### *Working Holiday Makers—Asians and Chinese*

An increasing body of academic work in recent years was undertaken by Asian scholars (who came from the same country or territory as the informants) that have focused on Asian youth who are mainly from Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China embarking on working holidays in Western countries, including New Zealand, Canada, and Australia (Zhu, 2021). For instance, some research

has looked into the motivations of young Asians going on working holidays (Ho et al., 2014; Nagai et al., 2018; Wattanacharoensil & Talawanich, 2018), while others have investigated the learning experiences and outcomes of overseas working holidays (Kato, 2013; Kawashima, 2010; Tsaur & Huang, 2016; Xu et al., 2021). Some studies have argued that Asian youth are susceptible to or have experienced precarious situations, discrimination, and exploitation in these Western countries as WHMs due to a variety of factors, such as language proficiency, being visible minorities, and the temporary status as WHMs (Fan & Hebbani, 2014; Yoon, 2014a). It is worth noting that these studies have highlighted that academic focus in the tourism discourse has slowly shifted from Western to Asian participants by incorporating their non-Western social and cultural context, which lays a solid foundation for challenging the dominant stance of Western-centric perspectives in the current tourism discourse (Cohen & Cohen, 2015; Winter, 2009; Zhu et al., 2018).

More research has been undertaken to understand this emerging phenomenon and the interesting topics around young Chinese. Studies have examined the decision-making process of embarking on working holidays among Chinese youth and the satisfaction gained from such an extended journey overseas (Meng & Han, 2018a, 2018b). Other research argued that Chinese youth have different motives for working holidays as compared to their Western counterparts. For instance, some Chinese youth regarded their working holiday experiences as an alternative way to seek permanent migration to the host country (Fang et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2020). Other research has focused on the positive learning outcomes that Chinese youth have gained from their working holiday experiences; for example, Chinese WHMs claimed that they have become more independent, brave, and inclusive as well as changed their perspectives on marriage (Zhu et al., 2021). Young Chinese have also achieved a work-life balance while being WHMs and adapted to the work culture in New Zealand (Zhu, 2021).

Although the working holiday journey is largely perceived as a rewarding experience by Chinese WHMs, it is still worth noting that research has suggested that despite experiencing personal changes and reshaping their self-identities, Chinese WHMs were susceptible to precarious situations, such as being exploited within the overseas Chinese community, having limited employment opportunities because of

their temporary status, and facing inherent insecurities (Zhu et al., 2021). More studies have begun to focus on Asian and Chinese WHMs; however, most of these studies focused on what motivated them and what they have experienced and learned as WHMs. Little is known about how Chinese parents think of their children's decision to partake in working holidays.

### ***The Relationship Between Parents and Children Regarding Long-Term Travel***

In the current tourism discourse, studies focus on exploring the relationship between backpackers and their fellow peers they have made interactions along the journey (Murphy, 2001; Noy, 2004). However, tourism scholars have rarely considered and discussed the relationship between young backpackers and their parents and other family members (Cohen, 2003, Pearce & Foster, 2007). Pearce and Foster (2007) further suggested that it is important to consider the interaction between backpackers and their parents or even other family members in terms of backpacking. Previous research suggested there has always been a gap in knowledge regarding the attitudes and perspectives of parents towards the backpacking journey undertaken by their children, which needs to be addressed.

At the cultural level, among the five dimensions of cultural measurement developed by Hofstede (2001), individualism refers to "the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups" (Shi & Wang, 2011, p. 15). According to this model, China emphasizes collectivism over individualism (Hofstede, 2001), despite young Chinese becoming more and more individualistic (Zhu et al., 2021). Studies on Chinese youth suggested that they embarked on long-term travel to separate themselves from the collective expectations of their parents and the Chinese society (Zhu et al., 2020) and escape from the control of their parents so that they do not need to comply with the social norms (Fang et al., 2021), which is in line with the collective ideology and culture emphasized by China.

