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HIDDEN TENSIONS: AN EXPLORATION OF MULTINATIONAL COMPANY EMPLOYEES' SOCIAL IDENTITIES IN THE U.S. AND CHINA

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Abstract

This dissertation examined Chinese and U.S. organizational members' multiple social identities and how they engaged in identity work to develop, organize, revise, and manage identity tensions that emerge from various identifications communicatively. More specially, identity was essential to multinational company employees' work lives as a cross-level dynamic. They were linked, facilitated, and shaped employees' workplace activities, such as their decision-making, work preferences, and communication. Tensions emerged as employees were guided by manage multiple identifications and endeavored to organize these identifications through communication. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with 18 Chinese and 13 U.S. volunteer participants in international companies located in China and the U.S. A modified constant comparative analysis revealed, first, four types of salient identities in both identity-encouraging and challenging contexts: individual (cultural and religious), collective (organizational, occupational, and team), positional (leader role and community role,), and relational identities (family role and friend role). Participants organized these identities differently, concluded in two identity models, the holistic and kaleidoscope model. While they were developing and organizing these identities, identity tensions also emerged: work-life challenges, member-leader transition, friend-professional switch, and cultural/religion-work challenge. Identity tensions triggered participants' sensemaking to make sense of their identity organizations and engaged in various identity management strategies. Such strategies included passive observational learning from mentorship and workgroup cooperation in which participants were involved, as well as a set of functional (Compartmentalization, avoidance, and reframed

integration), rhetorical (disclaimers, defense, venting, making clarifications, and self-deprecating jokes), and discourse (organizational discourse) identity work tactics they developed from daily routines.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Identity is central to individuals' participation in modern organizations. Identity serves as a "root construct" (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000, p. 13) for various aspects of work life, ranging from employees' own emotion management, to overall organizational managerial effectiveness. Identity is frequently divided into personal and social identities. While a personal identity refers to individuals' self-image and self-definition, social identities denote individuals' roles or memberships with certain positions in a social network or human aggregates, providing them a sense of belongingness in the social world (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). In contemporary organizations, social identities matter. They situate employees with a sense of the organizational landscape regarding "who or what it is, who or what other entities are, and how the entities are associated" (Ashforth, Harrison, Corley, 2008, p. 326).

Nowadays, workplaces are tremendously complex, with globalization facilitating interactions and group formations among people of different national, ethnic, or religious backgrounds. Employees can connect or belong to various social groups in which multiple social identities are developed. Such multiplicity of identities is apparent in employees' active participations in social clubs, religious groups, work teams, companies, and/or a particular occupation. This multiplicity of social identities appears to challenge and complicate our understanding of organizational members' work lives, especially in multinational companies (MNCs). Within these multinational/multicultural companies, the diversity of workforce has strikingly expanded the availability of social groups and their identities, producing a wider range of social information and more complex partnerships than the geographically limited companies (Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015). Business cooperation may involve more careful considerations of national cultural, ethnic, gender, language, or religious differences, simultaneously, than in business exchanged in geographically and demographically limited organizational settings.

Diverse social group characteristics available further complicate interpersonal, intergroup, intercultural, and hierarchical relationships in multinational companies with associated positive and negative impacts. Multiple memberships and roles are vital for enhancing self-esteem, building social relationships, as well as fostering organizational socialization and decision-making (Ashforth & Mael, 1989); meanwhile, various identities can clash, compete, or conflict. The “inconsistency between the contents of two or more identities, such as a clash of values, goals, or norms” is termed an identity tension (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 354). In addition, not only incompatible identities, but also identity ambiguity can trigger identity tension. An identity tension has been found to be closely associated with emotional stress, workplace burnout, intergroup conflicts, and dysfunctional organizing (Burke, 1973; Cherim, 2002; Cox Jr., 1991; Jones, 2009; Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015; Li, Xin, & Pillutla, 2002). Although relevant literature has attempted to tease out the complexity of workplace identities, our understanding remains incomplete due to 1) fragmented conceptualizations of social identities, 2) an inconsistent and inadequate theorizing for structuring multiple identities, and 3) a lack of understanding of how employees communicate to cope with identity tensions.

Scholars have studied multiple social identities in the workplace by roughly following two major foundational theories, which appear to pull the big picture into parts: identity theory and social identity theory. Identity theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000) views social identity as role-related. For example, a role-related identity could be a mother to a family, a joker in a social clique, or a supervisor in a team. Role identities are developed from various social relationships. Another leading theory, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985) supports that social identity is memberships that entail depersonalized prototypical characteristics of collective targets. For example, an individual's identity with a corporation claims typical characteristics of the company; a strong supporter of Chinese culture tends to think and behave in culturally appropriate ways that represent the Chinese traditional values or beliefs. These two defining lenses appear to be mixed or employed confusingly in relevant studies. Thus, evidence of salient identities in the workplace is relatively exclusive or insufficient in a sense that they only offer insights into specific types, such as role identities or collective identities with group or organizations.

Relatedly, scholars from these two theoretical perspectives diverge on the contextual relevancy of social identities and thus fail to answer questions of when and where members' salient identities are activated (i.e., identity salience) (Stryker & Burke, 2000). While identity theory posits that social identity is relatively stable and remains salient across situations and time, social identity theory highlights the characteristic of situational salience. According to social identity theory, individuals' most salient social identities vary depending on their preference in given social situations. The divergence on the conceptualization of social identity as stable, and social identity as salience is apparent. Therefore, an integrated examination that embraces multiple types of salient social identities is necessary and will supplement current identity literature.

Furthermore, the ways multiple identities are linked across the level of analysis is not well understood in the identity literature. Most scholarly work has attended to a particular level of analysis (e.g., micro-roles/group/organization) to unpack the complex nature of identity (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Burke, 2003; Fitzsimmons, 2011). However, workplace identities appear entangled while impacting employees' work lives. A holistic view that examines multiple identities as a cross-level dynamic is necessary because our understanding of cross-level identities and their linkages constructed in communicative activities remains unclear. At the conceptualization level, nested identities and cross-cutting identities, two key constructs in the relevant literature, are employed confusingly. Nested identities refer to the notion that multiple formal identities can nest, or be embedded within others, as they are institutionalized in an organizational structure (e.g., work team; department; organizational identity); cross-cutting identities are formal (e.g., work union; task force), or informal social memberships (e.g., friendships or cliques) that intersect with nested identities (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Abraham, 2004). The confusion is evident in empirical studies where cross-cutting identities can also be nested into, instead of intersected with, the institutionalized social structure (e.g., Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014). For example, Meisenbach and Kramer (2014) identified that music identity and family identity were enacted in a volunteer organization and affected volunteers' decision-making. Music identity served as a higher order, cross-cutting identity to volunteers, nested in their organization. In addition, the divergence among identity and social identity theory is also apparent in the few theoretical models that study cross-level identities. For instance, Ashforth and Johnson's (2001) nested identity model and Fitzsimmons (2013) have simply focused on either collective or role identity integration and segmentation. A more comprehensive theoretical model is crucial to not only represent employees' identification with collective memberships, but also to reflect their role commitment to various social relationships.

Moreover, some informal identities, in the traditional sense, such as friendship or national cultural identities, have been perceived as transitory, proximal, or weak, yet they can become enduring, dismal, or strong for multinational company employees. Many MNCs now operate in the form of interdependent and intercultural teams with a flatter hierarchical structure (Poole & Real, 2003). Friendships between supervisors and subordinates can become more pervasive and meaningful than those in government or local companies, where hierarchy is clear. Thus, these informal identities are likely to become powerful in MNCs, and impact employees' identity management through daily communicative practices. In van Marrewijk's (2004) study, friendships formed between individuals of different cultural groups in the multinational alliance were influential in impeding straightforward communication among employees. These individuals' strong informal identities tended to trigger a rivalry between alliance partners. Cultural identity, despite various kinds of conceptualizations, mainly refers to identification with cultural ordering at the societal level in this study (Gudykunst & Kim, 2002). Employees' system of thoughts and the taken-in cultural values and beliefs through enculturation may greatly impact their identifications in intercultural organizational settings. Compared with geographically limited business settings, the diverse workforce and interactions in multinational companies provides greater possibilities for exploring cross-level identities, as well as their linkages and organizing patterns.

More importantly, most relevant studies fail to provide a clear picture of members' identity management strategies, especially during identity tensions. The divergent perspectives of identity formation (role versus group-based views) direct empirical findings. Scholars who studied role-based identity management tend to focus on functional approaches, that is, individuals striving for the effective management of multiple roles. They develop various strategies to achieve cognitive coherence in identity management and to perform well. Roccas and Brewer's (2002) identity management typology, for instance, demonstrated individuals' cognitive tendency to buffer potential identity tensions by managing various social identities. In role identity management, individuals' participations in collective identity negation are somewhat neglected. Along this line, individuals may take both internal (actions done by/for self) and external (actions done to /with others) tactics to deal with identity tensions (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). Current studies, however, have provided a glimpse into only one of these two tactics, such as individual management strategies (e.g., Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Pratt & Foreman, 2000), or identity image (e.g.,Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004). Therefore, how employees make sense of and cope with various multiple identities and associated struggles both in individual and collective, internal and external actions is open to further investigation

Hence, the goal of this dissertation is to identify multinational company employees' salient social identities in the workplace, uncover the systemic linking among their multiple identities, and understand their communicative management strategies in identity tensions. To achieve this goal, a study that involved multinational company employees in both China and the U.S. was conducted due to the theoretical potentials and contextual uniqueness embedded in each country. China and the U.S. have become two major global markets, with significant contributions to the world economy (Zhu, 2013). The number of multinational citizens has greatly increased in these two countries. Over the past ten years, the overall population of multiracial individuals has grown by over 30% in the U.S. (Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015), and 29.53% in China (CCG, 2015). The high-level mobility of the population and frequent multinational cooperation in the U.S. and Chinese markets provide great potential for organizational individuals to identify with multiple social categories, take in various communicative messages, and internalize their preferred values and beliefs. In addition, multinational companies in China and the U.S. tend to integrate various, yet distinctive national, economic, political, and organizational characteristics in the workplace. Members may organize their various identities into different patterns, encounter diverse identity tensions, or act on distinctive identities, as a result. The unique setting of MNCs may generate interesting observations about members' identity negotiation and supplement the identity literature.

To this end, the purpose of this dissertation is to explain how employees' multiple identities are linked and how members manage potential identity tensions in Chinese and U.S. multinational companies. The following sections (a) review foundational theories and identity features in studies of multiple identities in the workplace, (b) explain multiple perspectives of studying the linkage of multiple identities, (c) discuss the potential impacts of multiple identities on the individual, group, and organization level, and (e) recognize communicative identity management strategies in the identity literature.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this dissertation is to unpack the linkages among Chinese and the U.S. multinational company employees' multiple salient social identities and identify the communicative strategies they employ in managing potential identity tensions. The following discussion is a review of relevant literature, in which the major theoretical arguments for this study and research questions are presented. The literature review (a) identifies two leading identity theories and identity features in studies of multiple identities in the workplace, (b) explains the primary lenses of theorizing concerning linkages of employees' multiple identities, (c) summarizes identity tensions on the individual, group, and organization level, and (e) presents a major theoretical lens for approaching identity management.

Identity, Social Identity, and Identification

The conceptualizations of identity vary. A review of current literature on multiple social identities in the workplace reveals that identity and social identity have been used interchangeably without a careful differentiation. The confusion comes from two major guiding theoretical perspectives: identity theory and social identity theory. These two theories provide seemingly similar, but essentially distinctive conceptualizations of social identity.

Identity theory. Identity theory was developed to explain individuals' role-related behaviors. Grounded in symbolic interactionism, identity theory posits that individuals' social identities are various relational networks in which they take on multiple positions or roles; each role entails a set of expectations posed by the group to which an individual belongs (Stryker & Burke, 2000), or other interactant(s) in social relationships. Multiple role identities define multiple facets of an individual with a socially constructed self-meaning, differentiating him/her from others. For example, a supervisor makes sense of his/her role as a leader in connection with the role of a subordinate; this supervisor may also clarify his/her role as a co-worker in comparison with other supervisors. Socially appropriate definitions of a leader and a peer in others' eyes then prescribe this supervisor's behaviors. Essentially, identity theory maintains that individuals seek self-relevant meanings and expectations for roles in social groups, and internalize them into a relatively stable cognitive schema of self. Thus, according to identity theory, the development of multiple social identities is rooted in a self-defining process in which the individuals learn and construct meanings about who they are from interacting with other social members in various social relationships.

Social identity theory. Social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1985), along with self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985), set out to explain intergroup relations, group interactions, and the social self. Different from the role-based identity theory, SIT defines the self-concept in relation to features of categories. The membership of a particular social category denotes ingroup and outgroup boundaries, which define, as well as regulate an individual's behaviors (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Social memberships influence individuals through two underlying sociocognitive processes: categorization and self-enhancement. Self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985), later proposed as a supplement to SIT, demonstrates the categorization process. People are involved in depersonalization naturally, a process in which they are attributed to, and act on as representative of in-group characteristics (i.e., prototypes) in social interactions. Depersonalization results in individuals being categorized based on group prototypes, differentiating in and outgroup members. For example, employees may perceive a recently promoted supervisor as representing the managerial group (i.e., depersonalization). The supervisor may begin acting on a leader identity, instead of a general employee identity, to align with the ideal and expected image of the management (i.e., categorical prototypes). Categorical prototypes then enable employees to make sense of the social contexts to a maximum level of clarity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The new categorizing process that occurs for the promoted supervisor guides ensuing social interactions with the crew of former co-workers, the management, or clients, and removes ambiguity and uncertainty.

Through self-enhancement, positive ingroup stereotypes bring individuals a sense of belongingness and pride, and allow them to claim accomplishments of the identified collective, which, in turn, improves individuals' self-esteem (Hogg et al., 1995; Stevens & Fiske, 1995). Combined with the categorization process, when employees initially step into multinational companies, they may only draw from the most readily available categorizations such as gender, work units, ethnicities, or other previously developed identities with associated prototypes; however, to make better sense of the company, employees should be motivated to maximize perceived differences or similarities, later, with more contextual-based categories, such as team, newcomers, Chinese, or friends. Employees also identify with targets that bring psychological enhancement. A fan of Apple products can highly identify with the Apple company before joining. The company identity can either be strengthened or weakened later, depending on this employee's feeling of belongingness and pride after joining. Notably, categorization and self-enhancement are sociocognitive processes that may result in either positive or negative implications for individuals. Categorical prototypes may bring both stereotypes (e.g., biased perceptions toward minority group) and benefits (e.g., appreciation or close connections due to perceived similarities); while self-enhancement aids self-esteem, it may trigger individuals' biased protection of the target due to an associated strong sense of pride.

Theoretical divergence. Identity theory and SIT provide two seemingly similar, yet different lenses of defining identity. Identity theory is role-based while SIT supports group categorization-related memberships. The current literature does not thoroughly consider the differences in empirical studies based on these two theories and employs the terms identity and social identity interchangeably. The theoretical divergence drives studies of identities in the workplace into two trends. Following identity theory, researchers' major focuses are on individuals' role management, role boundaries, and role transitions as part of organizational lives (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2000; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). For example, Ashforth et al. (2000) posited that organizational members experienced role transitions every day among work, home, and other frequently visited places. They developed role transition scripts that specified certain sequences of moving between role identities. The role-based perspective appears to neglect social attributes such as ethnicities or nationalities, which can remain constant across roles. Stryker and Burke (2000) differentiated race, gender, and ethnicity as socially attributed identities because they characterized the social structure, not the self, and did not carry specific sets of behavioral expectations.

By contrast, SIT examines a wider range of collective targets that include workplace identities such as groups, teams, or organizations, cultural or ethnic identities, and gender. A review of the relevant literature shows that scholars have identified the importance of ethnic, cultural, and gender identities in organizational employees' work lives (e.g., Brewer, 1999; Fitzsimmons, 2013; Gibbs, 2009; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Gibbs emphasized cultural identities in global teams and identified cultural tensions that characterized intercultural collaboration. The convergence and divergence of cultural identities (e.g., national cultures, corporate cultures, socio-demographic cultures, and professional cultures) were negotiated as multi-facets of a global team, salient to global team cooperation.

In addition, the two fundamental theories differ in their emphasis on situational salience in identity development. Role-based identity theory explains individuals' search for perceived self-relevant meaning in social interactions for a coherent identity schema. Identity is stable across time and situations once individuals internalize perceived self-meanings into an organized self-perception (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Supportive of this view, Serpe and Stryker (1987) conducted a study on university graduates and found that students tended to select an organization, that highlighted their highly salient identity, which they had developed before their entry. When they were successfully hired, their self-definitions remained stable over time. Thus, identity theory tends to underestimate the contextual salience and neglects individuals' sociocognitive processes in their identity development. By contrast, social identity is highly responsive to immediate social contexts in SIT and self-categorization theory. People are motivated to seek the most easily justifiable categorizations that are readily accessible and situated in local contexts. In other words, individuals search for labels or categories that best explains similarities and differences that occur in social interactions at a given time. As a result, the employed identity may shift to fit the changes in contexts.

Comparatively speaking, social identity theory is clearly more dynamic and can account for sociocognitive processes in identity development, while identity theory gives a better insight into role identity and the reciprocal process between individual and society, from a sociological perspective. Along this line, the following discussion further teases out major issues that appear in the big picture of social identities in the workplace resulting from the divergence of the two foundational frameworks. The next discussion presents important constructs in employees' identity development and negotiation among multiple social identities.

Diverse Typologies of Social Identities

Social identities embrace a broad range of identities that occurs in social interactions, identified in various scholarly classifications. These identities are classified into various categories that complicate and make somewhat confusing the navigation of influential social identities. Brewer (2001) proposed a popular typology of social identity: 1) person-based social identities indicate that individuals internalize characteristics of a group as part of their self-concepts (e.g., demographic identities such as ethnicity or gender); 2) relational social identities mean individuals define self according to others in their groups (e.g., independent self versus interdependent self); 3) group-based social identities align with identity theory (e.g., supervisor, mother); and 4) collective identities emphasize shared social actions initiated by group members to construct a representative group image, which speaks to SIT (e.g., work units, organizational identity). These four types of social identities are vital to understanding how individuals define themselves in various social contexts.

Partially overlapping with Brewer's (2001) classification, Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, and Ethier (1995) categorized five types of identities based on need fulfillment: personal relationships (e.g., friend, parent), occupations (e.g., student, teacher), political memberships (e.g., feminist, Republican), ethnicity/religion (e.g., Asian, Christian), and stigmatized groups (e.g., workaholic, minority). Each type of identity satisfies irreplaceable individual needs and drives individuals to participate in social group activities. Scott, Corman, and Cheney (1998) further summarized the four most relevant social identities that occur in organizational life: individual (individual's well-being is placed above interests of social memberships), work group (e.g., team or work unit that strive to promote the interests of collective beliefs, values, or norms), organizational (benefits of a primary organization are highly valued and protected), and occupational or professional (e.g., identification with an industry, professional associations, unions, or job types).

In addition to these three prominent typologies, scholars also differentiate work and formal identifies (e.g., organizational identity) from non-work and informal identities (e.g., family, friendships) in relevant literature (e.g., Ashforth et al. 2000; Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). The overall mapping of influential social identities in the workplace becomes challenging due to a variety of taxonomies available. This concern occurs not only because scholars hold distinctive research angles, but also because of the increasingly complex workforce in contemporary organizations. First, the overlap among three prominent classifications is apparent. For instance, ethnicity in Deaux et al.

(1995) is one type of individual identity in Scott et al. (1998); however, ethnicity/religion and other individual identities, such as family and gender can be grouped into Brewer's (2001) personal-based category. Individual identities also are defined broadly enough to embrace family and gender identities as a personal relationship identity. Second, the variety of typologies may not capture the complexity of social identities in multinational companies. Employees can develop a wider range of identities in multinational companies than the geographically limited settings due to the more diverse workplaces. In such a workplace, pre-existing classifications of social identities may fail to identify new influential identities or nuanced differences embedded in multinational companies in the U.S. and China.

Identification

Developing an identity involves a process of identifying with a target, which is termed as identification. Tolman (1943) defined identification as "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to [a collective], where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the [collective] in which he or she is a member" (p. 142). Identification allows people to differentiate in a self-defining process. In other words, individuals are able to answer the question, "Who am I," through answering, "With whom do I belong and not belong?" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). For instance, identification with the Apple company implies a de-identification with Microsoft. In addition, people are motivated to be seen unique as the identified collective, which speaks to the self-enhancement in SIT (Brewer, 1991). If the Apple company is perceived as standing out between all the other IT companies, identification with such a company can provide a sense of uniqueness.

Ashforth et al. (2008) further expanded this concept by proposing a fuzzy set of identification models, in which identity is the core. In their set, identity consists of self-definition (I am), importance (I value), and feelings (I feel about). The three elements integrate in the statement, “I am A, I feel proud of A, and so A is important to me.” The outer ring of identity content embraces values (B), goals (C), beliefs (D), stereotypical traits (E), and knowledge (F). The core of identity directs the content, “Because of A, I care about B, want C, believe D, generally do E, and can do F” (Ashforth, et al., 2008, p. 330). Behaviors of identity are the outmost ring that reflects individuals’ actual actions. Accepting these attributes indicates a process of identification and the development of an identity, which guides employees to define themselves in terms of associated prototypes of one or more collective targets or roles. Connecting to multinational companies in this study, employees in Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG), one of the big four accounting firms worldwide, may make a statement as “I, as a KPMG employee, value professionalism, and feel valued as an accountant at KPMG.” A KPMG employee then indicates identification with the company, while a valuable accountant shows their occupational identity, mingled with organizational identification. Members’ identity drives their behaviors by providing a set of values, beliefs, and goals. A self-defined KPMG employee will behave in ways congruent with his/her identity core and contents.

To this end, identification appears as the process of developing an identity, taking in a set of self-definition, values, goals, and beliefs, and behaving accordingly. Moreover, Scott et al. (1998) further expanded on this conclusion by postulating that identification is both the process of developing and the outcome of practicing identities. Their argument will be further explained later in the discussion of structural perspective.

The preceding discussion shows that relevant conceptualizations have considered identity and identification as enduring, stable, or contextually salient cognitive constructs. Despite variations, a general agreement is achieved, implicitly or explicitly, that social identities and the identification process itself are fundamentally communicative (Burke, 1950; Elsbach, 1999; Scott & Stephens, 2009). Individuals' identity work, the process of forging, maintaining, revising, and alternating identities, involves social interactions and communicative strategies as individuals develop and negotiate their identities (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). It is through various communicative identity work that individuals are able to engage in identification, identify with roles and collective targets, and form identities. For example, Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) defined workplace identity as a narration, an "internalized and evolving story that results from a person's selective appropriation of past, present and future" (p. 135). They concluded that accounts, narratives, and other rhetorical strategies were necessary for individuals to claim and express their work identities in role transitions. Another example is Koerner's (2014) study on how business professionals articulate identity processes in various forms of courage. Workplace courage as "episodes of identification" manifested in four storylines, or "identity-laden descriptions" (Koerner, 2014, p. 87). Communicating identification with workplace courage ("Who they were") and disidentification with the identity of "coward" ("Who they were not") illustrated business professionals' sensemaking of courageous acts. Further, participants' articulation of identification processes validated self and others' courage identities, and guided their workplace behaviors. In this sense, communication is pertinent for activating, expressing, and shaping identities in the workplace. More importantly, the multiplicity of social identities and identification is apparent. It is through various communicative activities, events, or episodes that organizational members negotiate the potentially overlapping, compatible, or competing meanings of multiple identities.