For Western counterparts, they tended to exit their normal lives by embarking on a backpacking journey and wanted to pursue independence by making their own decisions without asking for directions, guidance, and assistance from their parents (Cohen, 2003). Wilson et al. (2008) pointed out that young people from New Zealand embarked on a similar overseas journey to the one that their parents did many years ago, suggesting

that feeling nostalgic and finding a connection with their parents in Europe may be a motive for these young people to engage in backpacking. However, it is an entirely different scenario in China, where no such rite of passage was undertaken by the parents' generation for the youth to follow. Backpacking and working holidays are very nascent phenomena.

However, none of these studies have delved deeper into the parental attitudes and perspectives on their children's decisions about going on working holidays and how culture affected these attitudes and perspectives. Even the predominant Western literature in the tourism discourse on backpacking and working holidays also acknowledged the lack of academic attention to the relationship between parents and their children in terms of backpacking and working holidays (Cohen, 2003, Pearce & Foster, 2007). Therefore, it is pertinent for this research to address this gap in knowledge by using a qualitative method to explore the attitudes and perspectives of Chinese parents towards the decision of their children to embark on working holidays in New Zealand and how culture affected these attitudes and perspectives.

## Methodology and Method

This research sets out to examine the attitudes and perspectives of Chinese parents towards the decision of their children to embark on working holidays in New Zealand and how culture affects these attitudes and perspectives. The interpretivism paradigm involves the researchers and their subjectivity to interpret the multiple realities of a certain phenomenon (Corbetta, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), allowing researchers to examine an emergent phenomenon from the informants' perspectives (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Knowledge is generated through the interactions between the researchers and the researched (King & Horrocks, 2010), in which researchers play an active role (Braun et al., 2019).

In line with the interpretivism paradigm, face-to-face interviewing was adopted to encourage Chinese WHMs to tell their stories and share their experiences about the reactions and responses they received from their parents when they shared the news of going overseas for working holidays. The method of face-to-face interviewing allows the researcher to actively interact with the interviewees to gain in-depth and

insightful descriptions of the topic discussed (Jordan & Gibson, 2004; Mann, 2016). Meantime, face-to-face interviewing enables the researcher to interact with the informants actively, so they are more willing to open up and share their personal experiences (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Consistent with the interpretivism research paradigm, thematic analysis was employed to analyze the transcripts of the interviews as it is a suitable method for researchers to develop themes from the discursive qualitative materials (Braun & Clark, 2006).

As part of a more comprehensive research project, this research recruited 30 Chinese WHMs through snowball sampling in Queenstown and Christchurch, New Zealand, between March and June 2016. Snowballing sampling not only enables scholars to recruit informants more effectively (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Noy, 2008), it also offers practical benefits for exploratory and descriptive qualitative studies that focus on under-researched topics (Hendricks et al., 1992).

The reason why Queenstown was selected was that it is a compact yet internationally renowned resort town with many tourism and hospitality businesses that offer seasonal employment opportunities during the peak season to migrants like WHMs. Christchurch, being the biggest city on the South Island, has many orchards, farms, and factories around the city that offer temporary employment to WHMs. During the recruitment process, some informants were initially informed of the research project through a mutual friend. Those who agreed to take part in the interview were asked to spread the word about the research in their friend circles and social networking platforms, such as WeChat groups.

Prior to the recruitment of informants, the approval on ethics was obtained by following the regulations and guidelines stipulated by the human ethics committee at the university level. Prior to undertaking the interview, all informants had been informed of the research aim, and the consent of voluntarily taking part in the research and digitally recording the interview was received in writing. Pseudonyms have been allocated to all informants to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of their identities. Informants were given the option of using either English or Mandarin as their preferred language for the interviews; all of them felt more comfortable in Mandarin. The interviews covered multiple aspects of the comprehensive research project

and lasted from roughly half an hour to around two hours, which enabled the researcher to delve deeper into the personal stories and experiences of informants (Veal, 2011). The informants were asked about their social-demographic information, including their age, gender, education background, and length of being WHMs, as well as questions revolving around the perspectives of their parents regarding their decisions to embark on working holidays.

Because of the exploratory nature of this topic, thematic analysis was undertaken inductively to enable the transcripts to do the talking (Boyatzis, 1998). The thematic analysis consists of several steps, which is a recursive process (Braun & Clark, 2006). Firstly, I personally transcribed the digitally recorded interviews in Mandarin to Chinese characters for initial familiarity. There were around 6,000 Chinese characters related to this part. Then, these transcripts were read and re-read to gain further familiarity and lay

a solid foundation for analysis. Next, as the examples shown in Table 1, the transcript extracts were coded in Chinese characters before being translated into English for further analysis. The translation that occurred in this step was to make sure the meanings from the original language were preserved during the analysis (Esfehani & Walters, 2018; Zhu et al., 2019). During this step, a total of 85 codes related to the attitudes of Chinese parents were produced. Then, the themes were searched among the codes. For instance, “getting older” suggests they will be older for jobs or marriage when they get back after working holidays. “Unstable life” indicates they make huge changes in their lives and may have to start over once getting back. “Peer pressure” hints at parents’ attempts to use external factors to sway their children’s decisions. The common underlying meaning these codes expressed is that Chinese parents want their children to stay put and have a stable career and life rather than going on

**Table 1**

*Examples of Transcript Extracts in Chinese Characters Turned Into Coding in English*

Pseudonym	Transcript extracts in Chinese (translation provided in brackets)	Codes in Chinese	Translated Codes
Jennifer	他们会有担心，那你回来之后都很大了，又没有男朋友，就是很不稳定的生活，年纪又大了，你知道国内的状态就是这样，其实也没有很大，其实25、6岁的年纪也还好，可能是周围的朋友都结婚了，他们也会觉得着急  (They did have their concerns. When you come back, you will be older, but you do not have a boyfriend, which would be a very unstable life. You know what it is like in China. Actually, I do not feel that old. In fact, 25 or 26 years old are not that bad. Maybe because friends around me have gotten married, they feel anxious.)	(1) 年纪大 (2) 没有男朋友 (3) 不稳定的生活 (4) 来自同辈的压力	(a) getting older; (b) having no boyfriend; (c) unstable life (d) peer pressure.
Nina	因为在中国教育和传统的北京下，可能他们还是希望你能早点成家呀。  (Because Beijing is under the influence of Chinese education and traditions, maybe they still hope you could get married soon.)	(1) 中国教育和传统 (2) 成家	(a) Chinese education and traditions; (b) get married.

working holidays. The theme “Chinese parents urging children to settle down” was developed to convey the essence of the data (Morse, 2008), which worked well with both the codes and the original transcripts (Braun & Clark, 2006). Lastly, I translated into English selected excerpts in Chinese characters to present the findings.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this research, the research paradigm was discussed in detail, and step-by-step data analysis was presented with examples (Yilmaz et al., 2020). Secondly, this research fully recognized the active role of the researcher, ranging from being involved in all the processes of conducting the research to identifying the meaningful themes from the transcripts (Braun & Clark, 2006). Thirdly, in this cross-language research, the codes were produced in Chinese characters first to better reflect the original meaning (Esfehani & Walters, 2018; Zhu et al., 2019). When presenting the findings, the conceptual equivalence was achieved through the author assuming the dual role of researcher/translator (Zhu et al., 2019), as translation is “more than an exchange of words from one language to another” (Temple, 2002, p. 846), but embraces the “additional layer of subjective understanding” (Hennink, 2008, p. 26).

## Findings

### *Social-Demographic Characteristics*

Table 2 is a summary of the socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewed informants. More female Chinese WHMs ( $n = 23$ , 76.7%) were recruited in this research than their male counterparts ( $n = 7$ , 23.3%). The mean age of these informants was 27, with one informant keeping her age confidential. All of them have left Mainland China for at least five months and the average length of them being WHMs in New Zealand was a little over 10 months. The overwhelming majority of the interviewed informants had obtained their post-secondary degrees, including diplomas from junior colleges ( $n = 5$ , 16.7%), bachelor’s degrees ( $n = 18$ , 60%), and master’s degrees ( $n = 6$ , 20%). Also, four of them received their master’s degrees from overseas universities. The only exception ( $n=1$ , 3.3%) was that the informant took a temporary leave from his tertiary education for working holidays. Drawing from the stories and experiences shared by these Chinese

WHMs, three themes were developed regarding how their parents thought of them embarking on working holidays: (a) Chinese parents being supportive, (b) Chinese parents urging children to settle down, and (c) Chinese parents not wanting children to undertake “low” jobs.