Co-presence of Multiple Identities and Identifications

Despite the theoretical divergence noted, scholars appear to agree that employees develop multiple identities with various social groups within or outside the organizations (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Burke, 1973; Gossett, 2002; Russo, 1998; Scott et al., 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Tompkins & Cheney, 1983). Organizational members' choices of social identities in various circumstances depend on several major features, as reviewed in the following sections.

Situational characteristics. Previous research has demonstrated the importance of taking contexts into the consideration of employees' multiple identities. Scott et al. (1998) further explored the contextuality of social identities, defined by locales that characterized modern organizational lives, ranging from random places like hallways or cafeteria, to formal settings, like meeting rooms or a leader's office. Within and outside the organizations, employees came together in these locales for routine activities by which they were able to develop multiple identifications (e.g., friends, co-workers, or subordinates) (Giddens, 1984). More importantly, relevant contextual cues, such as the roles of interactants, the nature of the events or activities, and the timing when the situation occurred, activate individuals' most salient identity that directs ensuing interpretations, activities, and behaviors (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). Thus, multiple social identities reflected in given situations guide members' decisions in terms of "which goals are important in this situation, who is to blame for the conflict, who has the power to control, or which norms are perceived as important" (Poole & Garner, 2006, p. 276). Scott and Stephens (2009) provided an example by proposing a situational model of identification. They revealed the situational-based nature of volunteers' identifications in three communication-based contexts: communicating with other volunteers, with family and friends, and with patrons. Volunteer identification with the performing arts stood out when communicating with patrons at events, and then greatly influenced their level of work motives. This study demonstrated how identification processes were situated within various communicative activities, shifting from one situation to another.

The context-relevant nature of identity and identification is essential to this dissertation. Diverse organizational activities and routines assemble employees, activate their most salient identity in relevant locales, and enable them to make sense of organizational lives. The diversity of social contexts is particularly visible in MNCs. Multinational companies frequently operate based on project teams or computer-mediated communication on social media, such as Facebook and Facetime, or via email. This further increases the complexity and diversity of formal and informal, domestic and multinational business activities. Such a context provides space for employees to identify with a wider range of social attributes. Employees adopt, exchange, and interpret various contextual cues, which then influence their identity negotiation.

Identity salience. Situational characteristics reflect when multiple identities will stand out in organizational members' routines; however, in a given situation, individuals can reveal multiple identities. Identity salience addresses questions, which one of these identities tends to be dominant and how multiple identities work together. Identity salience is linked with two aspects: situational relevance and identity subjective importance. Since the previous section has addressed the relevance of contextual or situational relevance in identity negotiation, this section reviews individuals' subjective evaluations of multiple identities.

Identity subjective importance describes the degree of importance an identity has in an individual's subjective evaluation. Identity theory (Stryker, 1980) pointed out that individuals ranked their multiple identities based on subjective evaluation in a "salience hierarchy" (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001, p. 32). Higher order identities are subjectively more important, and tend to exert greater power on one's self-esteem, feeling of self-worth, as well as evaluations of others than lower order identities (Callero, 1985; Hogg et al., 1995). Salience hierarchy (rank of importance) is associated with how individuals weigh aspects of themselves. For example, Deaux (1991) argued that individuals perceived social identities as voluntary (i.e., identities we can choose, like organizational identity) versus involuntary identities (e.g., nationality); and desirable (i.e., perceived positive identities) versus undesirable (i.e., perceived negative identities). Voluntariness and desirability influence an individual's subjective ranking for a particular identity in the hierarchy, based on how much effort an individual will spend to maintain an identity and the degree to which an individual will express an identity. Deaux (1991) discovered, for instance, that parental identities appeared more desirable to individuals than the group and organizational identities (e.g., club member) did. He also found that gender identities could be more voluntarily than ethnic identities (e.g., Asian or Hispanic).

Notably, identity salience is deemed to be stable across situations and time in identity theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000), whereas Ashforth and Johnson (2001) argue that identity salience is situationally subjective, related to how central an identity is an individual's immediate goal, belief, and values. Some scholars support identity theory that frequently accessible identities, such as gender or ethnicity, can be individuals' most valued, important, and frequently employed identities in memory, gaining high accessibility and; therefore, a high level of salience (Hogg, Abraham, Otten, & Hinkle, 2004; Oakes, 1987). Contrary to this view, situational salience, proposed by Ashforth and Johnson (2001), argues that perceptually salient identities (i.e., aligned with immediate goals) in the immediate situation are situationally accessible. The situationally salient identity provides individuals with corresponding resources in decision-making (Hogg et al., 2004).

Employees in multicultural organizations' various identities can differ on the level of salience. Among choices of following organizational values that "embracing diversity" and supporting ones' cultural group in a team conflict, a Chinese/American employee may act in a way that supports the identity he/she subjectively ranked highest. Potentially, cultural identity may take higher order for a Chinese employee's salience hierarchy than his/her organizational identity, which, in turn, drives the member to support the national cultural group; it is also likely that a member may take organizational identity as the priority, which aligns with the immediate goal of resolving the conflict and getting the job done. In this hypothetical case, the employee may then take actions to reduce cultural conflicts and support diversity in the organization. In this example, the importance of cultural and organizational identities directs the employee's perceptions and decision-making in the conflict situation. Therefore, identity salience is essential to understand multinational company employees' work lives, such as their preferred values and beliefs.

Identity compatibility. In addition to considering when and how an identity becomes influential, similarities among each identity also matter in the interaction among employees' multiple identities. Scott et al. (1998) posited identity compatibility as the level of overlap and consistency between multiple identity regions. Individual tend to group available resources such as rules, norms, or relationships to different identity regions; these resources can be unique or overlap.

Scott et al. (1998) argued that the more compatible various resources are among identities, the more likely the identities overlap, and vice versa. This point is supported in identification literature (Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Scott, 1997). Some studies, however, have suggested that multiple identities generally compete (e.g., Tompkins & Cheney, 1985; van Maanen, 1976). Different from the argument, Mael and Ashforth (1992) posited that multiple identities are "loosely coupled." Each identity connects to others while retaining some degree of independence and uniqueness. Changes in one identity do not always affect all the others. A team member, for instance, may find that a currently established project team is creative and welcoming, consistent with the corporate "family" mission, yet slightly different from his/her previous work group that is friendly and traditional. The notion of identity compatibility is particularly important for identifying salient identities and further explorations of potential tensions or conflicts that emerge from incompatible identities. The salience of employees' multiple identities may remain unclear and blurry when they are similar and relatively compatible with values, beliefs, or rules; tensions and conflicts can emerge from the incompatibility of identities because they denote distinctive or unique characteristics, which will be discussed in the second section later.

Other influential features. Current literature also suggested some other more or less important features that may affect individuals' identity development and negotiation, including identity cues, identity size and position, front and back regions, and identity tenure.

Identity cues, as discussed in Ashforth et al. (2008), can be conscious or nonconscious stimuli that spur the enactment of an identity. Identity cues tend to answer the question of how identification occurs by examining priming effects, such as smiling at clients at the first sight, entering a company, or taking on a uniform. Putting on a uniform, for example, activates an occupational or organizational identity. Different identity cues appear to relate with the contextual cues noted previously, while contextual cues emphasize more situational characteristics.

Scott et al. (1998) also discussed identity size and position, front and back regions, and identity tenure. These features tend to impact which identity may stand out in the workplace. The notions of *identity size and position* are similar to identity salience, referring to the importance of an identity to a person, and affecting which identity is perceived central to members. Ashforth et al. (2000) studied micro transitions such as between home and work on a daily basis. They reviewed that core features characterized important, necessary, or typical aspects of an identity, which contrasts peripheral features in role transitions. In the case of multicultural companies, the greater the contrast is between members' core and peripheral identities, say organizational identity and friend role identity, the more difficult their transitions can potentially become.

Front and back regions describe individuals' abilities to draw on and express one identity in one situation while disassociating from other targets (Scott et al., 1998). The front region is defined as positive identification, whereas the back region is more related with negative disidentification. Members draw on premises or beliefs reflected from the front regions as they develop identifications with one target, and they draw on back regions as they disassociate from a different target. Some organizational identification studies address this idea and reveal how members hold the old or develop new identities in organizational changes. Chreim (2002) conducted two empirical studies and found that organizational members experience dis- and re-identification states during organizational changes, which then involved drawing on a currently desired identity (i.e., the front region) and leaving the previous organizational identity behind (i.e., the back region).

Identity tenure indicates the duration of time an identity is retained by an individual, which speaks to Deaux's (1991) identity dimensions in that tenure characterizes the forms of identity. In Scott et al. (1988), for example, involuntary identities, such as ethnicity, obtain longer tenure than voluntary identities, such as work team membership.

Taken together, the big picture of the multiplicity of social identity is incomplete. Role-based identity theory and group categorization-based social identity theory drive scholars' attention to divergent ways of conceptualization. The diverse ways of mapping influential social identities in the current literature further complicate our understanding. Available typologies of social identities in the workplace may not have fully explained employees' various identifications in multinational companies from two distinctive nations. Employees can identify with multiple social attributes in varied social interactions, and adopt the associated values, norms, or beliefs. Social contexts and employees' subjective evaluations are then vital to identifying which salient identity is more influential. There is a need to recognize employees' salient social identities activated in relevant communicative events, activities, or episodes. Thus, the first two research questions are proposed:

RQ1: What salient social identities are expressed and valued in the daily work lives of Chinese and U.S. multinational company employees?

RQ2: Do the salient social identities of Chinese and U.S. multinational company employees change in different situations?

Integrating Multiple Identities and Identifications

The multiplicity of identities in the workplace is a complex phenomenon. Various identities can intertwine, entangle, overlap, or compete. Scholars have attempted to unpack the relationships among employees' salient identities from multiple lenses. The following section reviews five major perspectives utilized in relevant literature: cognitive, sensemaking, structural, symbolic perspectives, and discourse.

The cognitive perspective. Scholars, mainly from the sociopsychological tradition, perceive multiple identities function as a complex cognitive system. A cognitive perspective posits that individuals can achieve cognitive accuracy in the self-defining process and cognitive coherence in organizing multiple identities into patterns within the system. Identity theory and SIT are rooted in this perspective and have become fundamental to the majority of relevant studies since the late 1980s (e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 1998; Ashforth et al., 2008; Hogg & Abrams, 1999; Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015). Intercultural scholars are some of the earliest intellectuals who explored intercultural organizational contexts such as multicultural teams. They suggest that individuals acquire relatively accurate self-perceptions and recognitions of group boundaries. Employees of multicultural organizations can classify and organize cultural schemas into stable and consistent patterns, termed identity patterns (Ashforth et al., 2008; Markus, 1986). Fitzsimmons (2013) suggested a cognitive and motivational mechanism of identity patterns. Multicultural team members are motivated to develop integrated identity patterns with a consistent and coherent organization of various cultural identities.

Such an integrated identity pattern brings the maximum levels of cognitive consistency, self-esteem, and the lowest level of psychological pressure of switching among multiple identities. In the preceding example of identification, an employee in Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG) proposes the statement, “I, as a KPMG employee, value professionalism, and feel valued as an accountant in KPMG.” Such a consistency among the organizational and occupational identities demonstrates a more integrated identity pattern, reduced cultural, value, or belief gaps between the two identities, and more perceived similarities between members in these two social categories. However, members who fail to do so may experience a greater sense of uncertainty toward outgroups because of employees with inconsistent identity patterns. More specifically, those who identify with either KPMG or with being an accountant only gain less accessible resources for social interactions, they experience a larger perceived cultural distance among the two social categories. Therefore, an inconsistent organization of social identities implies a separated cognitive identity pattern.

In addition to the trend of focusing on cognitive consistency, psychologists have expanded their interests to the degree of cognitive complexity of social memberships. Roccas and Brewer (2002) proposed a model of social identity complexity in their seminal work, which postulated the degree of overlap among individuals' perceived multiple identities. When individuals' multiple memberships in different groups converge to form a single ingroup identification, their identity structure is relatively simple with a low degree of complexity; if one's perceived memberships do not fully converge or overlap, the associated identity structure carries a high degree of complexity. A female supervisor may view gender identity and parental identity similarly (i.e., low complexity), yet different from her role as a leader (i.e., high complexity). A high identity complexity produces benefits for employees in multicultural organizations. Beyer and Hannah (2002) found that employees who gained diverse experiences developed more identity hooks to connect with the consortium they joined, which further facilitated these employees' adjustments. Thus, employees' cognitive identity consistency and complexity are vital in organizing their various social identities into coherent patterns.

A major criticism of this perspective is that individuals do not always differentiate multiple group memberships clearly because of their essentially inaccurate self-conceptions. Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) argued that social categories had plasticity because they were socially defined and required adapted applications to local circumstances. “A working mom” may carry distinctive meanings and behavioral guidance in the U.S. versus China. The definition of a supervisor may be more or less different or vary when in a team meeting versus personal interactions. Individuals’ experiences of self-defining frequently remain plausible because they are subjected to shifting situations. The next section of sensemaking further strengthens this critique.

Sensemaking. The second approach to understanding multiple identities, sensemaking, is a closely related yet unique lens as compared to the cognitive perspective. Sensemaking is rooted in identity formation and negotiation. Sensemaking serves as the springboard to individuals’ actions by driving them to make meaning of the world, define situations, and decide the possible courses of actions based on the most salient identity exposed. The perspective of sensemaking approaches the topic of multiple identities by revealing how employees’ most salient identity, among these multiple identities, guides their perceptions and decision-making, which varies in contexts.

Departing from the argument that individuals can obtain accurate and clear self-definition, some scholars acknowledged identity/role ambiguity (e.g., Bodenhausen & Peery, 2009; Morgan, 2002), a precursor to sensemaking. Identity ambiguity occurs when identity cues obtain unclear implications (Bodenhausen & Peery, 2009) due to the increasingly blurred social categories available for employees. Sensemaking, then, begins when individuals encounter chaotic situations like identity ambiguity, competing values or beliefs, or struggles when practicing multiple social roles/memberships (Weick, 1979). Motivated by these chaotic situations, they first identify chaos by asking what happened, and make sense of the current situation based on their most salient identity among their multiple identities. Individuals' salient identity guides their possible courses of actions. Sensemaking cannot be separated from communication, through which members' plausible justifications for actions are constructed. Individuals label and categorize ambiguous, contradictory, or complicated experiences through the use of particular terms. In Garrety, Badham, Morrigan, Rifkin and Zanko's (2003) report, a female manager, Sue, was extremely dissatisfied with the excessively patriarchal culture in her program. She labeled her feeling for the program's control with the term "disturbing." Her sensemaking of the conflicting and undesirable situation exposed the gender identity among organizational, subordinate, and leader identity. Therefore, multiple identities can create anxiety, ambiguity, disturbance, or knowledge gaps with various resources (e.g., norms, values, or beliefs) available, deemed as disorder, chaos, and conflicts. Sensemaking is a process in which employees reconstruct disordered meaning-making in social interactions, which highlights their most salient identity among multiple identities, and becomes situationally stable.

The structural perspective. Structuration theory provides a third effective framework for studying multiple identities. Different from a sociopsychological perspective that views identities as initiated by and rooted in individuals, structuralists perceive that both individual agency and organization or other social structures (i.e., institutional structures) are essential in actively shaping individuals' various identifications (Scott et al., 1998). Giddens's (1984) structuration theory theorized the duality between structure and system. Structures are generative rules and resources available to individuals' actions (Giddens, 1981). System refers to the reproduced relations in regular social practices. The duality of structure and system suggests that individuals' actions might generate structural resources that can be utilized by their future interactions. Various identities as structures provide rules and resources, such as assumptions, values, and beliefs for organizational members; identification is a system-level construct, a process of emerging identities as individuals use the rules and resources to create and recreate their identities. The duality of identification as structure and process outcome is articulated mainly through language, and situated in social interactions, serving to reproduce, regionalize, and unify identities. For example, employees many show their sense of pride for work group in statements, which enhances their sense of belongingness and then prompts further expression of identification of this target.

Scott et al. (1998) further theorized how multiple identifications might overlap or conflict in a structural sense. When two or more identities are similar in identity core and content (See the previous discussion of identification in Ashforth et al., 2008), employees' expressions (behaviors of identification) of these similar identifications may simultaneously strengthen their future understanding and practices of these identities. However, multiple identities can conflict. For instance, in a case of resource allocation, team identity may become the most central and readily accessible one if team members are not satisfied with the organizational policy. Team identity guides employee's decision-making process regarding whose benefit is valued, who should get the fewest resources, or whose decision they should support. Members who feel their benefits threatened may appear as strong team supporters and be perceived as protectors, campaign leaders, or weak organizational followers. Such labels can further strengthen their expression of work group identity and weaken that of the organizational identity later. Identified elements like situational cues, identity positions, or identity tenures may also influence employees' further identity expression. In multinational companies, the structural process can become more complicated in that it may involve more choices of identities, such as national cultures, co-cultures, religions, or job positions.

The symbolic perspective. Another stream of studying multiple identities focuses on how individuals employ various rhetorical resources in identity claim, expression, development, and management, such as objectives, humor, dress, accounts, narrative, and stories (Ashforth, 2001; Elsbach, 2003; Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006; Scott & Lyman, 1968; van Maanen, 1998; Weick, 1995). More specifically, these approaches explore how members utilize artifacts, language, metaphors, or rituals to create, symbolize, and maintain meanings in identity development and negotiation. Multiple identities, in this perspective, are then perceived as grounded in cultural assumptions and values, and answer central, enduring, and distinct questions for organizational members, such as "Who am I?" (Hatch, 1993). For instance, Pratt and Rafaeli (1997) studied the organizational dress of nursing professionals in a large hospital. They argued that dress was a symbol that reflected organizational and group characteristics. Choices of particular dress forms reflected distinct subgroups: shift membership (day versus evening nursing) and hierarchical membership (managers versus subordinates). Also, multiple identifications of nursing professionals were multilayered and consisted of a web. Thus, nursing professionals' outfits not only indicated organizational core values and beliefs but also reflected a range of event-driven identities within the hospital. Symbols carried various interpretations and meanings based on contextual differences. Empirical studies suggest that multinational employees' multiple identifications can lie in their daily uses of different symbols, such as outfits, company slogans, or logos.

Discourse. The last focus on multiple identities explores organizational members' uses of discourse. Ybema et al. (2009) argued that identity construction involves "the discursive articulation of an ongoing iteration between social and self-definition" (p. 301). Organizational discourse is a situated meaning-making process in a sense that it not only conveys meanings, values, or beliefs of an identity, but also evokes and shapes ongoing interpretations in social interactions (Walker, 2012). Daily language uses, such as team meetings, labeling, or jokes may become institutionalized and grouped into various types of discourse through organizational routines and social practices. Identity is developed and reflected in such discourses as societal, organizational, or department discourse that provides evidence and ways of reasoning to shape employees' future interpretations.

Applying the discursive approach, Fairhurst and Putnam (in press) proposed a notion of paradoxical tensions which embraced identity tensions in a wide range of tensions, contradictions, or dialectical-related phenomena. Their conceptualization of paradoxical identity tensions are 1) grounded in members' sensemaking accounts, and 2) featured in members' uses of language that often reflect multiple and competing discourses. Paradoxical identity tensions denote the "dilemmas, dissonance, and irrationalities" resulted from competing identities in discursive and routine organizing.

Baron and Pfeffer (1990) identified organizations as a context in which members classify actions, people, or situations with terms that indicate tensions and contradictions like "majority versus minority," and "senior versus newbies." Categories denote a duality of paradoxical identity tensions in members' retrospective and collective sensemaking (Fairhurst & Putnam, in press). Organizational members construct a shared understanding by labeling employees of powerful, benefit, or higher status groups and who are not. The classifications, and further, a clash of social memberships, are institutionalized and embedded in ongoing, yet competing discourses (Bakhtin, 1984; Fairhurst & Putnam, in press). Identity tensions can manifest in members' use of language that indicates opposing cultural or value systems, including contradictions between meanings. Baxter (2011) noted, "It is through language that the simultaneity of differences is realized" (p. 28). A hypothetical statement, "Chinese employees care about relational connections and American employees care about personal space," may demonstrate cultural differences in workplace preferences. In a Chinese multinational company, such discourse can transform into an intergroup conflict that indicates cultural group boundaries between Chinese and American employees.

Competing discourses further entail members' conflicting reasoning logics provided by their preferred identities (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Problem labeling, humor, ambivalence, or irony from discursive routines build into employees' reasoning logic answer the question, "Why do I do so?" and justify members' choices among competing identities. Labeling relational and space preference in the workplace based on cultural identities provides explanations for members' actions. Brown and Humphrey's (2006) work of two colleges merging demonstrated how ex-Beta and ex-Gamma staff resisted the discourse of management. Organizationally promoted discourse that "college is business" encountered resistance from the staff who proposed the counter discourse that "college is for education."

More important, identity tensions do not come alone, as they can intertwine with other tensions situated in discourse. Paradoxical identity tensions tend to manifest in dualities, such as male versus female, or majority versus minority. These tensions of multiple pairs of identities are entangled in members' work lives, defined as tension knots (Fairhurst & Putnam, in press). Tension knots generate interrelated and amplified forces or impacts that co-present tensions pose on each other discursively (Jamieson, 1995). Presumably, members of the sales team may encounter a clash of language uses, for example, with members of the marketing department. Similarly, identity tensions can also occur between the cultural/ethnic majority and the minority, or between the team leader and the subordinates. In a given circumstance, multiple pairs of identity tensions can intertwine and become tension knots. Interactions between a leader of a cultural/ethnic minority in a marketing department and a subordinate of the cultural/ethnic majority in sales become more complicated. Discursive routines surface conflicting identities in colliding localized reasoning embedded in collective sensemaking.

Overall. The five perspectives reviewed demonstrate the multiplicity of social identities that come along with both identity consistency and conflicts in the workplace.

For instance, the cognitive perspective demonstrates that a high degree of identity consistency and identity complexity provide employees more identity hooks or opportunities to connect with various roles and positions, facilitating their workplace performance. The overlaps among multiple identities reinforce the developments and expressions of identities and identifications accordingly, in a structural sense. However, the deconstructive nature of interactions among multiple identities is also apparent. Identity paradoxical tensions frequently exist in employees' uses of language due to categorization in identity development, reflected in workplace discourses. The shifting local situations and the diversity of identities available frequently trigger identity ambiguity and then sensemaking, especially in such complex organizations as multinational companies.

More importantly, these five perspectives are not mutually exclusive, and the overlaps are easy to identify. For example, the sociocognitive process, categorization, is clearly indicated in sensemaking and discourse. Multiple identities as clashes of discourse are also grounded in members' sensemaking; sensemaking can become structural. Employees' meaning-making of situationally salient identities enable and constrain their expressions of those identities later, which again shapes the continued interpretation of the identities. Among the five, the structural perspective offers insightful, yet debatable explanations that perceive identity as a cross-level dynamic. Despite this, these different approaches to the examination of multiple identities do not clearly specify how multiple identities are linked, and in what ways they operate as either integrated or opposing forces in members' communicative practices.

A Cross-level Dynamic: Nested Identities, Cross-cutting Identities, and Holistic Identities

The cross-level analysis of identities has been underexplored until recently. Most identity research has paid attention to one particular level, such as the individual, group, organization, or occupation level, while ignoring the others (Ashforth, Rogers, & Corley, 2011). A review of the relevant literature highlights two primary constructs for exploring the relationships between identities: nested identities and cross-cutting identities (e.g., Brewer, 1996; Ensari, Hewstone, & Miller, 2003; Hogg et al., 2004). However, the conceptualizations of the two concepts remain problematic, as well as inconsistent.