### *Chinese Parents Being Supportive*

Although most of the interviewed Chinese WHMs shared that their parents disapproved of their choices of going on working holidays in New Zealand, some parents have been more open-minded in terms of the life choices and major decisions independently made by their children. More and more Chinese parents have realized that there are more options than the routine path for younger generations, and it is acceptable to be different from others. Some Chinese WHMs mentioned their parents were very open-minded and supported their choices about being a WHM in New Zealand. For instance, Olympia stated, “My parents were quite open-minded and supportive. They told me it was my life, and I should be the one who calls the shot.” In a similar vein, Carter said that “My father firmly believed that adults should make their own decisions.”

The concept of working holidays is rather exotic to many parents in China, and many Chinese parents would expect their children to follow the routine path, which is to find a stable job upon graduating from the university and have a stable life after getting married, as shared and discussed above by those Chinese WHMs interviewed. However, some parents went on board simply out of their love and respect for their children and showed their understanding and consideration towards the decisions made by their children. Florence recalled,

My parents would not stop me from doing what I wanted to do. They might express their opinions but would never say something like: you must do this, or you could not do that. In fact, they did not have a clue about it [being a WHM]. They felt I was neither studying nor working or traveling, yet they thought if this was what I wanted to do and then go for it.

In a similar sense, Emma was very grateful for having the support from her parents and even her grandparents:

**Table 2***Social-Demographic Characteristics of the Interviewed Chinese WHMs*

<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Duration in months as WHMs</b>	<b>Education Level</b>
George	M	27	12	Diploma
Yvonne	F	28	15	Master
Jennifer	F	25	8	Bachelor
Anthony	M	28	15	Master
Anna	F	28	6	Bachelor
Betty	F	29	5.5	Bachelor
Diane	F	28	12	Diploma
Catherine	F	31	12	Bachelor
Emma	F	28	15	Bachelor
Florence	F	30	12	Bachelor
Gaby	F	24	7	Master
Helen	F	26	6	Diploma
Isabella	F	30	10	Master
Kate	F	24	12	Bachelor
Frank	M	26	7	Bachelor
Luna	F	-*	15	Bachelor
Mia	F	26	11	Bachelor
Nina	F	33	12	Master
Olympia	F	25	11	Bachelor
Carter	M	21	7	Temporary withdrawal from university
Danny	M	24	5.5	Bachelor
Phoebe	F	25	12	Bachelor
Rachel	F	26	12	Bachelor
Serena	F	33	12	Master
Tiffany	F	28	6	Bachelor
Ethan	M	30	12	Bachelor
Ursula	F	30	5.5	Diploma
Wendy	F	26	12	Bachelor
Victoria	F	27	10	Bachelor
Blake	M	26	7.5	Diploma

Note: \*Luna refused to disclose her age during the interview.

My family had always been open-minded, probably because I was not around my parents a long time ago. They fully supported whatever I wanted to do. They did have concerns for me, but they had overcome their worries and supported me to be here. Although my grandparents were in their 90s and had no idea what I was trying to do, they felt I should follow my heart if I truly wanted it.

The demographic features of the informants also link to why their parents supported the decision. In particular, four informants received their highest degrees from abroad, illustrating their previous experiences of independently living in a foreign country reassured their parents.

### ***Chinese Parents Urging Children to Settle Down***

The first theme that was frequently mentioned by Chinese WHMs revolved around the expectations from their parents. As seen in Table 2, the mean age of this cohort is in their late 20s. Thus, they are at a stage where it is natural for their parents to expect their children to settle down soon and have a stable life, particularly in China, where the social development has reached a state of involution, yet the social welfare system is not properly established to keep the pace. Thus, Chinese parents disagreed with their children's decisions to go on working holidays and expected their children to settle down in China by either having a stable career or relationship. Anna stated a relatively extreme point as she thought she was emotionally kidnapped by their parents and friends who interfered with her life in the name of showing love and care. Unlike the emotional kidnap faced by Anna, Diane still felt the pressure from her parents:

When I told them about my decision, my parents thought I was insane. I did not make much money when I worked in Beijing, but I had a stable job at a state-owned enterprise. [My parents] thought that job was perfect for me as I was doing what I loved and would get a promotion if I had continued to work hard for three to five years. Although I enjoyed the happiness and freedom of being a WHMs, simultaneously, I felt the pressure from my parents. For example, every time I had a video chat with them, they often asked me when I

would go home or whether I had thought about my future career.

From the perspectives shared by Diane, her parents implied that she should not have given up her previous stable job and were worried about her future employment upon her return to China. Chinese parents deemed not only having a stable career as a representation of settling down but also urged their children to have a stable relationship or get married. For example, Jennifer stated, “[My parents] worried about me. They deemed not having a partner at a relatively older age as an unstable life. You knew what it was like in China. I did not feel I was that old, as the age of 25 or -six was not that bad. But they would become so anxious, particularly when all my friends and relatives around me had got married.”

It can be seen that peer pressure also plays a significant role in Chinese parents urging their children to settle down, as it could “save their faces” when interacting with relatives and neighbors in their social circles. The term “leftover ladies” that describes females who do not get married after a certain age can also apply to their male counterparts. For instance, Blake commented, “I would be considered as a leftover man in China if I had not got married at 29 or 30 upon my return. I would be nagged every single day by my parents.” The mean age of these informants is 27, meaning many of them were approaching their 30s. The majority of the informants had obtained a bachelor's degree or a diploma from a junior college, which means they were in their early 20s when they graduated and had worked for several years. Naturally, their parents would expect their children to continue to follow the path by settling down rather than going on working holidays and starting over when they return to China.

### ***Chinese Parents not Wanting Children to Undertake Low Jobs***

Besides expecting their children to settle down and have a relatively stable life or relationship, Chinese WHMs shared that their parents had another reason to oppose their decision to embark on working holidays. As shown from their socio-demographic characteristics in Table 2, all of them have received tertiary education (to some extent at least), and most of them have got their college or university degrees, so their parents did not want their children to engage in jobs that were deemed inappropriate to college graduates from their perspectives, such as labor-intensive jobs.



Some Chinese WHMs mentioned that their parents had learned a bit about the working holiday scheme and what WHMs did to support their lives overseas from the Internet, which further strengthened their opposition. For instance, Kate recalled,

My parents did not agree with my decision as they did some online research and found out many WHMs undertook temporary jobs such as fruit-pickers or servers, which were relatively low jobs as perceived by them. They thought life would be entirely different compared to that in China and were afraid that I would have a hard time.

Given the temporary nature of the working holiday scheme, Chinese WHMs can only work for the same employer for six months at most (Immigration New Zealand, n.d.). This very temporariness of the scheme hindered WHMs from the possibility of getting more long-term job opportunities in the host country. Thus, they had to find short-term, unskilled, labor-intensive, seasonal employment to support themselves in tourism and hospitality businesses, orchards, and factories, as there was relatively higher demand in these sectors of the employment market. In particular, all of them have received tertiary education in China and overseas, so their parents expected them to work in their fields of study or other white-collar jobs, not in the real fields. Catherine said that her parents would support her in studying abroad rather than going on working holidays for this reason:

My parents did not support my decision at all. They did not think it would be a good thing for a girl to run everywhere. If I went abroad to study, they would probably support me as at least I could get a degree. Before my departure, my mother and I had watched a documentary about WHMs together, and she had some ideas about the scheme. She said to me I traveled to another country just to be a farmer.