Nested identities. Nested identities refer to the notion that multiple formal identities can nest, or be embedded within others, while they are institutionalized in an organizational structure (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg et al., 2004). For example, a work unit is nested in a company, and the company is nested in an industry. An organizational chart represents a typical hierarchy of nested identities. Ashforth and Johnson (2001) proposed a ringlike system that described how formal workplace identities were nested (See Figure 1), ranging from a lower order job identity to a higher order organizational identity. Mummendey, Wenzel and their colleagues (e.g., Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Wenzel, Mummendey, Weber, & Waldzus, 2003) described that a higher-order group should fully characterize the lower-order group's attributes, and then occupy a dominant position in a nested group situation.

Scholars employ nested identities with more or less inconsistent definitions. Ashforth et al. (2011) summarized and differentiated relevant studies based on the level of self and the level of analysis. Most role conflict studies examine the level of self, in other words, how an individual perceives his/her roles in social relationships, ranging from individual to dyad, group, or higher (e.g., I'm a joker, a friend, a supervisor). This idea speaks to identity theory in that individuals internalize a position/role as a part of self-definition (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Level of analysis, another popular lens, characterizes nested identities based on the level of collective targets in organizations. Level of analysis aligns with social identity theory in that individuals' self-perceptions are constructed based on defining characteristics of a category (Hogg & Terry, 2000). The conceptual differences are nuanced. Similar to the divergence between identity theory and social identity theory, the differentiation between the level of self and analysis is either largely ignored or inconsistently used in current literature.

Following level of analysis, Ashforth et al., (2011) further took a structural perspective to explore nested identity as a cross-level dynamic. Multiple identities range from the level of the individual ("I am ambitious") to the dyad ("We are a partnership"), to the group ("We are a team"), to the organization and industry. Identities at higher levels of analysis constrain and enable the form and enactment of identities at lower levels, which, simultaneously, constrain and enable the higher-order identities. More specifically, the emergence of individuals' personal identity is I (i.e., introsubjective), moving gradually toward We (i.e., intersubjective), and then reified as it is (i.e., generic subjective). Organizational members' intrasubjective understanding ("I think") comes together to create a shared understanding and consciousness ("we think") through interactions. The enactment of "we think" then gives rise to a sense of the higher order collective that is long lasting and institutionalized by members of this membership ("it is”). This generic subjective identity defines goals, operates routines, and regulates information flows, as well as taken-for-granted beliefs (Weick, 1995; Wiley, 1988). Following structuration theory, the intersubjective and generic subjective constructions of a given collective shape are shaped by the constructions of collectives at other levels.

Thus, in the case of multinational companies, an individual’s identity can be enacted as a new employee first. Then, it is through social interactions within the company that a shared consciousness of “who we are” as a company member is established. At last, a seemingly objective reality that reflects a sense of organization is constructed, embedded in daily routines. This process of identity formation is a multi-level system that involves individual to organizational or even higher order identities. The higher order identity, such as organization, will constrain and enable the lower level identities that include social groups and divisions, as the group and division identities simultaneously constrain and shape the higher order identities.

The traditional conceptualization of nested identity reviewed above focuses on formal workplace social categories. Identities of each order, especially organizational identity, are frequently formed, promoted, and institutionalized within organizational structures (Hogg et al., 2004). This argument that only formal identities may become established in the nested ring remains questionable. Informal identities can also be called into being and become part of the nested ring through daily communication among organizational members. For example, Meisenbach and Kramer (2014) uncovered how volunteers expressed multiple identities in a voluntary organization. They identified a higher order music identity, present with a family identity in participants’ conversations, which were not traditionally defined formal organizational social memberships. Based on Deaux et al.'s (1995) typology, music and family identities can be seen as individual identities that describe personal social relationships. However, these two higher order identities were perceived more important and influential than volunteers' organizational identities in their decision-making. Another example of the alternative understanding of nested identities is used in Russo's (1998) study on journalists. Journalists' work identities were "grayed" as their families and communities were closely connected. Some respondents received great family influences about news reporting. Their family identity bonded with their journalist identity, which significantly impacted their careers.

Overall, nested identity is traditionally conceptualized as formal workplace categories, embedded in the ring-like system, as proposed in Ashforth and Johnson (2001) (Figure 1). The higher level of identity tends to characterize the lower one. However, empirical findings demonstrate the possibility that non-workplace social identities may also be organized into the ring-like system and serve at either the higher or lower order. Apparently, the notion of nested identity has been expanded, which somewhat overlaps with another construct used in studies of multiple identities, cross-cutting identities.

Cross-cutting identities. Cross-cutting identities were introduced when scholars realized that individuals' multiple identities were not always clearly layered and ordered; more importantly, non-formal workplace identities also appear influential in the workplace. Cross-cutting identities associate with either formal or informal social categories. Compared with formal workplace nested identities, formal cross-cutting identities are constructed in a structured fashion, yet have less institutionalized sense, such as identities of task forces, union locals, committees (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). However, the differences are rarely apparent in the literature. In Ashforth and Johnson's (2001) ring-like system (Figure 1), although formal nested identities were arranged from lower to higher levels, cross-cutting identities frequently intersected the rings, particularly at the lower levels. Figure 1 indicates the ambiguity between nested and cross-cutting identities. For example, a task force group is a lower order nested group identity while it can also become a formal cross-cutting identity. By contrast, informal cross-cutting identities are more distinct and commonly seen. Brewer (1995) defined informal cross-cutting identities as "external to the organization and overlapping only partially with membership in the organization itself" (p. 51), such as friendship, religious groups, or demographic clusters. In van Marrewijk's (2004) study of a multinational telecom alliance, employees bonded in friendships based on their company cultures. Friendship and cultural identities appeared influential. Their strong cultural identities impeded efficient communication and cooperation in the alliance, which triggered a rivalry between alliance partners.

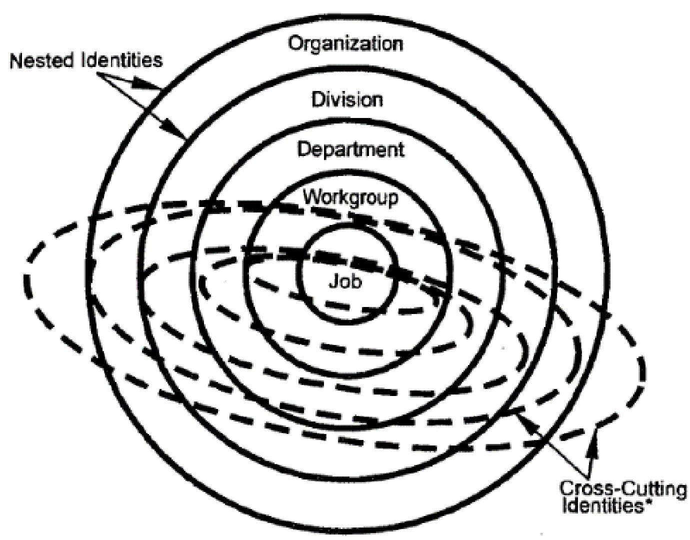

Figure 1: Nested identities and cross-cutting identities (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001, p. 33).

Comparisons and critiques. The differences between nested identities and cross-cutting identities are subtle and often mixed in empirical studies. The previous review shows that the conceptualization of nested identity calls for more exploration with the presence of formal and informal cross-cutting social identities in the workplace. First, the ring-like system (Figure 1) is open to questions. The assumption that higher order identities exert less power than lower ones do is questionable. Identity salience and contextual differences should be considered. Generally speaking, in a ring-like system, lower order identities are found more exclusive, concrete, and proximal than higher order identities, as each level is mutually reinforcing. However, many empirical studies have presented obvious inconsistencies in their findings. Some scholars using a nested identity approach argue that lower-order identities tend to be more salient shaping employees' cognitive and affective behaviors (e.g., Apker & Fox, 2002; Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Scott, 1999). However, higher order identities, like organizational identity, were argued to be of stronger chronological salience when this particular identity was highly promoted by the organization or unique (e.g., a university's sports team). Higher order identities also gain greater power when the organization is vertically designed or obtains a collectivistic culture (e.g., Chinese culture) (e.g., Albert & Whetten, 1985; Ashforth & Johnson, 2001).

Comparatively speaking, cross-cutting identities are similar to lower order identities, yet can be more salient if the associated situational relevance is high. A friendship clique may become more influential in a multicultural organization where personal contacts are heavily valued. In van Marrewijk's (2004) study of the telecom alliance Unisource, employees in one of the telecom providers, Dutch KPN Telecom, retained strong personal networks with former colleagues; also personal networks were used to recruit new managerial members that brought new co-nation Dutch employees. Identity salience and contexts are influential to the ultimate identity tensions in the multinational alliance. A legitimate reasoning, drawn from this review (e.g., Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014; Russo, 1998; van Marrewijk, 2004), is that cross-cutting identities can step into the institutionalized organizational structure with potentially more powerful influences.

The second question is whether the ring-like system is the only possible linkage among multiple identities. Employees' social identities may not always be arranged as the ring system describes, especially with various non-formal social identities available. In an multinational organizational setting, non-work identities may play a vital role in integrating diverse employees. In addition, identities are enduring and changing (Hecht, 1993). A nested identity system may not fully explain how individuals' various identities change depending on situations. As an alternative to a ring-like system, Gibbs (2009) proposed a unique lens of studying multiple identities in the workplace, a kaleidoscope framework. The kaleidoscope lens examines diverse cultural identities in global teams. Various cultural identities (organizational, national, corporate, functional, and professional identities) consisted of a kaleidoscope. Team members frequently negotiated multiple cultural identities to preserve equilibrium between integration and fragmentation within the team. Different cultural identities were activated, as they existed in tension with one another. The kaleidoscope perspective demonstrates multiple cultural identities as dynamic tensions in the workplace. Employees' social identities may link differently in intercultural organizational contexts.

Thus, the ring-like arrangement of identities may not fully explain how employees perceive, express, and link multiple identities, since various cross-cutting identities appear more influential than it theorizes. The contextual uniqueness of multinational organizations may provide space for more possible ways of linking employees' multiple identities.

Holistic identities. Ashforth and Johnson (2001) further deepened the examination of multiple identities. Since each identity tended to draw its own ring (See the fuzzy set introduced previously in Ashforth et al., 2008) and hold boundaries, the authors postulated another possibility of constructing a single, unified self that denoted a holism in self-definition. They cited Thoits and Virhshup (1997) to demonstrate the holistic qualities of multiple social identities: "When multiple identities are conjoined (e.g., student activists) … their meaning and behavioral consequences may reside in the amalgamation itself" (p. 128). Dietz and Ritchey (1996) attempted to speculate that multiple identities might generate synergy as they are tightly bonded in individuals' self-definition. Identity synergy is proposed because nowadays employees are able to take advantage of various resources to get work done. A tentative diagram (Figure 2) is derived from the reasoning above. In Figure 2, "a senior female banker at Chase" may carry contents and meaning beyond "a banker," "a senior employee," and "a female." Individuals can utilize the advantages of each social identity, altogether with the maximized power generated. The potential outcome produced is greater than prioritizing any of the salient identities in a given situation. Then, a Chinese senior female banker at Chase can generate more capacity by employing cultural connections, tenure, gender stereotypes (e.g., female discourse), leadership positions, occupation, and the organization.

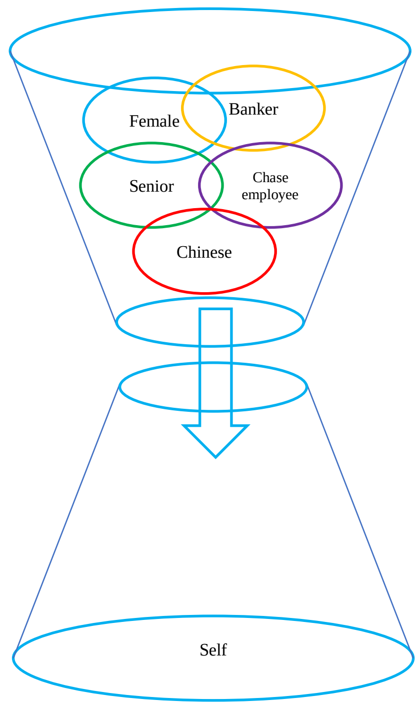

Figure 2: Tentative holistic identity model.

To this end, the understanding of multiple identities as an integrated system requires further explorations. We learn from various theoretical lenses (e.g., cognitive, sensemaking, structural, symbolic perspectives, and discourse) that communication is central to employees' identification with multiple roles and collective targets. While few take a multi-level perspective, studies appear to reveal that routine communication exposes organizational members' subjective preferences for identities in given situations; employees participate in social interactions and are influenced by social structures (e.g., employee composition, organizational culture, and operational style) in identity negotiation. With vague theoretical constructs like nested and cross-cutting identities, we do not know how employees communicate, organize, and connect various social identities in daily routines. Important features of multinational companies, such as workplace diversity, relatively large employee bodies, divisions of labor, and long-distance cooperation, may provide a context for potentially more complex identity linking. Thus, the third research question is proposed:

RQ3: How do Chinese and U.S. multinational company employees communicate to organize and structure perceived salient social identities (nested, cross-cutting, or holistical)?

Identity Tension

The preceding discussion demonstrates that modern individuals frequently encounter struggles organizing various identities within the increasingly complex social context. As Ashforth et al. (2008) explained, identity tensions occur when two or more sets of values, goals, or norms are inconsistent (Ashforth et al., 2008). Similar constructs, such as identity struggles, identity conflicts, role conflicts, identity dissonance, and identity tensions also frequently appear as outcomes of incompatible identities (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2000; Ashforth et al., 2008; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015; Scott et al., 1998; van Marrewijk, 2004). This section roughly divides current literature based on the level of analysis, reviewing how identity tensions affect modern organizing at the individual, group, and organizational levels. These three levels are not mutually exclusive, but integrated parts of the organizational dynamic.

Individual level. Most research at the individual level has emphasized role identity conflicts, usually in two forms: intrarole and interrole conflicts. Intrarole identity conflict describes the inconsistencies that exist within an individual's one identity. An intrarole conflict may occur when a supervisor endeavors to help subordinates in need but must maintain fairness at the same time. Interrole conflict refers to a single individual's multiple identities conflict in a localized context (Ashforth et al., 2008). For instance, a supervisor who is a mother may encounter issues about work-life balance; a U.S. employee in a Chinese company may feel cultural shock in the workplace.

Interrole conflict is challenging in that an individual's inconsistent roles may trigger negative self-perceptions, stress, workplace burnout, and work-life imbalance (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2000; Ashforth et al., 2008; Jones, 2010; Miller, Joseph, & Apker, 2000; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Individuals can feel self-worthless, hopeless, out of control, embarrassed, or confused in identity conflicts (Jones, 2010). Miller et al. (2000) studied care coordinators in a university hospital and found that participants experienced stress and burnout in role ambiguity. They felt frustrated about not being able to position their roles accurately, which led to job ineffectiveness. Participants had to release and buffer emotional burnout with the social support of others who felt the same way. Harter and Krone (2001) investigated students of Osteopathy who transited to professional practitioners. Emotional dissonance occurred when participants struggled for emotional detachment in their professional identity while caring for patients as doctors. Interrole conflicts appear to impact employees' affective feelings at work negatively.

Concerns regarding interrole identity conflicts are also apparent in research on work-life balance (Clark, 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Hall & Richter, 1988; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006). Scholars argue that the permeability and intersection of roles (e.g., family role identity vs. organizational identity) provide space for hidden interruptions and increased confusion regarding when and where to perform a particular role. Olson-Buchanan and Boswell (2005) argued that members with a high level of work to non-work integration (i.e., reduced role boundaries between work and non-work identities) tended to allow favored work/non-work roles to interrupt a role in another domain. Talking about being a mother/father in the work domain, for instance, indicates the overlap between the family role identities and the professional identities. A high level of this identity integration may trigger identity ambiguity in both the family and work group domains. Also, the blurred boundaries between roles may cause role-referencing, a phenomenon that intersected roles tend to serve as a reference for another (Nippert-Eng, 1996), as well as strain-based conflicts (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). A supervisor may frequently acknowledge and reference his/her mentorship in nurturing children, or vice versa. Role-referencing makes it difficult to disengage one role fully from another. The entangled roles come along with work-life intersections, and then potential imbalance.

To summarize, multiple identities can be challenging to multinational company employees in that identity tensions trigger emotional and cognitive struggles due to diverse roles. A Chinese developer may feel depressed and frustrated when his/her professional identity (e.g., a creative program developer) conflicts with an IT company that values traditions; the collectivistic ethnicity may impede the development of an organizational identity if the company promotes individual competition. Further, interrole conflicts cause disruptions to employees' personal lives due to the difficulty of role switching.

Group level. Individuals' identity negotiation cannot be separated from social groups. Multicultural or global groups have become increasingly common in recent years. Emerging from intercultural studies of intergroup relations, scholars have specifically focused on how social identities direct ingroup members' perceptions and attitudes in intergroup comparisons (Hogg et al., 2004; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Rooted in social identity theory, identity tensions emerge from the clash among social identities in intergroup competitions (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Aritz & Walker, 2010; Brewer, 1996; Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Simon & Klandermans, 2001)

One major type of identity tension is related to the prototypical variations among social group members. Employees take multiple genetic identities (e.g., gender, national, or ethnic identity) and other generic roles over time, such as newcomers, supervisor or human resource department members. Prototypical members tend to align with the group's expectations of an ideal, often hypothetical in-group member. High prototypical members who behave in a group-serving manner then gain greater leadership effectiveness. Such a manner validates their credentials and builds trust (Hogg et al., 2004). However, the group expectations tend to place less prototypical members into a dilemma that triggers identity tensions. Minorities perceived as deviating from the mainstream prototype are expected to prove their credentials or ability. For instance, stereotypical beliefs about good leadership (i.e., leadership prototypes) tend to favor male characteristics much more than female characteristics (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Female leaders, then, may face the identity struggles of behaving like a man or remaining feminine. Further, less prototypical members can challenge the taken for granted or dominate identity by raising group tensions. Apker, Propp, and Ford

(2005) examined how nurses in an egalitarian team resisted traditional role identities discursively. Participants opted for redefining their roles as a competent peer of physicians by challenging the notion that nurses are subordinate to doctors. Conflicts arose when they attempted to redefine or modify the chaotic situation. Thus, such an identity tension often lays in the hierarchical differences and competitions between high and low prototypical members of different social groups.

Past group and organizational literature also attend to nested and cross-cutting group memberships, and perceive each high order identity as a superordinate categorization in which subgroups compete. Ashforth and Mael (1989) summarized that when the superordinate identity was not strong, say organizational identity, and subgroups were differentiated with clear boundaries, then intergroup biases were likely to occur. Intergroup bias generates stereotypes, bias, and low tolerance for outgroup members (Hogg et al., 2004). Perceptional bias triggers stereotypes, justifies social boundaries and hierarchy, and enhances imagined threats and psychological defensiveness. Given that nested identities are structured within a hierarchy, members who obtain salient subordinate subgroup identities are likely to feel threatened sometimes within the larger collective, and then end up protecting their uniqueness and independence from the wider collective (e.g., Hewstone, 1996; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). Sani and Reicher (2000) provided an empirical example of schisms in groups. They argued that a schism was most likely to arise under conditions of identity threat and intolerance of diverse views within the overarching group. Notably, group status in the hierarchical layers appears influential in activating identity defensiveness (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In Lee, Adair, Mannix, and Kim's (2012) study of nested group categorization, they found that in-group bias was mitigated with the construction of a superordinate identity in intergroup cooperation. An identity of a high-status group tends to threaten that of a low-status group, while the opposite direction rarely happens.

Therefore, employees' diverse social identities contain the seed of intergroup conflicts. In multinational companies, a supervisor's cultural, religious, or gender identity may either foster or impede the enactment of a leadership identity. The extent to which this supervisor aligns with the expected prototypical characteristics is vital. In addition, when the organizational identity is not strong, lower order group identities can activate psychological defensiveness in competitions to protect or gain favors. In a complex organizational setting, such as multinational companies, competitions can occur more frequently or among more social groups, moving beyond oft-heard fights between marketing and sales. The hidden tensions embedded may aggregate to impact the overall organizational functioning.

Organizational level. Organizations consist of various social groups, so these two levels are hardly separated in analysis. Comparatively speaking, while group studies explore intergroup relationships, organizational research focuses largely on the impacts of identity tensions on the overall organizing and organizational functioning. A review of relevant literature reveals that identity tensions at the organizational level often manifest in organizational identity resistance and barriers to leadership effectiveness (e.g., Chreim, 2002; Hogg et al., 2004; Maneerat, Hale, & Singhal, 2005; van Marrewijk, 2004).

Identity resistance as a communicative response to identity tensions is mainly examined in the contexts of organizational changes and mergers. Identity resistance involves an identity disidentification and reidentification (Bisel & Barge, 2011; Chreim, 2002; Kramer, Dougherty, & Pierce, 2004). Disidentification occurs when a major organizational change requires employees to detach from the existing values, norms, or behaviors and then begin the process of identifying with the new sets promoted by the management through reidentification. During disidentification, chances are that employees may experience a sense of uncertainty and loss of meaning in terms of roles, status, or values while adjusting to the implemented changes, termed as identity loss (Chreim, 2002). Identity loss often creates identity tensions when employees perceive incongruences between their existing identity and the identity promoted during the changes. To respond to the incongruence, employees may choose to hold on to previously internalized beliefs or assumptions, and resist the new ones promoted by the management (Prasad & Prasad, 2000). Resistance often lies in everyday communication activities in a form of less visible, more ambiguous, and more mundane actions (Prasad & Prasad, 2000; Scott, 1985). Many studies have identified that routine resistance often involves discursive participation such as humor, joking, gossip, irony, metaphors, or language games (Collinson, 2002; Gottfried, 1994; Putnam, Grant, Michelson, & Cutcher, 2005; Sotirin & Gottfried, 1999). For example, Prasad and Prasad (2000) revealed employees' process of owning resistance through a discursive act. Employees defined their own behaviors as confrontational or hostile as purposeful resistance to organizational control. This type of resistance appears to impede the overall organizational functioning expected by the management. In this sense, scholars cast routine resistance as a complex pattern of discourses that involves ongoing identity tensions. Such tensions emerge from perceived incongruence between employees' previously existing and currently enacted identities during organizational changes.

Relatedly, identity tensions challenge leadership effectiveness during organizational changes, realized in employees' collective identity resistance. Leadership effectiveness cannot be separated from control. Control occurs through communicative behaviors or activities that exert authority over others (Gossett, 2009) and is fundamental to leadership. Foucault (1977) pointed out, "where there is control, there is resistance" (pp. 95-96). Resistance acts as a barrier to efficient leadership. Resistance and control can be viewed as a paradoxical identity tension that often co-exists (Scott, 1985). In van Marrewijk's (2004) study of the corporate merge of multiple telecom companies, operators of one telecom company encounter leadership challenges of controlling their employees who were also a part of the alliance. They found that employees tended to identify with both their former parent company and the alliance through double commitment. They not only worked together as co-workers, but also were connected by various informal social ties. Members resisted the parent company's control because they became dependent on and committed to their own social ties within the alliance.

In addition, cultural differences were also found responsible for the collapse of mergers in a few relevant studies. Empirical findings show that the management's nationalities played a role in the joint or merged corporation. When a manager shared more similarity in nationality/culture and prior ties with a parent company, he/she tended to identify stronger with that parent company in the merger (Li, Xin, & Pillutla, 2002).

To this end, identity tensions may arise in forms of cognitive struggles, interrole conflicts, intergroup competitions, identity resistance, and organizational malfunctioning. Despite extensive literature, knowledge about social identities in multinational organizational settings is deficient. Most studies tend to examine a small piece of the whole picture, as seen in their focus on one or two particular identities. Compared to individuals in the geographically limited business settings, multinational company employees may obtain a wider range of role identities and group memberships, which carries a greater potential for generating various identity conflicts or tensions. Identity tensions are often invisible and only become manifest in a certain situation (Ashfort et al., 2000; Prasad & Prasad, 2000). It is through communication that employees define, label, construct, and make sense of identity tensions with other workplace interactants. Thus, the fourth research question is proposed,

RQ4: In what ways do Chinese and U.S. multinational company employees define, express, and experience identity tensions at the individual, group, and organizational level?

Managing Identity Tensions

Notably, multiple identities also bring benefits to modern organizations. For individuals, social identities are positively associated with self-esteem, job performance, and socialization experiences (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2008; Haslam & Ellemers, 2005; Kramer & Miller, 2014). Following SIT, identifying with a social category enables individuals to claim its achievements and then enhance self-esteem. In addition, socialization studies have revealed that multiple social categories provide a wider range of resources to newcomers, which reduces their uncertainty, enables more social relationships, fosters information-seeking, and assists in the adaptation process (Kramer & Miller, 2014; Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

The constructive nature of identity tensions is also obvious if it is well managed. Confrontation with conflicts can help avoid dysfunctional group dynamic such as ego defensiveness and groupthink (Brown & Starkey, 2000). Blurred identity boundaries foster employees' information sharing and help avoid excessive group cohesiveness (Hogg et al., 2004). Learning from conflicts contributes to the decision-making process by embracing diverse perceptions or views (Poole & Garner, 2006). Therefore, identity tensions can be a double edge sword that is either beneficial or challenging to multinational company members' organizational life. Thus, how employees manage these crises in communicative events or practices matters.

The current literature has investigated how organizational members manage identity tensions through communication extensively. Scholars approach this topic, again, with various perspectives and discover identity management strategies employed by members either individually or collectively. The following section presents three major types: functional, sensebreaking and sensegiving, and discursive strategies.

Functional strategies. Sociopsychologists have explored how organizational members manage multiple identities by looking at their strategies for structuring social memberships. A review of studies in this tradition shows that individuals tend to structure their perceptions and behaviors in order to reconcile potential competitions among definitions of self (e.g., Ashforth et al. 2008; Burke, 2003; Fitzsimmons, 2013; Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015; Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek, 2004). Scholars have proposed several dimensions, continuums, and categories to classify various strategies, mainly in role conflicts. For instance, Roccas and Brewer (2002) have proposed four forms of identity management to represent how multiple group memberships are subjectively represented: 1) intersection occurs when individuals define self based on a single social identity that consists of multiple memberships. "A female supervisor" is one identity composed of gender and position, shared with female employees of management; 2) compartmentalization refers to individuals who activate memberships based on situational or contextual considerations, such as being a supervisor in the office and acting as a friend at dinner outside the office with subordinates; 3) dominance is an approach in which the individual emphasizes the dominant status of one particular social identity and places all the other types as simply characteristics of self. A female supervisor may emphasize her leader identity shared with all managerial staffs while "female" is just a gender characteristic of hers. Another type of dominance places multiple identities in a hierarchical pattern. Only within the hierarchy will dominance further differentiate themselves based on lower level identities. Thus, a female leader of dominance will identify more with being female among all leaders, but not with being female in the subordinate groups; and the last type 4) merger refers to individuals who tend to embrace a variety of salient social identities simultaneously. A female leader will identify with females among leaders and non-leaders, and recognize leaders regardless of gender difference. These two types are both salient across situations and boundaries.

Similar to Roccas and Brewer's (2002) work, scholars have proposed other defining strategies. For instance, Burke (2003) also identified three ways that individuals choose to revise identity: 1) incompatibility, in which individuals might choose the most important identity and withdraw from the rest; 2) avoidance, in which individuals might compromise and avoid situations that cause identity conflicts; or 3) balance, in which they would try balance by redefining the meanings of both identities. For instance, Kramer (2011) explored volunteers' assimilation in a community choir. Volunteers obtained multiple role identities such as work, family, and volunteer. Time commitments to work and family were found crucial for volunteers' decision-making regarding joining, staying, or leaving voluntary associations. As for the volunteer role, participants chose to suspend it when they encountered time or stress conflicts, which fits the avoidance strategy.

Intercultural studies also examine cultural/ethnic identities in the group or organizational settings. Berry (1997) argued in his seminal work that individuals employed four strategies, including assimilation (i.e., choosing one cultural identity over others), separation (i.e., keeping the old cultural identity), integration (i.e., maintaining two cultural identities), and marginalization (i.e., withdrawing from both cultural identities). Ensuing identity management strategies were developed following his guidance, such as acculturation and adaptation (Berry, 1997), identity negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005) and identity management theory (Imahori & Cupach, 2005).

Table 1: Summary of Functional Strategies

Berry (1997)	Roccas & Brewer (2002)	Burke (2003)
		Balance
Assimilation		Withdraw
	Dominance	
Integration	Intersection	
	Merger	
Separation		
Marginalization		Avoidance
	Compartmentalization	

Table 1 compares overlaps and similarities among the three prominent typologies of identity management strategies, despite the different terms employed. For example, integration in Berry (1997) is broad enough to speak to intersection, merger, and compartmentalization in Roccas and Brewer (2002). Maintaining two identities, cultural and organizational identities, can speak to three situations: a) a Chinese employee as one identity (intersection), b) a Chinese and an employee as two facets of self (merger), and c) either Chinese or employee based on situations (compartmentalization). Selecting the most important one and withdrawing from the rest in Burke (2003) is then similar to assimilation in Berry (1997). With these proposed strategies, we still do not know clearly how members in multinational companies structure multiple types of identities.

While Roccas and Brewer (2002) and Burke (2003) are rooted in the role-based theoretical lens, Berry (1997) is widely employed in studies of cultural and ethnic identities. Role conflict or cultural/ethnic conflicts are examined independently in relevant studies and they appear to be only a portion of the whole story. Some other identities, such as friendship, religious, or occupation, can participate in employees' social interactions simultaneously. Also, it remains debatable if individuals always take active roles in identity management. They may not be able to or always motivated to differentiate multiple identities in the complex social world. Moreover, employees learn from other organizational members through information exchange and social events. Further consideration of their participation in communicative events and collective efforts is necessary.

Sensegiving and sensebreaking. Differentiated from the functional perspective, studies of sensemaking aim to uncover how organizational members participate in collective sensegiving and sensebreaking as they make sense of identity tensions. Sensegiving occurs when individuals shape their own or others' interpretations by attempting to influence how the self and others interpret the meaning of actions (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Sensebreaking is a phenomenon in which individuals are motivated to explore identity incongruence (Pratt, 2000) by asking "fundamental questions of whom one is when one's sense of self is challenged" (Pratt, 2000, p. 464). Both of these two phenomena cannot be separated from sensemaking in identity management, the process of assigning meaning to experiences.

According to the previous discussion, organizational members engage in sensemaking when facing anxiety, ambiguity, or confusion in identity tensions. Employees make sense of the current chaotic situation collectively. By various means of daily communication, they coordinate and organize disordered, ambivalent, or shifting understanding into converged, coherent, and relatively stable interpretations (sensemaking); meanwhile, they also conduct sensegiving to reduce equivocal inputs (Weick, 1995) and to shape sensemaking for both the self and others. Rouleau (2005) provided an example for strategic sensemaking and sensegiving in an organizational change of product lines. Middle managers in this study served as both interpreters and sellers of the change. They made sense of the change in daily communicative activities (i.e., sensemaking), and came up with justifications for clients to accept the company change (i.e., sensegiving). These middle managers' own identity struggles during the transition were then resolved as they simultaneously interpreted and secured the organizational identity (Giddens, 1984). When looking at employees in multinational companies, identity tensions can emerge in any situation, at any level, due to disrupted sensemaking. Employees may participate in communicative activities or events to negotiate and reconstruct interpretations with relevant interactants, such as their co-group members. The process of interpreting and justifying then shapes their choices, actions, and thoughts in identity tensions.

Sensebreaking occurs when individuals sense identity incongruence, and strive to fill the meaning void by comparing who they have been and who they are willing to be in the future. Ashforth (2001) revealed that when newcomers joined an organization, they lacked a self-defining connection to the organization. In a similar manner, sensebreaking motivates newcomers to adapt to the desired identity as a means to resolve the problem of being "unfit." In a given situation, when a member's occupation identity as an innovative graphic designer competes with the company which values traditions, the member begins to question who he/she has been and attempts to be. The member's choice affects his/her rebuilt image in the company. The search for meaning is built into the member's identity narrative (Ashforth, et al., 2008). The underlying explanatory mechanism of sensemaking, sensegiving, and sensebreaking align with functional strategies in a sense that individuals are driven to define and categorize disorders or ambiguities out of competing identities, in order to achieve psychological safety (Weick, 1995). However, the role of communication is also obvious in this explanatory process because individuals' meaning-making is essentially ongoing and social (Weick, 1995). Notably, employees' use of language in social interactions appears vital in their management of identity tensions, which becomes another major focus in identity literature.

Discursive strategies. Scholars also examine discourse, that is, members' use of language, to understand how multiple identities overlap and compete in a discursive way (Dutton et al., 1994; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Studies of this trend tend to address how identity tensions are managed discursively in members' daily use of language, grounded in symbolism and organizational discourse.

Rhetorical strategies such as humor, stories, accounts, and narratives are essential to members' management of identity struggles because they rationalize and justify members' actions. For instance, narratives contribute to identity management. They involve "social efforts to construct self-narratives in socially accepted discourse that meet a person's identity aims" (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p. 137). Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) argued that organizational members crafted a coherent self-portrait out of fragmented or contradictory experiences during work role transitions. Although their constructed interpretation came from ambiguous or equivocal situations, it became authentic through social validation from the target audience. Guo's (2016) study on Chinese multinational employees' socialization further supports this point. Chinese multinational employees utilized memorable messages as a discursive resource during their socialization process, which facilitated a societal discourse that portrayed a shared image of the multinational company employees. A unique macro order workplace identity was then constructed.

Along this line, discourse at multiple levels within the workplace is also taken into consideration. Scholars have differentiated little-d discourse from big-D discourse.

Little-d discourse concerns the ways people employ language in daily communication (Marshak & Grant, 2008); ‘big-D’ Discourse studies macro-level narratives (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004), referring to “worldviews, ideologies, and perspectives that circulate within human systems” (Bisel & Barge, 2011, p. 3). Big-D discourse determines “what counts as knowledge, how knowledge is generated, as well as what forms of argument, evidence, and forms of reasoning are viewed as appropriate and legitimate by social actors” (Bisel & Barge, 2011, p. 3). Within workplaces, discourse at interpersonal, group, organizational, and societal levels can intertwine, and provide a discursive context for employees to interpret, modify, or make changes to the meaning of their multiple identities. Communicative messages, such as rules, stories, rumors, or jokes are discursive resources on which members can draw to make sense of their workplaces. Meanwhile, members also co-construct collective norms, rules, or cultures and call them into being via communication, such as organizational expectations and culture (e.g., what ways of talking and behaving should be performed, when, in what context, and how they should be interpreted) (Barge & Schlueter, 2004).

Identity tensions can be managed in members’ co-constructions and meaning-making of discourse. Palmer and Dunford (2002) summarized six types of strategies. The first type is a linear transition, arguing that members enter a “from to” scenario in which they move from one of the multiple discourses to another one. Organizational members can move from “tradition is important” to “diversity brings creativity.” The second category is dialectical approaches employed to manage opposing discourses, which speaks to some strategies identified in relational dialectics, such as integration, recalibration, and reframing strategies (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Burke &

Greenglass, 1993; Ford & Backoff, 1988). Integration, as defined by Baxter and Montgomery (1966), entails embracing identity tensions through ambiguous language or rituals. For example, hosting celebrations of cultural festivals unifies the whole company while supporting intercultural employees' cultural/ethnic identity. Recalibration or reframing means redefining tensions in order to minimize the contradictions. Employees may define informal social groups, say a mothers' club, as supporting women to work more efficiently. Forming such a clique enhances women's workplace performance, instead of protecting and fighting for work-life balance with the company. The third type of strategies, inter-subjective convergence, connects back to employees' sensemaking. Employees' interactions converge on either a temporary or relatively stable shared interpretation among competing actors and interpretations. Either a transitory or stable agreement "balance" among "valuing traditions" and "diversity brings new strength." The fourth category is a dominance approach that involves a choice to identify with one set of assumption, values, or beliefs held by one preferred discourse over others. The fifth strategy, monological narrative, refers to a coherent narrative that combines different discourses to define who they are. In Guo's (2016) study of memorable messages in organizational socialization, participants' portraits of multinational companies as a unique workplace consisted of multiple discourses from organizational, group, and interpersonal levels. Such a portrait served as a coherent explanatory logic and differentiated them from employees in other organizations. The sixth strategy is co-existing, when employees simultaneously operate with competing discursive logics. For instance, Palmer and Dunford (2002) studied a large Australian travel agency portrayed as a success in the industry. They observed two discourses co-existing in the company: competitive individualism as a responsible consultant, and competitive teamwork, as a team member. Participants co-constructed a set of interpretative routines and practices institutionalized through daily interactions to maintain healthy tensions between the two identities.

Connecting to members in multinational companies, employees' multiple social memberships may present various discursive resources that can lead to ambiguous, contradicted, or disrupted meaning-making (i.e., identity tensions). To seek a coherent and relatively stable understanding and interpretation, employees may engage in collective efforts to construct a shared understanding of the crisis, which may occur in office conversations, at a group party, through instant messaging, or in formal meetings. These little-d discourses in multiple social groups or cliques can be institutionalized through daily routines in the workplace, and further shape big-D discourse at the organizational level. To this end, the interconnections between sensemaking and organizational discourse literature are easy to identify. Members' sensemaking asks for discursive resources embedded in social interactions, whereas the construction and institutionalization of organizational discourse involves members' collective sensemaking via communication. However, it remains unclear when and in what contexts members "sense" identity tension and engage in tension management communicatively. Thus, the last research question is proposed:

RQ5: How do Chinese and the U.S. multinational company employees communicate to cope with workplace identity tensions?

This chapter has reviewed the current literature on identity theories that guide scholars' understanding of the multiplicity of workplace identities, has discussed individuals' organization of various identities, and the strategies employed to deal with potential identity tensions. The review has also proposed five research questions. The next chapter describes the method used in this dissertation to collect data that can answer these questions.

Chapter 3: Method

Research Setting and Participants

The goal of this dissertation is to identify the salient identities of employees in U.S. and Chinese multinational companies, uncover how these identities are structured in their daily communication practices, identify associated benefits and tensions, and recognize how employees communicate to cope with the tensions. The literature review shows that the multiplicity of social identities in multinational companies is more challenging and complex in that 1) this context provides a wider range of influential identities as perceptual and behavioral guidance to employees, and 2) its diverse social identities complicate contemporary workplace relationships and social interactions. An in-depth investigation of social identities in multinational companies is necessary. Further, the investigation does not aim to compare the multiplicity of identity in the U.S. and China, but exposes the types of salient identities, identity structures, and management strategies embedded in multinational companies in each country. Therefore, the research context, multinational companies, satisfied the proposed theoretical issues and research aims (Tracy, 2013).

Scholars in international relations, business administration/management, and journalism have used similar yet different terms to define multinational companies such as transnational organizations, multicultural companies, global companies, and multinational corporates (MNCs). With various terms available, there is a need to clarify the boundary setting first for this study. Scholars appear to agree that multinational companies are large business corporations that hire members of various nationalities. The law dictionary provides a technical definition for multinational companies: A “company or group is considered a multinational corporation if deriving 25% of revenue from out-of-home-country operations” (Black’s Law Dictionary, n.p.). Taken together, multinational companies in this study refer to relatively large business companies or corporations located in an out of their home country, more specifically, in the U.S. and China.

Eighteen Chinese and 13 U.S. volunteer participants were recruited via the researcher’s personal connections. The researcher also employed snowball sampling by inviting participants to help connect with other volunteer informants. In addition, the researcher contacted the managerial personnel in a multinational company in China, and a company in the U.S. to gain more recruitment access. The selection of qualified participants followed three criteria: 1) they were from their home country (i.e., China or the U.S.), 2) they were working in an internationally-based business company/team/branch office, located in their home country, owned by foreign investors, and 3) they had worked in the company/team/office for over 12 months in order to provide an in-depth understanding of work life.

The 31 recruited participants came from 10 multinational companies in the service industry. More specially, Chinese participants were recruited from five companies located either in Shanghai or Beijing; five of them worked in one company, but in different departments. The Chinese participants included eight males and 10 females all working as office-based professionals such as directors, managers, specialists, associates, and assistants. More than half of them (n = 10) held leadership positions, either in their workgroups or in various departments. They had been with their companies between one year and six years (M = 1.9, SD = 1.5). All had Bachelor’s degrees and one third held Master's degrees. They ranged in age from 23 to 35 years old (M = 27, SD = 2.7).

The U.S. participants were recruited from five companies located in Midwestern and Southwestern metropolitan areas; three employees worked in one company and two were from another one. The American participants were all Caucasians, and included nine males and four females. They were also office-based professionals, and held similar positions to the Chinese participants, although their job responsibilities varied depending on occupations. The American participants all had Bachelor's degrees, and were older than the Chinese participants, ranging in age from 25 to 50 years old (M = 30, SD = 9.2). Seven of the American participants had a leadership role in their current companies.

Interview Procedures and Instruments

With IRB approval, volunteer participants were invited to participate in individual interviews and recalled experiences of identity development and management in their current companies. The duration of interviews ranged from 30 to 70 minutes. Personal interviews were arranged according to participants' availability and locations. Ten interviews were conducted via cell phone and Skype because face-to-face meetings were not possible for participants. The rest of them were conducted in face-to-face mode.

Semi-structured interviews with Chinese participants were conducted in Mandarin, Chinese, whereas the ones with the U.S. participants were completed in English. The interview was designed with four focuses (See Appendix I for the interview design and Appendix II for the detailed interview protocol). To identify salient identities in multinational companies, the first focus was to elicit descriptions, stories, and narratives from participants about their strong identification with various role positions and social groups in their companies. Example questions included, “Tell me about when you feel your company/team/division is important to you, if any? What are your roles in the company/team/division?” The second research question aimed to uncover the linkages among or the structure of employees’ multiple identities. Thus, questions in this section identified how employees evaluated multiple identities and structured them in daily communication practices. Example questions included, “Please tell me about a time or a situation when you feel a particular identity/role is more important than any others to you,” and “How did you express the importance of that identity/role?” The third focus was to discover benefits and identity tensions brought by multiple identities through questions like, “Please describe a time when being in one group benefits your performance in the other one;” and “Please describe a situation or moment that you feel you do not want to be associated with your team/the company/other social groups, and any role you identified, if any.” The last focus was to discover strategies employees employed to manage identity tensions. Example questions included, “When you encounter the struggles mentioned above, what did you do? Is there anyone in your company who helped with the process?”

Demographic information, including gender, age, nationality, and self-identified ethnicity were collected before the interviews, followed by basic information about participants’ entry, positions, and tenure in their companies. Participants were interviewed with the same open-ended interview protocol, with the appropriate adjustment in wording between the two languages.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission. All interview recordings were transcribed; Chinese data were translated into English for analysis. All participants' identity was protected by using pseudonyms in the data analysis.

Data Analysis

A modified grounded theory approach was adopted to foster the search for contextualized knowledge and social dynamics in data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Suddaby, 2006). After the data transcription, the investigator first read and their re-read the data. For the purpose of data reduction, stories, metaphors, comments, accounts, or examples of employees' identity formation, development, and management among multiple identities, as well as how they managed identity tensions that emerged were first identified separated from the initial data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Demographic information and irrelevant small talk were deleted after the analysis.

The investigator continued to read the separated data repeatedly. An open coding process was then conducted to identify emergent and recurrent patterns. The investigator re-read, compared, and coded all the retained information into themes with equivalent level of abstraction through a constant comparison method. Similar to the analytic process in Kramer and Crespy (2011), the first example was treated as a code and compared with the second example. A new code was generated when the second example did not fit into the first, and so forth. For instance, a story that demonstrated organizational identity salience was coded first and compared to the second story. The second story was deemed as a new code if it demonstrated a non-organizational identity. Negative cases as rare or divergent examples that did not fit within the observed pattern were also accounted (Creswell, 2008). Through this iterative and descriptive process, preliminary themes regarding identity development and identity negotiation within multinational companies were identified.

All data was checked to ensure that they were best described by the categories assigned. By the conclusion of the analysis, all data was accounted for comprehensively. The investigator compared the codes and categories to recheck appropriateness and accuracy. Categories that originated during focused-coding were examined to provide possible explanations for potential inter-relationships (Charmaz, 2000). The same procedures were performed on the data from participants in the two countries.

Qualitative Rigor

Creswell (2007) suggested that researchers should strive to improve the qualitative rigor and credibility of research by employing at least two of the possible eight strategies identified by scholars. In this study, the researcher adopted negative case analysis and peer review (Creswell, 2012). For negative case analysis, the researcher accounted for inconsistent, opposing, or divergent data within proposed theoretical explanations. An examination of negative cases supported the notion that the theory presented was analytically complete (Creswell, 2008). Contradictions in the data exposed unexpected findings, which ultimately increased the power of the interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Last, an experienced organizational scholar was asked to evaluate the data analysis and results for the quality of this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

The following section presents the major findings in response to the proposed research questions. The investigator identified, first, the salient social identities relevant to participants' work lives, considered important situations in which the social identities were enhanced and challenged, and proposed two identity structure models that can explain participants' organization of various identities based on their subjective identity salience. Furthermore, the investigator recognized various identity tensions that emerged from participants' management of multiple identities, and how they communicated to cope with these identity tensions.

RQ1: Identification of Salient Workplace Social Identities

The first section presents influential social and role identities to participants in and outside the workplace. In the workplace, both Chinese and American participants recognized occupational, organizational, team, and leader role identities, reflected in their strong attachment to the jobs, company cultures, and team cultures. Leader role identity became apparent during participants' transition to the early stage of their supervisory positions, especially in some challenging situations. Interestingly, American participants further identified their important roles in specialty-based community service, usually connected with their companies. Their community roles were perceived to carry important social responsibility. Chinese participants, however, highlighted the significance of Chinese culture and cultural understanding in workplace conflicts, particularly in the arguments with their international leaders. Outside the workplace, family roles were salient and seemed unshakeable to both Chinese and American employees. Chinese participants lay emphasis on the friend role identity whereas American interviewees tended to value the religious identity. The salient identities, according to their characteristics, can be further divided into four types: individual identities, collective identities, relational role identities, and positional role identities, as discussed at the end of this chapter.

In the Workplace

Occupational identity. Occupational identity seemed important to both Chinese and American employees. Participants placed strong emphasis on the sense of joy and achievement they experienced from performing their current jobs. They enjoyed and valued personal growth in their career development, such as developing new skills, acquiring novel opportunities, and overcoming challenges. Particularly, American participants valued the social impacts of their jobs on local communities.