## Discussion

The findings illustrated that some Chinese parents showed support and understanding towards their children embarking on working holidays; nonetheless,

they knew little about the scheme, they did not understand why their children wanted to do so, or these decisions contradicted their expectations. The findings also demonstrated that Chinese parents have different attitudes toward the same phenomenon. Deutsch (2004) has discussed that the life paths upon graduation have been diversified for Chinese youth. Nowadays, young Chinese also consider taking some time out from their previous mundane life, so working holidays could be a break from the present or a springboard for them to get ready for the future (Zhu et al., 2020). Working holidays offered Chinese youth a new way to pursue their individualistic sense of self in a foreign country, which is similar to how Japanese and Korean WHMs shaped their individuality and shunned social pressure and parental interference through working holidays (Kato, 2010, Yoon, 2014b). The working holiday journey is a representation of young Chinese shaping their individualism from a long-standing collectivist culture in China (Hofstede, 2001).

During the working holidays, young Chinese have become more independent and courageous and gain a new perspective on the lives they left behind when they return to China (Zhu et al., 2021), but they do not perceive of them being away from home as a way to adulthood as their Western counterparts (Cohen, 2003). Moreover, Chinese backpackers and WHMs faced different scenarios as compared to their Western counterparts, as most Chinese parents did not have the opportunity to embark on overseas journeys when they were younger; therefore, young Chinese of this generation would not have the opportunity to seek the connection with their parents through an overseas rite of passage as young New Zealanders did (Wilson et al., 2008). However, future generations would have the opportunity to embark on working holidays overseas to establish a stronger bond with their parents and shape their own paths.

The opposition from Chinese parents towards their children embarking on working holidays highlights the intergenerational tension as Chinese parents would like to see their children have a stable career, particularly under the circumstance that Chinese society has reached a state of involution, which could be perceived as the Chinese version of the rite of passage. If their children could have a stable lifestyle, their parents would not have to worry about them, and the next step is naturally to settle down by getting married (Moskal, 2016). Chinese youth was disempowered

by socio-cultural factors, such as traditional values, parental expectations and control, and social pressures and influence (Fang et al., 2021; Tsai & Collins, 2017; Zhu et al., 2020). However, the findings of this research showed that more and more young people had realized the importance of choosing their own paths rather than following the routine path expected by Chinese society and their parents (Zhu et al., 2021). Also, young Chinese were strongly against any emotional kidnap from their parents in the name of love to force them to follow the social norms.

Some Chinese parents still perceive marriage as a duty that must be fulfilled by their children (Ikels, 1985; To, 2013). The findings suggested Chinese parents suffered from peer pressure when their children were the few ones who had not gotten married in their social circles. Then they would put more pressure on their children to have faces when socially engaging with relatives, friends, and neighbors (Chou, 2001; McMillan, 2006). Previous research argued that women in China are labeled as leftover if they still have not gotten married in their late 20s or early 30s (You et al., 2016). As illustrated in Table 2, 13 female informants recruited in this research met the criterion and would have been classified as leftover women if they stayed in China. The findings extended this perception as men around this age in China faced the same pressure as their female counterparts and would be labeled as well.

The findings suggested that another reason Chinese parents disagreed with their children's decisions was associated with the jobs undertaken by WHMs, particularly when most of these Chinese WHMs were highly educated. Although the phenomenon of backpackers and WHMs undertaking unskilled jobs is not a new topic within the extant literature (e.g., Cohen, 1973; Uriely, 2001; Yoon, 2014a), it was new to Chinese parents who thought it was not appropriate for their highly educated children to undertake such jobs. In particular, Chinese parents have invested so much over the years for their children to receive higher education so that they would have better chances of success in China, where the competition is always fierce (CIW Team, 2017).