Participants' strong identifications with their jobs lay in the consistent emphasis on exploring oneself and career development. Chinese employees particularly emphasized the nature of jobs that allowed them to realize individual values and discover "a new self." As a senior product manager explained, "It's really about the job because I get to travel around the world to various expos and learn from our clients and co-workers in other countries. I took over some really challenging tasks that I thought I couldn't do." Another representative comment from an associate program coordinator stated, "When I take a case [project], it's like nurturing a baby. I devote myself into the case and continually explore what I do to make it better with available resources, until the last minute." These comments revealed participants' devotion to their jobs and associated sense of achievement. Despite different professions, most Chinese participants also enjoyed "taking in challenges everyday" as they were "leading the

Chinese market." Typical challenges involved "dealing with clients from all over the world," "continuously self-educating to keep up with the industry," and "solving problems in various different cases." Chinese participants perceived their jobs as the access to diverse international cooperation and project teams, and a platform on which they can build their career. Their strong attachment to the occupational identity was apparent.

Similarly, most American participants also highlighted "the joy brought by their jobs" because of "various opportunities of self-improvement," and "the access to different types of clients." A specific example can be seen from a senior accountant: "Having that ability to put yourself in situations where you are frequently learning and so what is really interesting to me, at this point, it's really about my career that enables me to grow." The comments suggested that participants were satisfied with, and appreciated their jobs because of the associated wide-ranging career and learning opportunities. Therefore, both Chinese and American participants displayed strong occupational identities in their commitment to self-improvement through career development. Further, most American participants appreciated the powerful social networks established through their jobs. Frequent international and domestic cooperation provided them more opportunities to expand their social networks. An American engineer commented with a sense of pride, "Because of this job, I can pick up the phone and find information I need from my colleagues or clients all over the world if I need to. I develop friendships at the same time, which is fascinating." Many participants frequently named their workplace friends in other countries, and underlined “the wide range of information” they acquired from their social networks. The recognition of job advantages was built into their identification with their occupations.

In addition, American participants’ engagement in various community service also played into their occupational identities. Multinational companies supported diverse community service in which participants “coached members in religious organizations,” “consulted the university community,” and “organized for sponsors’ sports events.” In the discussion of the services, participants displayed a sense of fulfillment because of the social impacts created through their specialties, which further contributed to the identification with their occupations. For instance, a senior accountant in a “Big 4” accounting firm explained, “My company built various volunteer programs to give back to communities. We always bring new, young college graduates into practice. Teaching them to become an excellent accountant really brings me joy.” A sense of pride for their jobs was apparent in their active participation in specialty-based activities.

The meanings of social impacts were also expanded further to include social awareness, important to those who personally experienced bias in and outside the workplace as minorities. An impressive story came from a program coordinator working for a Chinese company:

> My father was gay. I grew up in a gay household from the 1970s. So, I experienced racism, not overtly visible. But still, you know? ... My boss cares about minorities and I’m so glad to undertake the responsibilities like bringing the best to people in needs, food, services, or whatever. I myself was a minority, although not ethnically, but I knew how it felt…

Social impacts in this comment entailed the social responsibility and empathy he valued and were realized in his job. This participant's personal experience became an important argument for his choices in the workplace. His company enabled him to fulfill the need "bringing the best to people in needs" while his comment spoke to other participants' preferences in similar logics, as seen in other minority groups.

Minority groups also included women. Female participants underlined the significance of helping women in the local communities through their occupations. A public accountant recalled her early career life when there were only three women in her company. "Men and women did not even go to lunch together! Now the situation has dramatically changed, but I would like to help more women to acquire practical skills so that they can live better." Such efforts included "participating in female leadership initiatives," "coaching female graduates for job interviews," and "organizing volunteer events." Across these stories, American participants' experiences varied in terms of the service targets, types of programs, and roles to play. However, they seemed to agree that the desired social impacts would not have been recognized or achieved if they did not take their current jobs. Occupational identity, in this sense, was reflected as the critical attribution.

Interestingly, positive social impacts became an important argument for some participants to redefine the meaning of their occupations, and to counter occupational biases, such as misunderstanding about certain occupations and minority. A senior accountant made an argument:

> It's meaningful for me that I'm not an unethical cold-heart accountant. Whatever the charitable mission is, we are contributing to that by providing that service. I

can work in a different company, but it’s important that my job can create positive social impacts.

In this representative comment, this accountant attached social meanings to his job and fought occupational bias. Some participants in sales also brought up similar ideas, such as “changing the bad, dirty sales into a skillful communicator.” Participants strived to protect their occupational identity by redefining the images associated with these occupations with positive social meanings. Occupational identity became salient in their defense, supported by their emphasis on the associated social impacts of their occupations.

Therefore, participants articulated their appreciation, attachment, and commitment to their current professions, which exposed their occupational identities. More specially, occupational identity was rooted in a set of desired values, beliefs, resources, and social meanings in this study, such as a sense of achievement, a globalized development platform, wide-ranging social networks and career development opportunities, and positive social influences brought to valued societal members. Various forms of workplace interactions identified above contributed to the development of occupational identity. Participants made sense of and assigned positive meanings to those interactions (e.g., “joy,” “fulfillment,” and “help people in need”). They recognized the importance of their occupations not only in professional activities like international cooperation and business trips, but also in extended workplace interactions like community activities. In addition, the preceding discussion has alluded to participants’ appreciation for their current companies and company cultures that seemed to intertwine with their occupational identity.

Organizational identity. Participants' attachment to their current companies was also apparent in the discussions of their occupations. In addition to the wide-ranging resources provided by their companies, participants also identified with their company cultures and values. More importantly, how the management communicated organizational missions, values, and cultures in the societal change contributed to participants' organizational identification.

The organizational cultures promoted in MNCs located in China differed from other types of workplaces such as state-owned or private companies. Some representative values of MNCs included "impersonal," "less focus on relational-maintenance," and "progress-based system." A sales manager from a German company praised the top management for its emphasis on a goal and progress-based orientation: "I think our management communicates great values and visions. They look at your efforts, not the 'dirty' relationships in most domestic or state-owned companies. A company like this will live longer." The strong identification with a goal-oriented value in this comment contrasted with participants' dissociation from "relational-focus in domestic or state-owned company cultures." It seemed that they particularly did not like "unnecessary efforts" spent on lower level employees maintaining relations with employees with higher positions, as frequently occurred in Chinese domestic and state-owned companies. Key words such as "dirty" and "complicated office political gaming" used to describe those organizations indirectly confirmed participants' identification with current company cultures. A headhunter in an American company recalled:

> I chose this company because of the leadership. My boss told me on my first day that I'm expected to work, to explore, and to make accomplishment with the

> company. The company culture is being enforced in the tasks and company policies. We don't do office politics here.

The headhunter's preference for goal-orientation was clear in her comparison with the relational-focus as "office politics." Chinese participants' appreciation for the current company cultures and resistance to the relational-driven cultures in state-owned and private companies exposed their strong organizational identities.

Interestingly, the top-down communication of company culture and its impacts on American participants' organizational identity surfaced in political changes in national politics and carried memorable implications. Due to a current presidential executive order, "the travel ban," multinational companies in the U.S. experienced an unexpected challenge since they had many worldwide stakeholders, as seen in a public relations specialist's comment:

> The travel ban, whatever you want to call it [laugh]. I was very upset and we have people all over and I was very concerned about their safety because we have a lot of employees from other countries and even our clients who have colleges and universities. … It's a disaster. An announcement from our leadership basically saying "we too are very concerned. We are making sure that all of our employees that are travelling internationally are safe and continuing to support our diversity program and continuing to be very welcoming to everybody, regardless of race, religion, and gender."

The message was interpreted as a firm support for diversity and stakeholders, creating a sense of solidarity. The company took efficient actions to communicate the management's position and further, the company culture. Similar cases occurred in other U.S. located companies involved in wide-ranging cross-cultural cooperation. A young engineer replied with a strong sense of pride, “My company is really putting people first. The management communicated with us a lot and made us feel we are not just general employees, but a valued asset, especially now the immigrant climate is sensitive.” Therefore, multinational companies in the U.S. faced challenges due to the political climate, which also created opportunities for the leadership to enhance company cultures. Such a challenge exposed organizational identities because company cultures, values, and beliefs were reinforced and restated in various forms of communication, such as emails, meetings, and institutional practices like diversity programs. Participants revisited their organizational identification in the experience of this organizational challenge.

Overall, participants from both cultures identified both occupational and organizational identities. Occupational identity entailed participants’ attention to self-exploration and career development, as well as the significant social impacts associated with their jobs. Multinational companies, in the meantime, provided preferred resources for participants’ career goals, especially for American participants who valued corporate social responsibility. In addition to fostering participants’ occupational identification, multinational companies also enabled organizational identity in both daily and crisis communication of company cultures. While the top-down communication appeared influential, in most company activities, more identity practices were enacted at the team level, such as project teams and case-based tasks.

Team identity. Teams were the context in which participants practiced various activities frequently. In multinational companies, project teams and smaller practices unified employees in a long-term frame, and created a "team bubble" exhibited in the unique team norms, team mentorship, and partnerships. Workgroup identification was then developed.

The "team bubble," described by most participants, can be seen in some unique team practices, norms, and ways of communication that were not prescribed by, or shared across the company. An American sales employee in a Korean company emphasized:

> I don't know 105, 000 people in the large company. What I know is the 5 to 20 people in my teams. We are partners who can help when, er, like if you have a personal issue with a client. You can come to the leader, say I don't want to work with this person. The company may not support it, but in our team, you get the help. I don't think many teams have this set up.

In this comment, team support was enforced in a unique way because the members developed such a mechanism/norm within the group, which differentiated them from "outsiders." In the interviews with the Chinese participants, such unique team practices depended on the types of workgroups, ranging from "exchanging daily pictures of trendy products" to "having coffee breaks at noon together." An example was that a Chinese communication associate explained how she learned to "call outsiders by nicknames" in her team. Team cultures were reflected in these unique practices and norms, and ways of communication, creating a sense of belongingness that unified participants in their workgroups.

Team mentorship involved learning from the group leaders and partnerships within the teams. An American public sector director in a German company emphasized:

> I think my team is the strongest because it has a group of great people working together. We have a lot of things to share and more specifically the mentorship and partnership are what I focus most now. It's not so much the company wise. It's just being in the right team and doing the right thing.

The mentorship and partnership mentioned in this comment appeared guiding participants' "ways of doing and thinking" in "learning and working in cooperation." When working with team leaders and senior members, participants took in rules and norms such as "how to communicate with clients," and "how to coordinate with other departments." A Chinese product manager joked about her experience:

> My team member frequently compared me with my director who was on my position, and I was her team member. They said our leadership styles were just the same, and they called us "sisters." I guess this is the mentorship. I gradually adopted her way of leading and communication.

The example suggested that participants not only received task training, but also cultural assimilation from the mentorship, as seen in the "ways of doing and thinking." Such mentorship further enhanced their team identities.

As for partnerships, department cooperation signaled workgroup identification. On the one hand, participants valued "positivity in their teams." "I feel very comfortable working with my team. We are very collegial and supportive," explained an American overseas sales representative. Although not greatly salient, participants also seemed to take on a friend role identity in the workgroups because "they meet each other every day, even more than the time spent with the family." Team cooperation enabled workplace friendship development, fostered social support, and enhanced positive emotional attachment.

On the other hand, participants engaged in comparison when working with other teams, which simultaneously highlighted their team identification. For instance, in a Chinese public specialist's team, the culture was "everyone is serious about their jobs." "But another team we worked with was somewhat slack and disorganized. I like the way our team works together." Her observation of differences compared to other workgroups further enhanced her team identification. Various team cultures ranged from "diversity with positive vibes" to "a group of ambitious people." Nevertheless, participants frequently compared and contrasted "we" and "they" to acquire positive reinforcement, which, in turn, enhanced team identities.

Therefore, team bubbles comprised of unique team practices, work styles, and norms that defined the team cultures. Along with the mentorship developed in daily routines, participants developed strong team identifications with established values, emotional connections, and social support.

Leader role identity. One role identity that emerged as separate, but related to team identity is the leader role identity. Employees in this study brought up their experiences of transitioning from employees to leaders by emphasizing the challenges of leading a team and taking a new role. Leader role identity was exposed in the challenges participants faced while they made sense of their role expectations that involved distinctive perceptions, communication, and behaviors. A Chinese headhunter shared her story of becoming a member of the management:

> I'm having a hard time performing like a team leader. My boss is an assertive, strong, and smart lady. I wish I could have more time to practice and become a leader like her. Right now, I'm more like imitating her. People expect more from you as a leader like the way you speak and how you deal with challenges. You just can't say "No" that much.

This fellow realized the difficulties in role transitioning, particularly in communication style. Another Chinese sales manager also confirmed with a description of a leader role that prescribed "a knowledgeable, strong, and systematic communicator." She mentioned her frustration when participating in the online social groups of the management: "I was terrified being in that group because I was not familiar with the whole management process, not to mention clearly articulating my ideas when being asked questions." Meeting the new role expectations, particularly the communication style became a challenge, bringing the recognition of a leader role identity to the surface. Such challenges enabled participants to be aware of the characteristics of the leader role identity and the associated changes.

"Strong communicator-leader" was also apparent in the U.S. located multinational companies. American participants emphasized words like "coordination," "talking with the big-picture thinking," and "organized with clear messages" in the discussion of challenges in employee-leader transitions. In addition, constant conversations with former and current supervisors boosted participants' recognition of their leader role identity in team mentorship. Memorable messages such as "acting like a leader," and "practicing leading from now on" urged participants' adaptation, and then the salience of their leader role identities. It seemed obvious that a leader role defined a set of distinctive ways of thinking and doing, which were highlighted or exposed in the role transitioning process, and required participants' constant adaptation.

Community role identities (U.S.). Community was a unique notion to American participants, closely related with their work lives. While participants highly identified with their professions in specialty-based activities, their emphasis on local communities were also apparent. Multiple roles emerged and influenced American employees' work lives, including teachers, consultants, and social workers in different areas. Community service ranged from leadership initiatives, consultant services, to various social programs. An audit associate provided this story of promoting literacy:

> We give thousands, probably millions now of books away to kids. It fits so well together with what's important and the passion whether it's helping. My parents always raised me with the idea that you take care of people around you. Well, part of it means being involved in the community.

Role identities in community service manifested in similar statements such as "coaching the students in the initiative fulfilled me" and "serving local communities is part of my personal belief." Therefore, American participants chose companies that enabled them to fulfill desired community roles and social responsibility in various corporate programs and other community service.

Notably, extended team practices in community service also took critical roles in participants' role identities in communities. An example was a communication specialist's engagement in the university-wide student training sessions. She worked with a few peers in other departments on the sessions periodically. "I like my training group! We are very collegial. I enjoyed working with them while fulfilling the charitable mission," she explained. Such team cooperation was also common in volunteer groups with local minorities, or consultants for fundraising events. Participants' community roles were further encouraged through the extended team practices.

Cultural identities (China). In multinational companies, Chinese employees recognized the cultural differences in interactions with their international peers and supervisors (i.e., societal cultural characteristics or understanding in China versus in other countries). Chinese participants' culture identity became obvious in workplace conflicts, which occurred mostly due to cultural barriers. The first challenge due to the language barriers. A business consultant described his Indian supervisor as an example:

> She is a challenge. She understands, can listen, and write in Chinese. However, when she translated our conversation back to English, the meaning was totally changed. I frequently struggled speaking with her, but meanwhile, was deeply amazed by the complexity of Chinese and the cultural implications behind it. I had to reflect my Chinese ability frequently, as a Chinese [laugh].

Comparable to this example, other participants also brought up similar struggles, especially in business that required a strong mastery of language, such as public relations, media, marketing, and consulting. Language barriers existed in various types of workplace communication, such as "brainstorming of product themes," "presenting proposals," and "writing emails." These challenges drove participants to reflect on the cultural meanings of their ideas in communication. More importantly, conflicts then emerged in cases when participants insisted their cultural understanding. A product sales manager shared this example:

> My boss is quite localized, but I think he still has trouble understanding things like government policy because it has to do with the national conditions. Sometimes it does not make any sense to him, but he tends to count on his 20 years' work experience in marketing. Then arguments become very frequent because we both want to do a good job.

The manager interpreted different ways of doing things as "cultural differences," more specifically, the different cultural understandings. Such conflicts activated participants' sensemaking, in which they choose to stand for personal cultural understanding. Their cultural identities were deemed salient.

Relatedly, controversial topics such as "abortion," "open policies," and "market-oriented economy" also were categorized as cultural barriers. Participants recognized a strong attachment to the Chinese culture when talking about these topics with foreign employees or clients. "It's not feasible to apply whatever is going on in their countries to China because of the different national conditions and our unique history. It's important for me to correct their misunderstanding." Participants' defense for their cultural standpoints denoted their cultural belongingness, and more important, a cultural identity that entailed specific ways of interpreting and understanding certain issues.

Further, Chinese participants realized such perceived cultural belongingness from external comparisons, obvious in a banker's recall of an American director's visiting to the Chinese branch:

> I remember he said he envied the good relationships we have in our office. Members are so close to each other and the team is warm. He said in the U.S.

> office, people are not close after work and they say embarrassing words to each other directly in their office.

Similar comparisons made by foreign employees and clients outside also occurred between China and Korea, China and Germany in terms of “hierarchical differences,” “positivity in the work environment,” and “flexibility.” Constant communication with foreign employees and clients in such conversations contributed to employees’ understanding about the Chinese workplace from a cultural identity standpoint.

Summary of workplace identities. Chinese and American participants brought up similar salient identities in the workplace. Occupational identity lay in their focus on career development and self-exploration, while American participants attributed strong social meanings to their jobs. Participants’ salient occupational identity also involved organizational efforts because multinational companies communicated and provided support, resources, and values that aligned with employees’ career choices and preferences. Such organizational efforts were more obvious and preferred at the team level. In the workgroups, employees highlighted the “team bubbles” that defined their team identity. It was through team mentorships, norms, and daily cooperation that participants developed a sense of belongingness, group boundaries, and cultures. Moreover, the leader role identity also became salient among participants who experienced challenging role transition. Such role transition boosted participants’ identification with leader role identities in team communication.

Notably, a unique community role identity stood out to American participants, connecting to their workplace and occupations. They internalized desired community roles into work lives and valued the associated social responsibility. For Chinese employees, cultural identity served a critical guidance in workplace conflicts in terms of how to interpret international business partners' cultural and communication competencies.

Outside the Workplace

Family role identities. Outside the workplace, various types of informal identities impacted participants' work lives, such as their family role, friend role, and religious role identities. Family roles took a vital position in that "family always goes first," a statement that appeared in the interviews with all participants. They shared strong emotional and social attachment to family roles, particularly the roles within the nuclear family. As a senior American QC staff commented, "It's always valuable to me, my home life and my faith. I can always work somewhere else, but I only have one home, my wife and my children." Speaking to this representative statement, participant appeared to agree that "nothing can be more important than the family." Therefore, family identity seemed to take the most important position in participants' discussions.

Interestingly, Chinese family stories revealed most participants' consciousness about their roles in family emergencies, such as a health crisis or family loss. A Chinese PR associate in a U.S. company shared:

> Just several weeks ago, my jaw suddenly came off in the middle of the night. I tried 20 minutes until I had to call my dad. He took me to the emergency center. Since then I've started to realize that no matter how successful you are, family is always what you can count on, no matter how successful you are.

Family emergencies turned on the reminder, alarm, or "stop sign" to Chinese participants. Similar scenarios ranged from "the loss of an important family member" to “the diagnosis of serious diseases,” in which Chinese participants played children, parents, grandchildren, and spouses. Family emergencies truly touched them and brought the importance of family roles to the forefront. In addition to these severe situations, “conflicts resulting from time allocation” represented a more common context to most participants. They stated a strong willingness to and placed importance on spending time with family members because it was “the most meaningful and rewarding moment.” Despite the various roles they played, participants agreed that nuclear family roles were the most important identities.

Friend role identity (China). Similar to the family role identity, Chinese participants’ personal friendships satisfied their relational needs. Personal friendships mainly consisted of participants’ college friends, which were critical in terms of reducing workplace burdens and exchanging work-related information. Friend role identity was activated when participants strived to dissociate from their workplace roles and sought a sense of “self.”

Friendship outside the workplace buffered “frustration,” “depression from workplace conflicts,” and helped participants “figure out confusions.” A representative comment came from a Chinese banker, “My two best friends are valuable to me. They also work in multinational companies, so we vent together, which is helpful balancing out my stress.” Venting, sharing, and buffering were the communicative activities that triggered the friend role identity because participants stopped performing any professional role in these situations.

More importantly, friend role identity enabled participants to discuss their similar workplaces. They navigated career development together through communicating various issues, confusions, and stories. A secretary named several friends whom her knew from a professional workshop in college, and commented:

> My friends came from different companies, in the same or different industries. I've learned a lot from them in terms of how to resolve workplace issues, such as dealing with conflicts. A few of them are older than me, and they somewhat instructed me. I value and try to maintain such friendship in a long run.

Information exchange with friends working in a similar workplace became a strong social support to participants. Some other participants undertook the role of instructors in their friendships. They also emphasized benefits such as "reflecting themselves when sharing personal experience with friends" and "growing together with friends." Friend role identity, then, included mentorship outside the workplace and became valuable to participants' work lives. Friend role identity was developed early, but grew naturally in Chinese employees' organizational socialization.

Religious identities (U.S.). In American participants' interviews, religious identities appeared important to the workplace. "Faith" and "religion" impacted employees' perceptions and work preference in work lives. Most American employees were Christian. When talking about why they chose their current companies, participants highlighted that their religions were greatly accepted or respected in their multinational companies. An audit associate, also a Catholic, shared a story:

> I got a client who came to me after she obtained an abortion. I cannot work with this client. I know all I'm doing is their tax return. It doesn't really aid their mission, but, it's something I'm not comfortable with. My team had me rotated without questions.

This audit associate's religion was valued and accepted in a company where diversity was valued. Religion also stood out in participants' daily interactions with international employees and clients, to whom they paid additional attention. A sales manager explained, "We have colleagues too from India and Pakistan, and Chinese. There are clearly differences with Mandarin and Cantonese, and their religious beliefs. I've always been involved with global companies and be aware of how my beliefs differs from others." In such multinational communication, the importance of "maintaining personal beliefs" and "not compromising personal religious belief" were emphasized. Although in the "businesslike" and "professional" workplace, participants appeared protective for their religion identities, as seen in the statement, "you need to know who you are and what's important to you." In addition, most American participants also held the assumption that "a professional, good partner should know how to respect others' religious beliefs and behave appropriately." The sales manager went on to comment:

> Knowing about the person's basic background is kinda the common sense for those who are working in the global market, right? We are all expected to do that, but it's also understandable that some people just don't know that much.

His opinion resonated with most participants' expectations for business partners. They acquired perspective-taking in frequent multinational communication, while personal religious beliefs still played into their self-concept as an important part.

Interestingly, religious identity was also apparent in some participants' rationales for community service. Contributing the valued communities was "a right thing" because it "helped out people in needs," "aligned with their religious beliefs," and "served for the peace." As a Christian program coordinator commented:

> …I don't care if you're a white farmer in Northern Missouri or if you're a Mexican grower picking crops out in California or if you're anywhere…. because we are part of nature and God creates us. That gets back to that type of understanding, we're a species, not a race.

Religious beliefs strongly influenced participants' perceptions toward other interactants in the workplace. Cultural differences, emphasized by Chinese employees, were minimized by American participants to "simply the language barriers," or "different species" in the interviews. Therefore, American participants were sensitive to their and others' religious orientations. Understanding and clarifying the differences enabled them to reflect further on the meanings and importance of their own religion identities.