Also, in Chinese culture, certain types of jobs were perceived as higher status than others (Bian, 1996, 2002), whereas the common and popular jobs undertaken by WHMs were labor-intensive, which were perceived as low-status by some Chinese

parents who were heavily influenced by traditional Chinese culture. The findings suggested that because of the temporary nature of the scheme, it was of great difficulty for Chinese WHMs to find employment that matched their educational background and skills. Thus, most Chinese undertook temporary, seasonal, or labor-intensive jobs, such as servers, housekeepers, farmers, or factory workers, which failed to meet the high expectations of their parents. Chinese WHMs perceived the engagement in a wide range of temporary jobs that they would not have done in China as a way to enrich their life experiences rather than undesired or low-status employment, which exemplifies the "intergenerational and inter-cultural differences in the perceptions of working holidays" (Tsai & Collins, 2017, p. 7). Moreover, previous research has illustrated that WHMs have become a significant labor source for temporary or seasonal jobs to support certain industries, such as agriculture, tourism, and hospitality in the host country (Robertson, 2014; Tan & Lester, 2012). Indeed, the temporary and seasonal employment undertaken by Chinese WHMs filled the labor shortage in the employment market of New Zealand, particularly in the agriculture and tourism industries (Zhu, 2021).

## Conclusion

This research explored the attitudes and perspectives of Chinese parents towards the decision of their children to embark on working holidays in New Zealand and how culture affected these attitudes and perspectives. By interviewing 30 Chinese WHMs, the findings of this research offer a rich and in-depth understanding of the perspectives of Chinese parents shared by young Chinese on their decisions to undertake working holidays in New Zealand. Three themes were conceptualized from analyzing the interview transcripts: Chinese parents being supportive, Chinese parents urging children to settle down, and Chinese parents not wanting children to undertake low jobs. Although most of the responses the young Chinese received from their Chinese parents showed reluctance and disagreement, the silver lining lies that some Chinese parents have become more willing to respect and support their children's decisions and adapt to these changes.

This research advances the academic inquiry into how parents react to their children's decisions

to undertake long-term travel, such as backpacking and working holidays, by probing into the conflicting attitudes towards working holidays among Chinese parents, which fills in the gap in knowledge. Also, this research advances the individualistic dimension of Chinese culture illustrated by young Chinese independently choosing their life paths rather than following the traditional ones expected by their parents and the society. By considering cultural and social factors of Chinese society, this research further challenges the dominant position of Western-centric perspectives in the current tourism discourse.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, young Chinese, who wanted to pursue the combination of international work and travel experiences, have constituted an emerging yet increasingly important cohort in the international community of WHMs. Under pressure from traditional values and the family-kinship system, some parents still perceive having a stable life, career, and marriage as the benchmark for happiness, which creates a huge generational gap (Zhu et al., 2020). Younger generations have become more independent and individualized as compared to their parents (Hansen & Svarverud, 2010) and have begun to explore the different possibilities in life, such as taking gap years (Wu et al., 2015), having more flexibility in choosing the career path (“Chinese people more tolerant,” 2016), or undertaking employment that would not meet parental standards, which also creates discrepancies compared to the societal and parental expectations. However, some parents have become more open-minded and supportive, to keep pace with the times, and respect the decisions made by their children. The different attitudes among Chinese parents constitute the epitome of the ongoing social changes and intergenerational conflicts in contemporary Chinese society.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research also has several limitations which pave the way for future studies. Firstly, this research interviewed young Chinese WHMs to get indirect perspectives on the reactions, opinions, and attitudes of Chinese parents whose children went on working holidays in New Zealand. Future research could consider directly interviewing the parents of young Chinese to get their views and perspectives on their children participating in long-term backpacking and working holidays in different countries.

Secondly, the sampling method failed to cover a larger geographical area, such as other cities on the South Island and even the North Island; thus, the representativeness of the cohort of Chinese WHMs may not be guaranteed. Future research could use quota sampling or other sampling methods to recruit informants to improve the representativeness of the cohort.

Thirdly, these interviews were undertaken prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, so it would be interesting to see the changes in attitudes and perceptions towards long-term backpacking and working holidays among young Chinese and their parents in a post-COVID-19 world.

Lastly, as one of the first studies that focused on the perspectives of Chinese parents on working holidays, the findings of this research are exploratory. Future research could employ a quantitative or mixed-method to recruit more WHMs to delve deeper into the phenomenon.

### **Declaration of Ownership**

This report is my original work.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

### **Ethical Clearance**

This study was approved by the institution.

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