Summary of outside workplace identities. Outside the workplace, family role identity was prominent to participants of both cultures and appeared unshakeable. However, while Chinese employees highlighted personal friendships, American interviewees highlighted religious beliefs. Friend role identity supplemented Chinese employees' work lives because individuals shared emotional burdens and navigated workplace challenges together. Communication as a friend was valuable to Chinese participants to make sense of challenging workplace situations. American participants seemed to value religious beliefs even in the workplace, which impacted how they perceived individual variations and preferences expressed in workplace interactions.

Categorizing Salient Social Identities

The identification of salient social identities in and outside the workplace revealed that participants developed identities with different types of targets, involving life-long enculturated beliefs, roles developed from various social relationships, and memberships recognized with collective workplace targets. Therefore, the social identities can be further categorized into four types: individual identities, collective identities, relational identities, and positional identities.

Individual identities included cultural and religious identities that pertained to long-term personal beliefs. Such beliefs were internalized and rooted in participants' growth and greatly impacted their perceptions toward the social world. Collective identities consisted of occupational, organizational, and team identities that described participants' memberships in a collective target, denoting a set of shared mission, values, and rules. Relational and positional identities were role-based identities that explained participants' socially-constructed self-meaning in a type of social relationship. To be more specific, positional role identities suggested individuals' roles associated with a form or designated position or role as participants in the community or the company, such as a consultant, a manager or an assistant. Relational role identities, however, defined their naturally prescribed and developed characters in social relationships, such as a mom, a husband, a friend, or a co-worker. Such categorization clarified the nature of each type of identity by indicating the identity characteristics. Individual identities were developed before participants joined current workplaces, and displayed long-term effects in the interviews. Role and collective identities were differentiated in this categorization in terms of how they were formed and internalized. While role identities were formed based on participants' self-understanding and others' expectation for certain roles (e.g., a sales person's understanding and efforts of changing the meaning of this occupation), collective identities explained the joint efforts of creating, developing, and maintaining collective beliefs, values, and behavioral norms or rules. In the next section, situational salience will be discussed to uncover how these identities were performed in either enhancing or conflicting ways.

RQ2: Situational Salience of Multiple Identities

Salient Identity Contexts

While RQ1 revealed what salient identities were recognized by multinational employees, RQ2 addressed the issue of when each identity became significant. To provide further understanding of the situational salience of participants' multiple identities, Table 2 categorized important situations in which participants' perceived identities were highlighted and emphasized: identity-encouraging contexts and identity-challenging contexts. Identity-encouraging contexts described situations that fostered identity formation, development, and maintenance; identity-challenging contexts reflected moments when participants recognized their important identifications, which, potentially, triggered sensemaking. Participants' narrations reflected the contextual cues that activated salient identities while certain identities appeared relatively stable across communicative practices. More importantly, participants demonstrated alignment (e.g., organizational, occupational, and community identity) and inconsistency (e.g., religious, cultural, and family role identity) among these identities, or in other words, identity compatibility and incompatibility.

Table 2: Summary of Salient Identity Contexts

	Internal Activities	External Activities
Identity-encouraging Contexts	• Organizational communication (e.g., company cultures, organizational support, resources, and globalized platform) • Wide-ranging social events and network • Team cooperation (e.g., workgroup routines and culture- building, casual activities, mentorships, and partnerships) • Management Communication in the political change	• External project cooperation • Communication with clients in the political change • Company-community volunteer programs, sponsored events, and service training, conducted by individuals or groups • Wide-ranging external social networks • Informal business interactions (e.g., dinner party) • Personal friend interactions
Identity-challenging Contexts	• Cultural conflicts • Intersection of religion and work • Team conflicts among workgroups • Promotion • Workplace friendship	• Cultural arguments with international clients • Occupational bias • Family emergencies and interactions

Identity-encouraging contexts, as explained, provided contextual cues that activated or enhanced participants' desired core values and beliefs of one or more identities, as the identity(s) guided their ensuing behaviors. Internally, the management's communication of the company cultures, available resources, and support provided a discursive context in which participants developed organizational and occupational identities. On a daily basis, employees received discursive messages from the management via emails, meetings, the internal communication platform, and daily routines. Various messages built "supportive," "open-minded," and "motivating" organizational cultures, reflected in participants' appreciation for the wide-ranging work opportunities, diverse interactants, and worldwide social networks. The companies were perceived as "a right place to work," which reflected the organizational identity. Thus, the management's communication constituted a discursive context in which participants drew on relevant identity resources for organizational identification. In addition, such organizational support also became salient when participants sought resources in career development. For instance, international cooperation enabled participants' access to “the trendy products and knowledge in the industry,” “wide-ranging social networks,” and “working with people in the top-ranked companies.” They recognized a sense of “fulfillment” and “joy.” Participants’ occupational identity was activated when their career goals were supported by these company practices. In this sense, participants’ organizational and occupational identities were intertwined and mutually enhanced in their work lives.

In addition, team cooperation was a critical context that activated team identity through various types of internal work routines (e.g., internal project cooperation, informal team interactions, and mentorships). Participants developed and adopted team cultures, emotional connections, and social support (e.g., support for personal religious beliefs and family leaves) through long-term team cooperation. Positive social interactions within the workgroups boosted team cohesion and the sense of belongingness, which underlied team identification. Workplace friend role identity, although not greatly salient, was also found at the team level because participants described “very comfortable” working in the “positive and collegial group.”

Along this line, national political change further provided an identity-encouraging situation for multinational companies in the U.S. through internal communication. In 2017, the presidential executive order regarding refugee admissions people from seven Muslim-majority countries greatly affected multinational companies. These companies had employees and clients who encountered worldwide travelling issues, which then hindered various intercultural cooperation. The management emphasized supportive messages that allowed American participants to revisit company cultures intensively. Such a value-enhancing process brought employees a strong sense of belongingness and membership that characterized organizational identity. Most companies in this study took immediate actions both internally and externally. Internally, the top-down communication emphasized the "supportive," "diverse," and "equal" values, which further strengthened American participants' organizational identity as they dealt with various travelling issues. A public relation associate recalled, "The top management were very effective by stating their position and I feel proud of working in a company like this because we care, and we take actions to really support diversity." The top-down communication during this political change allowed employees to enhance their understanding of organizational culture, values, and beliefs.

In addition to internal practices, identity-encouraging contexts also included external activities. Externally, not only did cross-cultural cooperation foster participants' occupational commitment and identification, it also allowed them to extend business relationships to friendships, defined as a workplace friend role, in their words. In addition, the frequent interactions with foreign employees and clients drove many Chinese participants to recognize their team identity and cultural identity. As noted in RQ1, some foreign clients and co-workers expressed their appreciation for the "collective and harmonious" relationships in Chinese workgroups by comparison with non-Chinese work settings. Such messages enabled comparisons and enhanced participants' identity regarding their teams, as well as the recognition of cultural factors in the team's positivity. Some arguments over task completion or controversial topics also occurred in the international interactions that enabled Chinese participants to be aware of their own cultural positions and identification.

During the national political change, both the management and employees were devoted to external communication with their travelling employees and clients. A public accountant manager explained:

> I stayed connected with some of my clients during that time because I was concerned they would have troubles. I also forwarded the messages from the top management. Our clients truly appreciated our support and help, which at the same time increased the emotional connections. Our company is being responsible and what I'm doing helps people in need, particularly our clients.

Positive feedback received from clients further reinforced American participants' organizational and occupational identity. They recognized the "value" and the "meanings" of their job during the company crisis by serving their clients. Therefore, communication during the external political change was a crucial situation in which American employees revisited the importance of the company culture and job values, which boosted organizational identity.

Another crucial external activity was company-community service, a context in which American participants acknowledged their organizational, occupational, and community role identities. Multinational companies provided diverse community-based activities in which participants contributed to valued communities with their specialties. In other words, corporate social responsibility was integrated in the local communities through participants' desired roles. Participants' sense of fulfillment was obvious when their specialties and contributions received recognition. Such communicative practices also promoted their emotional connections to valued communities. The overlap and alignment among occupational, organizational, and community role identities were easily identifiable. Community service then became a meaningful situation that fostered identity development and maintenance.

The last external encouraging context was Chinese participants' personal interactions with their personal friends. Hanging out with friends not only provided opportunities for emotional release, but also assisted their socialization into and navigation of the workplace. Chinese participants both received and provided strong social support through friend interactions as they shared workplace challenges or emotional stress. More importantly, the collective navigation of work lives somewhat impacted the development of occupational and organizational identities. A Chinese advertisement producer explained how information exchange among friends aided his career choices:

> I always seek for advices from my close friends because they work either in the same industry or can provide useful information as the long-term participants in the global market. We also attended workshops together. My friends recommended this company to me after I left my last job. They have heard about its good reputation frequently within the industry.

Friends' interactions generated strong external information sources to participants while they also performed as mentors to others to make sense of work issues. Their similar work backgrounds enhanced participants' friendships and contributed to their friend role identification.

In contrast to identity-enhancing contexts, identity-challenging contexts highlighted the internal and external situations that drew participants' attention to incompatible or ambiguous identities. Internally, workplace conflict was a notable context in which participants experienced “group boundaries,” evident in cultural barriers and workgroup clashes. To both Chinese and American participants, for instance, team conflicts occurred when they endeavored to achieve their team goal or to protect team benefits while cooperating with other departments or teams. “Different ways of doing come from different perspectives and emphasis of values. People in our team are really united; some other teams just don’t have the culture,” commented an American program coordinator. In such conflicts, participants identified team boundaries and strong support of their own teams. A Chinese private banker explained, “The big-picture thinking in conflicts is important. I’m glad my team is full of people with such mindset.” Team norms and values contributed to participants’ team identity and served to establish the group’s boundaries.

Another type of workplace conflict that underlined Chinese participants’ cultural identity was arguments due to cultural misunderstandings, between international partners and them. The divergent cultural understanding of certain issues, such as project proposals or conversations about controversial topics, challenged Chinese employees’ cultural identity. Chinese participants reflected on and acted to defend their cultural perspectives and positions in those interactions. Such identity-challenging context enabled Chinese employees to revisit and highlight the sense of cultural attachment.

Identity-challenging contexts were also evident in internal leader-member interactions. While promoted employees transited to their new role, they also encountered a relational adaptation process that caused challenges. For instance, the promoted employees frequently ran into the dilemma in which professional roles and friendships were intertwined. A Chinese media and public relation specialist provided an example: “Sometimes my friend in the other department asked me for a personal favor. I don’t want to break the rule, but I also don’t want to disappoint my friend.” The unclear role boundary can also be seen when participants were not satisfied with the lack of respect from former peers, now their subordinates. These moments and situations, similar to workplace conflicts, challenged participants to reflect on their desired identity, and decide how to deal with their role ambiguity. Therefore, identity-challenging contexts not only drove employees’ attention to their salient identities in a given situation, but also posed potential identity tensions that required corresponding management strategies, as will be discussed in RQ4.

Outside the workplace, family interactions and emergencies challenged participants’ family role identities. Some Chinese participants, for instance, identified family and health emergencies as challenging situations that brought family roles to Chinese employees’ attention. Most of them did not fully realize the significance of their family roles until then. They chose to “give up some work,” or “spend more time with the family” after such personal experiences. American participants also emphasized family roles, however, as relatively more stable regardless of situational changes. They consistently placed family as a priority despite “constant overtime work” or “not having enough time to spend with family members.” The fast-paced work style and irregular work hours challenged participants’ emphasis on family role performance. Most American employees in this study held solid family faith as their identification with and commitment to family roles appeared firm in their routines.

The identified categories were not mutually exclusive because internal and external activities were usually taken simultaneously and systematically, such as the management's communication of company cultures. Identity salience was obvious, too, in interactions at multiple levels. For instance, communication of supportive messages within and outside the companies both underlined American participants' organizational identity. Similarly, participants' communicative practices with clients at the company level involved team cooperation and various social interactions at individual levels. Therefore, while participants' identities were situationally salient, communication of consistent messages in these situations reinforced similar values, beliefs, and rules, and contributed to participants' identity compatibility.

Identity Compatibility and Incompatibility

In the discussion of Table 2, compatibility was apparent in the overlap and alignment among participants' occupational, organizational, and team identity, as well as community role identities in American employees' cases. Multinational companies' open-minded, supportive, and international environment provided participants a pleasant space and various international opportunities to develop their career, along with worldwide social networks. Participants' commitment to their company cultures and job values was embedded in communicative practices, recognized as organizational and occupational identities. While performing various job responsibilities, American participants also experienced collective organizational cohesion during the external political change. Therefore, the culture promoted in multinational companies in this study seemed aligned with participants' career goals, and community roles. American participants' community role identities seemed aligned with the desired values and beliefs provided in occupational and organizational identities. These three identities appeared linked and ranked of similar importance in the “salience hierarchy” (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001, p. 32) described in identity theory.

Team identity, however, seemed compatible with the three macro-level identities in different ways. In both Chinese and American cases, team cultures appeared to carry similar, yet unique characteristics and meanings due to the team cultures developed in participants’ workgroups. While the workgroups functioned to realize organizational missions and requirements, the group-based team cultures somewhat distanced participants from the company, in other words, the management’ control. Work teams were the major context in which participants made sense of the workplace. Participants developed team values and norms that may not be required by or may deviate slightly from the management’s expectations. Meanwhile, workplace friendships aligned with team identity in that such social relationships emerged from positive team cooperation. Most participants paid more attention to the team activities and personnel than to that of the companies.

Outside the workplace, family role identities appeared incompatible with workplace identities due to work-life challenges. Family and friendship role identities seemed more stable than workplace identities. Although participants tended to emphasize different identities in various workplace situations, they insisted that family roles were the priority in the identity hierarchy. Friend roles were persistently salient particularly to Chinese employees, not only because such roles assisted their workplace navigation process, but also because they provided constant emotional support.

This discussion of identity compatibility and incompatibility alluded to the idea that participants structured their identities in different ways. Two tentative identity models were then proposed in the next section to examine how participants' multiple identities worked together as they engaged in various communicative practices.

RQ3: Structuring Multiple Social Identities: A Cross-level Dynamic

The first two sections have discussed what salient identities were important to multinational employees and when these identities were salient. In the following section, the linkages among and how multiple identities work together will be addressed. As reviewed, current scholars have studied individuals' identity organization through several models, such as Fitzsimmons's (2013) multicultural identity dimensions, Ashforth et al.'s (2000) role-segmentation-integration continuum, or Ashforth and Johnson's (2001) nested identity model. These models have assumed that individuals organize identifications into one inclusive pattern and do not reflect the changing nature of identities. Participants in this study diverged on how to manage multiple identities, and displayed two distinct types of identity structures: a holistic identity model and a kaleidoscope identity model.

The first model, the holistic model displayed a unified perspective of managing identities. Participants of this category, mainly consisting of Chinese employees and a few American participants, preferred to integrate their important identities. More specifically, in the holistic model, they perceived multiple identities as different aspects that contributed to "the one," "an amalgamation itself" (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 128). For the purpose of demonstration, "the one" comprised of two types, relational and communal types (See Figure 3), yet multiple identities were actually internalized with ambiguous boundaries.

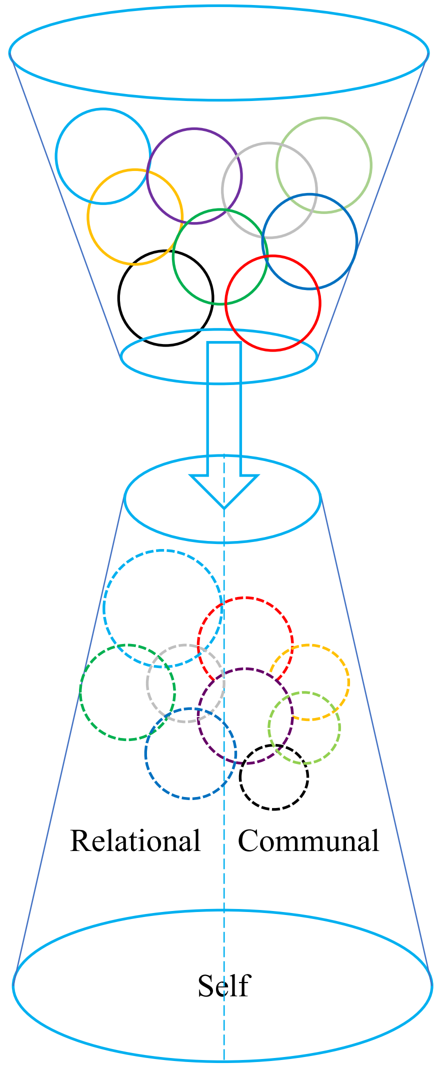

Figure 3: Holistic identity model.

Relational: Light blue = Family role identity; Green = Personal friend role identity; Grey = Community role identity; Black = Leader role identity; Communal: Red = Occupational identity; Orange = Organizational identity; Purple = Team identity; Light green = Cultural identity; Blue = Religious identity.

Relational type encompassed role identities: participants played certain roles in social relationships as a leader, a friend, a community server (e.g., a consultant, a volunteer, or a mentor), and a family member. Communal type incorporated collective memberships, such as team, company, cultural, and occupational identities. Figure 3 displays the relative subjective importance of each identity in the participants' eyes based on the size of the circle: family identity was projected as the most important; occupational and organizational identities, and community identity (U.S.) remained similar in importance, followed by team identity and friend roles that were intertwined; leader role and cultural identity were recognized as relatively minor in given situations.

Despite the variations among situational salience, participants came to agreement that "these roles drive to a whole self while each of them is an internalized part." They insisted that the important identities cannot be separated because they were all "important life experiences that make a better you over time." Therefore, identity synergy, proposed by Dietz and Ritchey (1996), was relatively apparent in these participants' narrations. A more specific example can be seen in a Chinese media and public relation associate:

> It's impossible to separate, and why do we need to separate? Each one is important and helps me grow. You can always reflect your experience when performing one role and take it to another context. Being a leader in my team leads me to think about how to mentor my kid and train them to gain necessary skills like perspective-taking. A successful person needs to learn how to integrate resources and reflect, I mean, as an elegant living expert.

Such an "integration" perspective was also confirmed by a few American participants, speaking to the core idea of the holistic identity model. An American engineer replaced "work-life balance" with the term "work-life integration." He laughed, "Work-life balance means you separate work and personal life clearly, or at least you try to, but I'm more work-life integration because I like how these two parts fit well together." Thus, each role and membership was considered a resource that enriched “the one,” in other words, the “amalgamation itself” (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 128). Participants perceived that the positive effects of their identifications benefitted their personal growth at some point in their lives, either in the a short or long run.

The other identity model that represented most American and a few Chinese participants’ organization of identities was the kaleidoscope model. The notion of a kaleidoscope, as reviewed earlier, was introduced by Gibbs (2009) who examined various cultural identities in global teams (e.g., organizational culture, national culture, corporate culture, or sociodemographic culture). Gibbs argued that diverse cultural identities existed in team dynamics as they posed various tensions. Each of these layers of culture may unify or divide the team, depending on the degree to which it is shared and the relative salience for team members. In an actual kaleidoscope, individual colored chips change their alignment as the kaleidoscope is turned. This create a wide variety of patterns depending on which chips are aligned at a particular moment. Similarly, the kaleidoscope metaphor here suggests that the various roles and levels can be turned so that they change alignment depending on the particular context. As a result, different roles at different levels temporarily align or separate depending on the context.

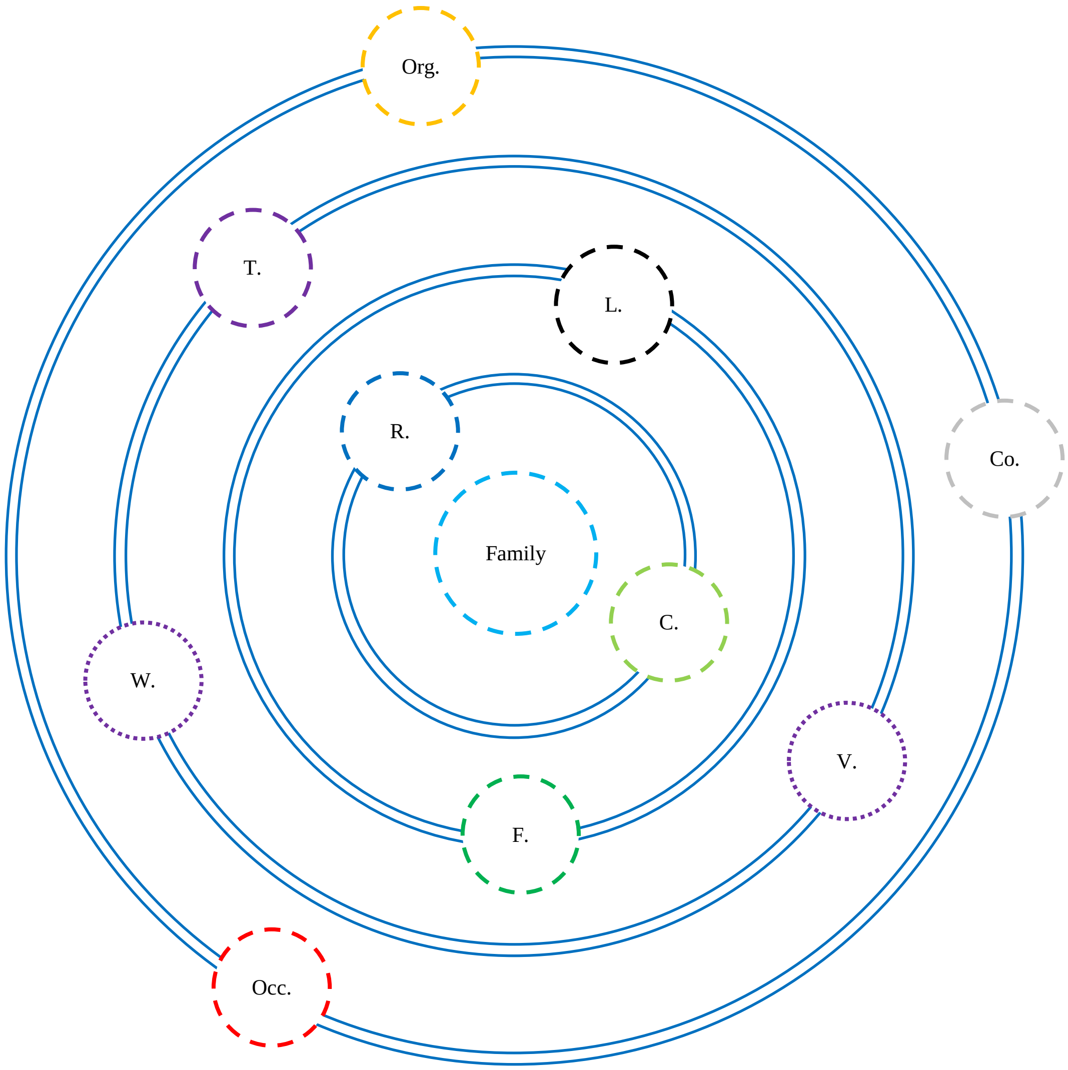

Figure 4: Kaleidoscope identity model.

Relational: Light blue = Family role identity; Green = Personal friend role identity; Grey = Community role identity; Black = Leader role identity; Communal: Red = Occupational identity; Orange = Organizational identity; Purple = Team identity (Volunteer; Work); Light green = Cultural identity; Blue = Religious identity.

While Gibbs's (2009) model mainly focused on macro cultural dimensions in team settings, this notion was employed to represent an identity structure with a specific focus in this study. As seen in Figure 4, identities ranged based on the level of importance to participants. Family identity remained the core and base. Religious identity, as a person identity, was salient even in the workplace for American participants because it guided how they formed and handled professional relationships to some extent. Workplace and personal friend (Chinese) roles emerged from various team cooperation, projects teams, and casual team activities, as well as volunteer teams, and community service. When employees were promoted to team leaders, the leader roles became gradually salient as they engaged in this role transition; some of them had trouble dissociating from the identity of a general employee. In the meantime, professional roles frequently overlapped with workplace and personal friend roles in various contexts. Identities can bump, align, or overlap with each other, as Figure 4 showed.

Further, team cooperation aligned with participants' macro level identities in multiple ways. First, employees' occupational identity was heightened in group practices with clients, co-workers, and community members. The process of performing their occupations, fulfilling career goals, and bringing professional contribution in diverse group contexts (e.g., project teams, workgroups, or volunteer groups) were important to participants. In addition, team practices were major contexts in which organizational values and missions were enforced. A company crisis illustrated alignment between team and organizational identities. Lastly, multinational companies connected to communities through various volunteer programs and serviced-based events. Employees recognized their community roles and switched between company representatives and community members. Therefore, team identity can align with occupational, organizational, and community role identities in given situations. Such alignment was apparent in an American marketing staff's narration:

> …Also, I focus on those types of entities that are working in a compatible way, like my job works for me in terms of my religion and I won't be able to work in

> a company that doesn’t support it. Right? It’s the same for the charitable effort I’m doing through the company program, right? So many things usually line up most of the time for me. Sometimes they can be challenging, maybe when I don’t feel the company can support my career anymore.

This participant’ comment on the job, the company, and community identities spoke to the kaleidoscope identity model. Multiple identities shared salience in given activities, depending on the identity content, values, and beliefs desired by the participants. Shared salience was more commonly seen between organizational and occupational identities for Chinese participants, as seen in a Chinese product manager’s reflection, “I chose this company because it supports graduates who want to gain experiences. They encourage you to take responsibilities, be self-motivated, which is what I want for my career.” To this end, following the kaleidoscope lens (Gibbs, 2009), identities were activated in given situations on the tracks; identities can be aligned, overlapped, or bumped with others, presenting different patterns, depending on communicative activities.

The kaleidoscope identity model was further differentiated from the holistic model in respect to participants’ perceived structuring strategies. Participants who preferred the kaleidoscope identity model sought to keep identities relatively separated, whereas those who preferred the holistic perspective deemed identities as integrated. The American marketing staff continued to comment, “I tend to put each of the roles into different blocks so that I won’t drag myself into troubles, I mean, have everything mixed together, although it’s really hard [laugh].” A few Chinese participants offered similar answers. They were aware of the struggles brought on by “stepping into different ponds at the same time," so "differentiation" and "managing work-life balance" became an important task. Therefore, the kaleidoscope model reflected the fluid nature of participants' identities because while participants tended to differentiate and rank them, depending on the situation, the relevant identities matched up temporarily with others. The kaleidoscope model, then, allowed various short or long-term identity patterns to occur.

Given that this project examines both Chinese and American participants, it is necessary to clarify the role of the societal cultural ordering in both the holistic and kaleidoscope models. National culture was not always overriding although it provided insights into participants' preferences. In the holistic model, Chinese culture only became dominant in workplace conflicts between Chinese employees and their international co-workers and clients, mainly reflected in cultural misunderstandings about task completion; meanwhile, the few American participants who preferred the holistic structure experienced being certain types of minorities sometime in their lives (e.g., A Caucasian in ethnic groups or a perceived homosexual in heterosexual communities). Thus, these American participants were also sensitive to cultural differences. In the kaleidoscope model, most participants had worked in an international workplace for a long period of time. They practiced English as their working language, and encountered only occasional language barriers in intercultural activities; in other words, their cultural identity was not obvious in the discussions.

To this end, the holistic and kaleidoscope identity models suggested two ways of organizing identities. Both role and social identities were taken into consideration to represent a more comprehensive identity range than the ones in past literature. More importantly, the holistic identity model highlights synergistic effects because each identity was perceived to generate benefits to employees' overall work lives. The kaleidoscope model, however, revealed the fluid nature of participants' identity structure in the various possible patterns, depending on how identities were activated and aligned in given situations. Notably, the identification of employees' identity structures further exposed their struggles with managing these roles and memberships that were not always compatible or clearly defined. The following section will discuss the tensions that emerged from ambiguous or incompatible identifications, as well as participants' management strategies.

RQ4: Recognizing Identity Tensions

Participants did not always manage multiple identities without trouble. For instance, many participants admitted that switching roles between family and workplace was a challenge and frequently caused identity tensions. Managing identities brought participants' sensemaking to the surface in the tensions. Questions such as "what is going on, what should I do, and how should I deal with the struggle" were raised in the sensemaking process. The following section summarizes four types of identity tensions that emerged from participants' narratives, as seen in Table 3: 1) work-life challenges, 2) member-leader transitions, 3) friend role-professional switches, 4) and culture/religion-work challenges.

Table 3: Identity Tensions

Identity Tensions	Definition	Exemplar Quotations
Work-life challenge	Tensions that emerged from time allocation and role-referencing	• "I felt bad that I can't be there for my parents with the same amount of time as I do with my team." • "My husband constantly told me, 'quit managing us.'
Member-leader transition	Tensions that emerged from individual's transition from an entry-level employee to a leadership position	• "When I was first promoted to this position, I got overwhelmed because I didn't think I was able to handle this." • "It is a challenging transition because talking to these people needs to be more strategic, and more concise, meaning speaking to the point."
Friend-professional role switch	Tensions that emerged from identity ambiguity in between workplace formal roles and friend roles	• "I sometimes was not happy about the way a member talks to me. He is, you know, too careless, maybe because we work together all the time." • "They seemed not to separate work and life much in the company and tried to ask for favors as friends, which gave me a hard time."
Cultural/religion-work challenge	Tensions that emerged from incompatible values	• "My job requires me to serve people in need, which I highly respect and try my best every day. This case is just beyond my acceptability because of my strong belief." • "It's hard to get him to see the logic because of the cultural barriers."

Work-life Challenge

Work-life challenges reflected employees' struggles managing regarding their workplace and their family roles. Work-life challenges mainly occurred time allocations and role transitions. Time allocation emerged as the first challenge because participants found it "difficult giving time to the family as expected" due to their current workplace and occupations. Multinational companies required frequent international travel and cooperation across different time zones. Employees in this study frequently had to compromise family time to fulfill their job responsibilities. This was particularly apparent among the Chinese employees and American employees who took leadership positions. One Chinese banker explained her comparison between work teams and family roles:

> For most of us, we spend more time in the company with the team members than our family members. I don't see my parents on a daily basis. So, the team is my

> like work family, just to compare. I felt bad that I can't be there for my parents with the same amount of time as I do with my team.

Her experience reflected most Chinese employees' struggles, particularly under the premise that accompanying the senior family members was "an important expectation in the Chinese culture" for the younger generations. Family roles were perceived important, yet were challenged due to participants' occupations and time allocation. Similarly, American participants also felt "pressured" in such circumstances, as seen in a public sector accountant' comment, "I can't be in two places at one time. We have deadlines every month and it can be really hard when someone comes to visit because our work requires overtime." In this participant's team, people also communicated effective work-life balance strategies. "We're dealing with this right now with our new young staff to figure out how to balance responsibilities at work and at home," she said. Therefore, how to allocate time to satisfy both workplace identities and family role identities became a struggle to employees in this study.

While participants experienced time conflicts, role transitions also seemed to be intertwined in work-life challenges. Many employees found it hard to separate work and family roles, which caused role transition difficulties. A Chinese product sales staff shared an episode:

> Because of my job I tend to care too much about those trendy products. I do that all the time even when shopping or watching TV with my husband. He thought I couldn't focus on enjoying time with him. I know, annoying, but you know, the job.

This comment illustrated that occupational habits seemed to influence, or more accurately, to interfere with how participants enacted family roles. Similar cases also included “talking too much at work and don’t want to talk at home,” “feeling anxious and kept thinking about work during Christmas,” and “always serving as the decision maker.” Such role transition difficulties were particularly apparent among participants who assumed leadership roles. “My husband frequently told me, ‘quit managing us.’ I now go home and try not to manage the family like I manage the team,” explained an American public relations director. This phenomenon when one role tends to intersect with another one is called role-referencing, and serve as a reference for that role (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Some participants who performed supervisory roles, however, displayed the struggle of role-referencing by avoiding “managing” or “making too many decisions for others.” A Chinese Quality Control manager elaborated:

> I try to let my husband make decisions at home because I’m tired of making decisions all the time. At home I just want to be a wife being taken care of. He doesn’t understand why I behave like that. Also, I can be impatient when he does not plan things out appropriately as I expected [laugh]. So, it’s hard.

The identity tension due to role-referencing was obvious in her efforts of avoiding workplace roles in the family. Both bringing and/or avoiding work roles in family settings indicated participants’ awareness of the overlap of the workplace and family roles, as well as their associated negative impacts. Therefore, the discussion revealed that role transition difficulties occurred not only in respect to time allocations, but also regarding psychological and habitual management between the work mode and family mode. In other words, identity tension here was about the management of identity goals

(“I want to be a wife” versus “I want to lead”), identity values (“I care about the family” versus “I care about the work”), and identity behaviors (“think about work” versus “enjoy the shopping”).

Member-leader Transition

Role transition difficulties not only manifested between work and family settings, but also within the workplace. Participants reported role transition challenges from a team member to a leader, along with adaptation to a distinctive set of perceptions, communication, and behavioral styles. In the discussions of workplace challenges, many participants described having a hard time as they adapted to supervisory but also performed subordination roles, at the same time. Such challenges were exhibited in the lack of communication competency: task competencies and role relationships.

In their communication competency model of group leadership, Barge and Hirokawa’s (1989) proposed task structure and role relationships as two critical elements that influenced leadership performance, which provided an explanation here. Task structure referred to task difficulty, the degree of integration required (i.e., cooperative requirements), and the number of possible salutations (e.g., solution multiplicity); role relationship was mainly reflected in the degree to which group members understood their role (Barge & Hirokawa, 1989). Task competencies involved the abilities of managing different task structures. In role transitions, participants’ tasks changed from simple to complex, which involved “more management of the work flow,” “more interactive communication,” and “high level of management skills building.” They emphasized that “it’s not the work itself anymore.” The changed nature of the job responsibilities posed pressure on participants in that they had to develop a new skill set and mindset, in which communication skills were the core. A senior public sector director in an international accounting firm recalled:

> When I was first promoted to this position, I got overwhelmed because I didn't think I was able to handle this. As a staff, I just got the assignments; it was pretty much sequential. But this job now is more demanding because I need to deal with a variety of clients every day and be responsible for the team. It's more about managing the engagement through the system. Lots of communication because the mindset is that you are managing different potential problems there, so how to resolve those problems by communicating with different people and get them work together is the focus.

The director continued to explain the similar situations encountered by the young team leaders in her office, and how they endeavored to help these leaders adapt better to the new role identities: "Some people would still come to ask X, Y, Z and go back to their desk, and then come back, as an entry-level staff. They need to communicate with a more systematic mindset." In the role transition, participants experienced increased task complexity that required stronger task competencies, especially communication skills that allowed effective management. Participants struggled to make appropriate changes in identity because such changes meant a change to "a new set of doing."

Barge and Hirokawa (1989) also argued that complex tasks required a greater breadth and depth of relational competencies than simple tasks. When participants were promoted to leader roles, relationship development within the management became a new challenge. Many participants felt "nervous" and "daunting" joining management and had to frequently adjust to “the management talk” in the relational maintenance, as seen in a Chinese media and relation manager’s experience:

> I was “dragged” into the WeChat group (Chinese instant messenger) in which the management frequently exchanged ideas and other information. I didn’t even want to talk because I was afraid of being put on the spot. In the past, I only needed to talk to my supervisor and now I need to speak to the big boss and other senior managers directly. It is a challenging transition because talking to these people needs to be more strategic, and more concise, meaning speaking to the point.

This comment spoke directly to the relational competencies required by a role transition. Participants had to adapt to different communication strategies in the relationship development, which posed challenges for their navigation of their new roles. The identity tension in role transition lay in “learning how to speak” and “talking like a leader.”

Managing relationships with both senior supervisors and subordinates, who were previous co-workers, was another side of the identity tension because participants frequently switched between the leader role and the peer role. They performed as a “sandwich” and frequently faced relational struggles. A Chinese headhunter complained about managing roles between her boss and a team member:

> …We joined the company together and now I became her supervisor. The girl has still treated me as her friend. My boss was quite assertive and thought I was being too “gentle and soft” with that girl. So, I need to be an assertive team leader in my boss’s eyes. The problem is, I don’t want to be too assertive and

> lose the friendship, but I also can't be too gentle because sometimes I do feel uncomfortable when the girl treats me as a friend when I'm actually her leader now. So that's a problem.

The quote indicated her struggle of communicating and performing appropriately when interacting with her boss as the subordinate and with her team member as the leader. Some participants also reported concerns communicating between their leaders and subordinates. They described themselves as "the squeeze" or "sandwich," which reflected the tension of serving as middle management, and further, such tension revealed the lack of relational competencies in the role transition.

Therefore, the lack of communication competencies, more specifically, both task and relational competencies, signaled the identity tension experienced by participants in the role transition. They became more associated and identified with leader roles while adapting, which was also a process of dissociating from employee roles. Leader role identity came out in those challenges and drove participants to adapt further. In addition, the Chinese headhunter's struggle of dealing with subordinates as friends was not unique, which alluded to another type of role switch between one's professional relationship and workplace friendship. Participants from both countries identified the difficulties of dealing with co-workers who were also their friends, as discussed in the next type of identity tension.

Friend-professional Role Switch

Managing the friend and professional role switch appeared to challenge participants' daily workplace lives. Their commitment to the work and workplace seemed to clash with workplace friendships in various settings, especially between the leader and co-worker roles versus a friend role.

As seen in the member-leader role transition, participants needed to manage being a leader and a peer frequently due to ambiguous role boundaries. A representative comment from a Chinese leader of a headhunter team explained:

> I sometimes was not happy with the way a member talks to me. He is, you know, too careless, maybe because we work together all the time. He sometimes would argue with me in front of other members, but I also know he is that type of friend. It would be great if he can be aware of that, and I also need to avoid being too friendly with him.

This comment reflected the leader's struggle with performing two roles, simultaneously, with a member. However, the decisions in terms of which role to play, as well as when, how, and with whom to play a specific role required strategic management. Separation of roles became more challenging in a collectivistic culture like China because participants considered "facework" and "workplace relationships" important. They "didn't want that person to lose face" or to "lose the friend."

Struggles of playing appropriate roles in the work settings were also apparent in the management of workplace friendships across teams. Some participants reported cross-department arguments due to their co-workers' role ambiguity. An American program coordinator commented, "It's hard to deal with some friends in another department. They seemed not to separate work and life much in the company and tried to ask for favors as friends, which gave me a hard time." Other reported cases also revealed similar themes. One Chinese public relation associate added, "A girl in my team asked me not to go to another team's activities because she hated one person there. I had to make a decision although department cooperation was important to my job." Therefore, participants recognized role ambiguity in their interactions with co-workers. They had to deal with the associated relational struggles or conflicts while juggling, separating, or balancing two role identities.

Another type of cross-department case was somewhat passive, in which the role ambiguity was clarified by an external force, such as a third party. A Chinese overseas marketing director shared:

> I have a good friend at QC department. She told me her Japanese boss questioned why we were so close, like we did some shady deal. So we had to pretend that we are not friends in the company. It's not a big concern, but annoying.

In this case, the leader became a third party who asked for role clarity in participants' workplace relationships. To this end, the role transition between friendship and professional roles posed identity tensions to participants, as seen in the member-leader and co-worker interactions. Role ambiguities emerged when interactants did not set up clear role boundaries, or encountered role ambiguities due to other interactants. Such ambiguities can easily trigger identity tensions, in which participants had to manage their choices between friendships and professional roles.

Other: Culture/Religion-work Challenge

While friendship was frequently involved in workplace interactions in various forms, other informal identities, such as cultural and religious identities, also can trigger identity tensions in participants' work lives. For most American participants, they either personally experienced or frequently observed others dealing with identity tensions that emerged from their religious and occupational identities. Chinese participants, however, encountered identity struggles due to cultural misunderstandings with their international supervisors.

American employees' awareness of religious differences was noticeable in the interviews. Participants identified either strong or obvious religious preferences and differences in interactions with clients and co-workers, which triggered identity tensions when other identities were also salient. The discussion of RQ1 reported how an audit associate, also a Catholic, decided to walk away from a client because of her pro-life beliefs. She continued to comment, "My job requires me to serve people in need, which I highly respect and try my best everyday. This case is just beyond my acceptability because of my strong belief. I had to walk away." Other similar cases were reported with a milder reaction. A public relations specialist commented:

> In the interactions with clients and co-workers, because of the diversity here, people have their own religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds. So when the conversations brought up a clear difference between our personal beliefs, I would be very cautious. We still need to do the business, but it requires a mutual understanding, right? It would be hard to work with someone who is an extremist or what.

Other participants also confirmed this specialist' point that religious differences can be obvious and require strategic management, such as the interactions with "Jewish," "some Germans," or "some Russians." These descriptions indicated participants' relatively firm positions regarding their religious identities in workplace interactions, ranging from protecting them to respecting it. However, their attachment to a religious identity, despite variations, can conflict with the occupational identity. Workplace diversity increased the religious variety. Participants had to deal with religious differences frequently, while aiming to achieve personal or collective business goals.

Similarly, workplace diversity also brought in cultural differences. A few American participants mentioned their experience in working with minority clients, which was an important portion in their business. “I felt that I couldn’t gain as much trust as my Latino co-worker because the moment he opened mouth speaking Spanish, our clients turned attention to my co-worker, not me,” one American consultant explained with a sigh. Not speaking the same language or being an outsider to minority community brought the cultural differences to the surface. Such experiences gave participants “a sense of out of control” and “an awareness of the cultural differences.” Further, similar reflections were more obvious among Chinese participants. As discussed in the previous sections, Chinese employees recognized the cultural and language barriers in their conflicts with their international supervisors. “The sense of out of control” and experiences of “lack of trust” also occurred among Chinese employees. Their international supervisors and clients frequently could not fully understand the cultural factors behind relevant government policies, implications embedded in project proposals, or culturally-based arguments. A representative comment was from a Chinese media and public relation associate:

> …When having arguments, I have to think about my position because both my boss and I want to do a good job, but it’s hard to get him to see the logic because of cultural barriers. So, I frequently struggle to communicate with him because

> we don't have conflicts over a shared goal. We are a team and both want to do good things, right?

"Different ways of doing" was the actual conflict point. Other Chinese employees also experienced similar issues. "*We* think this is a cultural issue," a marketing associate laughed. "We talk to each other frequently about this issue. It always requires some efforts to get across the messages to the foreign employees." Thus, the struggle between defending their cultural understanding and compromising to achieve their team goal was evident in these comments. Workplace conflicts brought the identity tension between cultural and professional role identities to the front stage, and involved participants' collective sensemaking. It was through the collective meaning-making of stories, gossips, and casual discussions that Chinese participants attributed the arguments and conflicts with international supervisors to cultural differences.

Another identity tension, although not salient, existed between a few American participants' pride for their occupations and the occasionally associated social bias. In the discussion of RQ1, a few American participants expressed discomfort about some general biases toward sales and accountants. They defended the social impacts created through their work, such as "I'm not an unethical cold-heart accountant" or "changing the bad, dirty sales into a skillful communicator." Participants' defense of their occupations exposed the identity threat, the social bias toward their occupations, in their work lives. Other participants with different professions did not share these cases.

In the preceding discussion, four major types of identity tensions were presented: work-life challenges, member-leader transitions, friendship-professional role switches, and culture/religion-workplace challenges. Each type of identity tensions encompassed struggles that emerged from either role identity transitions or membership boundaries. For instance, work-life challenges, member-leader transitions, and friendship-professional role switches all involved participants' efforts of playing two or more roles while each role entails a specific set of goals perceptions and communicative behaviors. Similarly, culture/religion–-professional challenges occurred in the establishment of membership boundaries that reflected group members' taken for-granted values and beliefs. Identity tensions then were the struggles, difficulties, and stress that occurred in participants' management of multiple sets of identity goals, values, and behaviors.

Further, the four types of identity tensions existed mainly at the individual and group levels while the interconnection was obvious in communicative practices. Work-life challenges, member-leader transitions, friendship-professional role switches, and religion-work challenges seemed more like individual struggles; for example, during member-leader transitions, participants experienced deidentification with the general employee, and reidentification with the management group. Essentially, role transition involved a process of recategorizing oneself and socializing into a new social group. The culture-work challenge was deemed as an intergroup conflict in participants' discussions. They seemed to construct the meaning of cultural barriers while communication with others who had the similar experiences. Such identity tension originated from individual practices, and was interpreted in the collective sensemaking as a group-level conflict. To manage identity tensions, participants then engaged in various identity work strategies, as discussed below.

RQ5: Communicating Identity Tensions: Identity Work Strategies

Passive Observational Learning

Identity management was an important topic to participants because they frequently reflected on workplace experiences to deal with identity tensions and struggles. In this process, some supervisors, mentors, and company leaders became “role models” who served as “the perfect one” and from whom participants “would like to learn;” however, they also observed some “bad examples” that demonstrated ineffective identity management. The observation process served as a passive learning experience for participants.

Role models provided “valuable guidance by words and deeds” in managing multiple workplace identities. Participants’ observations of these role models expanded their strategy repertoire. Role models displayed a set of qualities: well-defined identity goals and sophisticated identity knowledge that involved strategic communication. First, participants’ role models seemed good at defining their daily roles and memberships. In the interviews, they were described as “knowing exactly what they should do when playing a role” or “having a clear understanding about their position.” A Chinese headhunter praised her supervisor who took multiple roles:

> She is my boss’s wife, has two kids, and also a Master student now. I know her mother-in-law lives with her family. She’s like a superwoman now at her age [40s]. She gives me a sense that “everything is under control while each role is not easy.” I think she has a clear sense about her role responsibilities every time without mixing things together at one time. But it’s hard for me [laugh].

This supervisor seemed to display high role clarity, along with role responsibilities, which can also be found in other participants' stories. For instance, an American engineer praised his director, "He always has specific tasks set up, instead of juggling multiple tasks in a row. If it's 5:00pm, he leaves for the family time. Two years, rarely changed. He' s very organized." Therefore, the role models seemed to have a relatively clear understanding about when and what to do when performing a certain role, in other words, a clear identity goal in a given situation.

Along this line, acquiring strong identity knowledge also built into participants' recognition of these role models. The interviews brought up a type of knowledge or skills that were essentially communicative: how the role models communicated and positioned themselves to meet role expectations, depending on interactants and situations, or in other words, identity knowledge. Identity knowledge included the ability of conducting "appropriate," "effective," and "organized communication" with different people, especially during "challenging situations." One representative example was from an American sales manager's director:

> …He is very collected and a good communicator. When he is the leader, he is always straight to the point, clear messages, but very considerate and detailed. He can also be an excellent communicator with the person he reports to, like being very organized and responsive. He seems good at switching among different relationships and knows how to communicate to serve his position.

Both leader and subordinate role were apparent in this comment about his role model who gained strong communication skills to perform multiple roles. Similar descriptions also included "say the right words to the right people," and "good at positioning herself when talking to different people." Further, "challenging situations" further highlighted the importance of acquiring strong identity knowledge. A Chinese accounting associate observed how her team leader resolved the conflict between the department leader and a member in her team:

> She was like the sandwich, you know. But she was very calm and responsive. Clearly, we wanted to protect the team member being fired. She first comforted the member and quickly analyzed the situation. Then she talked to our boss in a very strategic way to let him understand that the situation was manageable and was not an individual mistake.

This team leader was perceived as having strong skills of aligning with her different professional roles in workplace conflicts, which involved communicating appropriately and a sharp awareness of role positioning. Therefore, identity knowledge seemed to be important for role models to take appropriate actions and maintain good relationships with different interactants in given situations.

Meanwhile, participants also observed "negative examples" that involved some supervisors and employees in their companies, as well as their own family members. They usually involved "lack of organization," or were a "workaholic," and "not good at dealing with relationships." Lack of organization, first, indicated a work style of jugging multiple things at once, reported by an American engineer about his team leader:

> That guy was a little bit less of a communicator. He is not exactly sure what he should be or where he should be doing at that given moment, like giving orders in the meeting, or reporting to someone. He just tries to get a massive amount of

> work done and no orderly fashion, specific fashion. Compared with other supervisors, he seemed to have more troubles organizing his life.

This leader lacked the ability to communicate and organize multiple roles in a structured way, which was then categorized into "negative examples." Another type of lack of organization manifested in "working overtime." An American accountant named a supervisor of her friend, "that person just has trouble getting to the point. It would be a 20-minute call and it would take her 25-minute to even bringing up the point of the call. She always works overtime. That way she even doesn't have time for her family." Therefore, lack of organization signaled the lack of effective communication skills required by certain roles. Relatedly, the lack of communication skills also involved individuals who were not good at role positioning in relational maintenance. More specially, they were perceived as not being able to perform the appropriate role in communicating with different interactants. For instance, a Chinese participants' supervisor appeared "weak even when interacting with the junior employees." A staff member in logistic department commented, "She is a nice person, but she can't position herself appropriately as a leader and always seems too weak. People do not seem to care about her in the company." This supervisor failed to perform the leader role and lost credibility in the role positioning.

The last theme was particular to Chinese participants. "Workaholic" summarized another type of "negative examples." A Chinese designer introduced her father's friend, "my dad has a workaholic friend. She is a senior management in a Fortune 500. Her phone is 24 hours available. I don't like her living style." Workaholic appeared common among participants' family friends or members, such as "father," or "husband," reflecting the imbalance between professional roles and personal live roles.

Although the comparison between role models and negative examples mainly came from participants' observations, it highlighted the necessity of defining clear identity goals and acquiring sufficient identity knowledge. Such knowledge seemed to enable role models to achieve their identity goals effectively because they could be highly responsive to role switching in ongoing social interactions. Notably, participants perceived that role models' strategies were somewhat "ideal" or "required long time practices." Identified role models were usually ranked higher and supervised participants, serving more or less a mentor role. While characteristics discussed were observed and retained in participants' repertoire, they explored some other either similar or distinctive tactics in their daily practices.

Specific Identity Work Tactics

The two identity structure models proposed in the previous section indicated participants' different subjective identity salience and evaluation, which simultaneously impacted how they managed identity tensions. Compartmentalization, avoidance, and reframed integration seemed more cognitive driven, and were achieved through daily communicative activities. Participants in these categories preferred accuracy in the self-defining process and a cognitive coherence in organizing multiple identities into patterns. Compartmentalization spoke to the role models "who were organized in separating work-life." Avoidance, comparatively, seemingly more passive, tended to withdraw from the tension sources. Reframed integration, however, was more strategic in that participants chose to change the nature and meaning of an identity tension.

Participants also employed rhetorical strategies, including making disclaimers, defense, venting, making clarifications, and self-deprecation jokes. Sensegiving and discourse strategies highlighted the participants' ongoing meaning-making process in developing, maintaining, and revising identity.

Compartmentalization. Compartmentalization referred to individuals who activated identities based on situational or contextual considerations. Compartmentalization was common among participants who strived to deal with role-referencing in work-life challenges, and maintain a separation between friendship and professional roles. For instance, in the preceding discussion, a Chinese headhunter encountered identity tensions in which both her friend and leader role identities activated during interactions with her former peer. This participant went on to explain her tactic, "After several times we argued in public, I finally decided to talk to her. I expect her to be less casual in the team but we are still good friends outside the company. I think she got it." Her tactic highlighted the contextual considerations that separated professional and casual settings, which spoke to compartmentalization. Similarly, when it came to work-life balance, participants who preferred compartmentalization endeavored to prioritize work duties based on the level of importance and complete them in the work settings, as seen in an example from an American program coordinator:

> I try not to jam myself into the multiple tasks that I can't complete in the work time. Be very clear about what I can do within a day, then set the order and the reasonable time limit, and complete them within the time frame. I know I can finish the list today, and I do it. My job is done during the work time.

In participants' descriptions of role models, observations like "leaving at 5:00 pm," "turning off the work phone at home," or "fully devoted to be a husband or other personal roles" can also be perceived as compartmentalization. In the workplace, they strived to focus on professional identities and then dissociate from them after work. Situational switch signaled participants' efforts of separating work and personal life.

Balance. Balance turned out to be another important approach to dealing with work-life challenges. Balance was theorized in dialectical studies as a tactic to fulfill each opposition in part with compromise (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996); it was also perceived by Burke (2003) as reframing the meaning of identities to achieve consistency. Balance in participants' interpretations was more dialectical-centered in that they strived to allocate time for both work and life, in part. Different from situational-based compartmentalization, participants' management of identity balance lay in the time control. Both Chinese and American participants identified the moments when they had to work from home or work overtime in the companies. In these cases, "make-up time" became an effective solution. As a Chinese engineer explained:

> We have lots of situations when I need to work overtime and can't spend enough time with my family. I choose to make it up for them, like taking them to vacations or leaving for work late in the morning. These are feasible solutions when I'm not that busy.

This engineer compromised time for either work or life temporarily, and then offered more of the other as remediation later. "Make-up solution" manifested in multiple ways, involving "taking kids to the company," "working from home," and "adjusting work shifts." Such a balance can be either equilibratory or not, as seen in some "failure cases." A few participants struggled with work-life balance despite their efforts. A Chinese operation manager complained, "Although I've tried to balance my work and wanted to spend more time with my kid, it's just hard. We basically work overtime all year round. My son calls me a workaholic." This fellow's intention to balance work and life was apparent, although it was not successful. The balance tactic did not completely remove the identity tensions; instead, it eased participants' struggles at a time with compromise required. The make-up solutions lost its effectiveness when it came to "the parents' meeting" or "the spouse's birthday" because these moments could not be made up or were hard to make at a different time.

Avoidance. Avoidance was another major tactic for managing workplace identity conflicts that was evident in the interviews. Participants who adopted avoidance tactics tended to avoid situations that caused identity conflicts (Burke, 2003). Such a tactic was employed when participants encountered conflicts between their professional and cultural-based identities. In cultural conflicts between Chinese participants and their international supervisors, most Chinese participants chose to avoid such cases temporarily, by proposing ideas in more indirect ways. A sales manager commented:

> He is the leader, so arguing might not change anything. After talking to my colleagues, I found that it's better to propose my argument based on customer analysis, not culture, although the proposal is basically the same.

In this comment, the sales manager reframed her original cultural-based arguments in the project proposal; instead, she highlighted the statistics that presented customers' characteristics. Essentially, she avoided continuously arguing with the leader about their cultural understanding. Chinese participants labeled such an option as "strategic avoidance" because choosing an alternative way of presenting arguments enabled them to avoid being limited between cultural and professional identities, which potentially triggered identity tensions.

The avoidance found in the interviews with American participants was also obvious, and might not involve compromise. An example frequently mentioned in this project was the American public sector accountant's identity tension between religious beliefs and her occupational identity. She refused to serve a client whose experience was against her pro-life values. "I just wanted to protect my beliefs, although I know it's a simple work. I don't want to take the pressure," she explained. In other milder situations in which American participants were highly sensitive to religious differences, avoidance as reflected in actions such as "digress from the sensitive topics," or "let partners who are familiar with the clients do the talking." Such tactics allowed participants to stay away from potential identity tensions and emotional burdens. Religious conflicts and those milder cases also revealed that avoidance might appear slightly different among participants, depending on the type and level of tensions, as well as participants' subjective identity salience.

Reframed integration. The third major tactic participants used to manage identity conflicts was reframed integration, frequently seen in Chinese participants' experience. Reframing, employed by dialectical theories (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Burke & Greenglass, 1993; Ford & Backoff, 1988), involves individuals redefining tensions in order to minimize contradictions. Integration then explained how the tensions can be resolved in a satisfactory manner. It also referred to how minorities accepted and incorporated both minority and dominant cultural identities to a large extent (Berry, 1997). Reframed integration carried the essence of these two tactics in that participants not only integrated two identities that caused tensions, but they also reframed such integration with new meanings. A representative case was a Chinese office administrator who integrated occupational and family role strategically:

> My company cooperated with some universities by offering some professional workshops. I took them to build my career, but these workshops also take away my time from the family. So, I decided to take the classes together with my wife, although her job is not like highly relevant. She also learned great stuff, so it's very meaningful because we developed more common topics, spent more time together. More important, we teach each other based on the classes how to do better and excel in our own workplace.

His tactic spoke to the essence of reframed integration because he redefined the behaviors and situations associated with an integrated plan by assigning new implications, such as "nurturing the relationship" and "developing mutual mentorship." Interestingly, many Chinese participants took relevant professional trainings outside the workplace with their close friends or romantic partners. Reframed integration seemed effective in allowing participants to achieve two or multiple identity goals; further, a new set of interpretations and meanings came out in the process to turn work-life tensions in "a collective learning progress."

Disclaimers. Stating a disclaimer, as a rhetorical tactic, also appeared effective for participants to deal with the identity tensions in both cultural and relational conflicts. Disclaiming from the conflicts allowed them to think free from struggling situations, and to be released from taking responsibilities. Some Chinese participants attributed the cultural conflicts to “simply the cultural differences.” In the meantime, international employees were perceived to take the primary responsibilities of raising the conflicts. When being asked about the tactics used in conflicts, an office staff gave a representative explanation, in addition to “avoidance,” mentioned previously:

> …My peers and I both agree that they don’t really understand how to work with Chinese. I have tried the best to communicate with them, like direct or indirect. So, I’ve done all that I can do. Now I just go with whatever my supervisor decides to do. I think the company should, you know, give them some training, or just replace them with a Chinese.

In this explanation, the responsibility for the conflicts was shifted to the interviewee’s international supervisor, as he stated the disclaimer in the complaints. Such complaints were not unusual among Chinese participants. While avoidance was also signaled in the case, the rhetorical tactic indicated a more passive attitude and a milder sense of resistance to such cross-cultural interactions. Participants who performed disclaimers frequently emphasized their “efforts of trying” and ended with “a sense of powerlessness” because international employees were not responsive.

Notably, in the management of professional and friend roles, many participants provided their reasoning with a similar logic. When it came to emotional moments, caused by the unclear friend-work boundaries, they highlighted their responsible actions, such as “focusing on the facts,” or “being understanding and considerate.” When their friends had trouble reacting to their compartmentalization tactic, participants concluded by stating disclaimers. “It’s their responsibilities now to deal with their emotion. I tried. There was nothing I can do besides completing my job,” an American engineer commented. "Not my responsibility" communicated participants' release of burden, the tension raised by the role transition between professional and friendship role identities. Therefore, performing disclaimers seemed to act with other identified tactics, such as avoidance and compartmentalization, to assist participants' management of identity struggles.

Defense. In addition to stating disclaimers, defense worked as another major rhetorical tactic for Chinese participants to protect their cultural identities, and for some American participants to protect their occupational identities. In the discussion of cultural barriers with international clients and peers, some Chinese participants activated the defense mechanism in conversations about sensitive topics, such as "abortion," "media control," or "one country, two system policies." They endeavored to "correct" international partners' opinions and concluded that the latter lacked in cultural understanding. A Chinese program coordinator argued:

> I can't help telling them that their understanding was not correct, at least not accurate enough. Something in our culture is just unique and foreigners can't understand it if they don't live here for a long time. Relations, face, hierarchy all that. They frequently assumed something with biased info online, or applied the western philosophy in China.

This fellow, clearly, was not satisfied with international participants' opinions in their conversations. He acted to defend the "uniqueness of Chinese culture" and drew the conclusion that "they don't understand."

Similarly, defense also appeared in a few American participants' narratives about their occupational identities. Participants strived to defend their occupational identities by proposing positive social meanings. In their defense, occupations such as sales and accountants displayed positive images based on the social impacts they created. As seen in RQ1, arguments such as "I'm not an unethical cold-heart accountant," and "sales people are skillful communicators" communicated their positions and protection of a congruent self-concept.

Other rhetorical tactics. Other tactics that displayed participants' language uses in coping with identity tensions were venting, making clarifications and self-deprecating jokes. These three tactics were not widely common across the interviews, but demonstrated alternative approaches to participants' identity work strategies. Venting described some participants' complaints to their personal friends or family members about workplace struggles. For instance, some Chinese participants released pressure with their friends. "I complain a lot about my Japanese supervisor when hanging out with friends [laugh]. I said bad things about him occasionally. They sometimes support me and sometimes don't, but that's ok." Venting did not remove the identity tensions for participants, but released their emotional burdens. Parents and spouses were other common recipients of venting. Clarification was employed by a few Chinese and American participants who struggled the professional-friend role switch, particularly when their friends caused this tension. These employees strived to state their positions while not disappointing the friends. Typically, they tended to "focus on the issue itself" and "clarified the reasons," as seen in a product manager's episode, "I explained to her about why I can't do her a favor, X, Y, Z, specifically about the facts. I said, 'It's not because of you, it's this particular thing that I can't help with.'" Clarification enabled participants to separate facts and relationships in communicating the reasoning, and then minimize the tension caused by role switches, despite different cases.

Another rhetorical tactic was self-deprecating jokes. While participants employed other approaches noted above, some of them also made jokes to position themselves and release tension in challenging situations. Self-deprecating jokes frequently appeared among American participants who encountered language barriers with their international clients, as discussed in RQ1. They turned out to serve as "assistants" to their co-workers who spoke the same language as the clients did. "I looked like a monster to some people [laugh]. They felt more comfortable speaking with my peer, that's for sure. I just needed to be a smiling idiot there [laugh]," joked an American program coordinator. Self-deprecating jokes assisted this fellow in buffering the helpless feeling and reducing tensions that challenged his professional role identities.

Sensemaking and sensegiving. Identity tensions were social and ongoing, especially in the role transitions. Participants made sense of their new roles and the role expectations in social interactions with others, as described in role identity theory. In the leader-friend role transitions, participants experienced disruptions of meaning-making ("What's going on here?"). They engaged in organizing ambivalent role understanding into coherent and relatively stable identity interpretations through sensemaking. "Be a good leader means you can't be a close friend with the team members like before," explained by an American marketing director. The leadership role came out to guide his course of actions: "I became workplace friends with other management staff later." He also observed failures of role transition among some former co-workers: "Those who failed moving up, I think, was because they couldn't make the switch to fit the new expectations." "Getting what the new role means and looks like" served as the reasoning behind these participants' role transitions.

Role models, in the meantime, guided their understanding about "what a leader looks like" in work routines. More specially, comments such as "say the right words to the right people," and "good at positioning herself when talking to different people" provided informative mentoring to participants' senseamking of the adaption process. In addition, some participants also engaged in sensegiving in the training of younger leaders later. As reviewed, sensegiving occurs when individuals shape their own or others' interpretations by attempting to influence how the self and others interpret the meaning of actions (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). A Chinese product manager recalled, "I kept telling my people that this is a necessary transitioning process, and they just need to learn how to lead by developing new skill set." These participants constructed a way of interpreting the role transition difficulties in the persuasion through sensegiving, which then shaped their own sensemaking or understanding of the identity tension.

Discourse. Different from previously identified tactics, organizational discourse was influential in this study at the macro level, providing a communicative context for participants to deal with work-life identity challenges. Two sets of relatively stable discourse "balanced" between "flexibility" and "competitive individualization" in many Chinese multinational companies.

According to participants' descriptions, multinational companies seemed supportive of maintaining employees' work-life balance in various company efforts. The management developed a set of ideologies in company policies and activities, which conveyed supportive messages and constituted “a way of understanding.” As a senior banker working in a private multinational bank explained:

> My company, especially our team, is really supportive. We are not required to sit there eight hours like the domestic companies as long as you complete your work. Sometimes I’m allowed to work from home. The management also frequently emphasizes a “flexibility” philosophy in the team building activities. So, I got the sense that we are supported on working with self-discipline.

The discourse of flexibility indicated that the management encouraged participants to gain work-life balance in their own ways with the premise of not compromising work performance. Such messages were also enforced in company activities such as team building events or the annual meetings. A public relation specialist offered some examples: “The top management seems to highly value the self-disciplined working mode. Each work group gets to develop their own policies that fit their own ways, such as turn-around policies that gives some space for personal preference.” The discourse of flexibility manifested in the way of working and management style that provided space for employees to manage identities in their personal lives.

However, additional discourse that seemed somewhat conflicted with the discourse of flexibility also existed. “Competitive individualization” referred to a process of preserving individuals’ unique characteristics, locating their “fits,” and promoting contribution. Such discourse was apparent in the daily communicative messages drawn by participants, which triggered a sense of anxiety and burden. A more specific explanation can be seen from a marketing associate: “‘Find your position’ is what I remember most clear from my supervisor,” he recalled. “He encourages me to find my value to the organization and to become irreplaceable." Another representative example came from a headhunter, "I keep hearing similar sayings in the meetings and annual parties. One catchy phrase is 'your contribution is valued'." Clearly, participants retained the core spirit from these messages that a good employee should be irreplaceable at their positions. They were expected to make individualized contributions, instead of becoming a "nobody." Associated with these communicative messages, a sense of anxiety and stress came out and enhanced participants' identity tensions in work-life challenges, as seen in a marketing director's complaint:

> I sometimes had to work 24 hours sometimes due to the time differences. When I take a break, I become worried about being behind my work or messing something up. Many people turned over because of the work pace and stress. I chose my job, not so much the relaxing life because I don't have so much family burden at this point.

This comment revealed that meaning-making was disrupted as participants tried to manage work-life balance. Discursive messages drawn by the participants' and the management's communication co-constructed norms or cultures and called them into being via communication. The discourse of flexibility and discourse of competitive individualization somewhat contradicted each other. However, they were situated in the companies simultaneously and adopted by Chinese participants. The two types of discourse then motivated them to manage by "utilizing company support" or/and "excelling in the workplace." Such communicative context enabled participants' sensemaking by providing discursive resources embedded in social interactions.

Participants engaged in communication with others and reflected on their own choices of "becoming a competitive employee" in a "self-disciplined workplace."

Table 4: Identity Work Tactics

Identity Work Tactics	Definition	Exemplar Quotations
Passive observational learning	Observing role models and negative examples	• "He seems good at switching among different relationships and knows how to communicate to serve his position." • "That guy was a little bit less of a communicator. He is not exactly sure what he should be or where he should be doing at that given moment…"
Compartmentalization	Considering situational separation	• "I expect her to be less casual in the team but we are still good friends outside the company. I think she got it."
Balance	Finding "the middle ground"	• "I choose to make it up for them, like taking them to vacations, or leaving for work late in the morning."
Avoidance	Avoiding the problematic situations	• "He is the leader, so arguing might not change anything…." • "I just wanted to protect my beliefs, although I know it's a simple work. I'd rather walk away from that situation."
Reframed integration	Assigning new interpretations to a satisfactory solution	• "It's very meaningful because we developed more common topics, spent more time together. More important, we teach each other based on the classes how to do better and excel in our own workplace."
Disclaimers	Claiming to release from being responsible for the problematic situations	• "So, I've done all that I can do. Now I just go with whatever my supervisor decides to do."
Defense	Defending to protect	• "I can't help telling them that their understanding was not correct, at least not accurate enough."
Vent, clarification, and self-deprecating jokes	• Releasing emotions • Clarifying the facts • Releasing tensions	• "I complain a lot about my Japanese supervisor when hanging out with friends [laugh]." • "It's not because of you, it's this particular thing that I can't help with." • "I just needed to be a smiling idiot there [laugh]."
Sensegiving	Meaning-shaking	• "I kept telling my people that this is a necessary transitioning process, and they just need to learn how to lead by developing new skill set."
Discourse	A macro-level discursive context that guides perceptions and actions	• "My company, especially our team is really supportive. We are not required to sit there eight hours like the domestic companies as long as you complete your work." • "I don't really have the flexibly there and sometimes when I take a break, I become worried about being behind my work or messing something up."

Summary

In this section, four major types of identity tensions were first identified. Participants experienced identity tensions as they were performing multiple roles or encountering membership boundaries. In essence, identity tensions occurred in the struggles, anxiety, and stress of achieving two or more identity goals, along with the emphasis on two or more sets of beliefs and values. Identity tensions also occurred when identity ambiguity existed between two or more identifications. Role models were important mentors to the participants. It was through various communicative activities that participants identified and retained the knowledge learned from role models, as well as the observations from “negative examples.” In managing multiple identities, participants further developed various specific identity work strategies depending on the level of identity tensions and varied subjective identity salience.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion

This dissertation aimed to reveal how multinational company employees manage their multiple identities in both the U.S. and China. More specially, this project identified role and social identities salient to participants, analyzed how they structured various identifications, recognized identity tensions, as well as managed those tensions. Following a modified grounded theory approach, 18 Chinese and 13 U.S. volunteer participants were invited to join this project and provid retrospective experience on identity development and management. The investigator conducted semi-structured individual interviews with Chinese participants in Mandarin, and with U.S. participants in English. In the following, a summary of the major findings will be presented based on an integrated model of identity work, followed by a discussion of theoretical implications.

An Integrated Model of Identity Work

An integrated model of identity work was proposed to synthesize the findings. This model describes how participants develop and manage various identities. In other words, the model portrays the process of how they defined, formed, maintained, revised, and strengthened their various identities based on the various roles and memberships they performed in multinational companies (e.g., Alvesson &Willmott, 2002; Pratt et al., 2006; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). As the model indicates, both American and Chinese employees engage in identity-encouraging and identity-challenging contexts that either enabled or questioned their choices and actions in identity formation and development. Four types of salient identities first emerged: individual, collective, positional, and relational role identities. Each type encompassed a range of identities similar in natures. The four types of identities presented either mutually enhancing or conflicting identity goals, values, knowledge, and behaviors. In the co-presence of these identities, synergistic effects, identity incompatibility, and ambiguity were communicated into existence as participants engaged in sensemaking. Since participants sought a congruent self-understanding in sensemaking, they appeared to organize various identities in different ways, represented by either a holistic or a kaleidoscope identity structure. However, ambiguous, incompatible, or conflicting identifications frequently drove them to different struggles, termed work-life challenges, member-leader transitions, professional-friend role switches, and culture/religion-work challenges. To respond to such identity tensions, participants actively made sense of their observational learning, and adopted a set of identity work strategies to sustain, adapt, modify, or revise their identifications (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). In the following, I will present the process described in the model will be presented with a detailed summary of the findings.

Participants activated desired identities in both internal and external practices, ranging from management's communication in response to an external political change, to individuals' daily interactions. As described in the model, revealed salient identities can be divided into four categories (See Block a.): Individual identities (cultural and religious identities), collective identities (occupational, organizational, and team identities), relational role identities (family roles, friend roles, and peer roles), and positional role identities (supervisor roles and community roles). Individual identities described participants' long-term personal beliefs, rooted in their enculturation

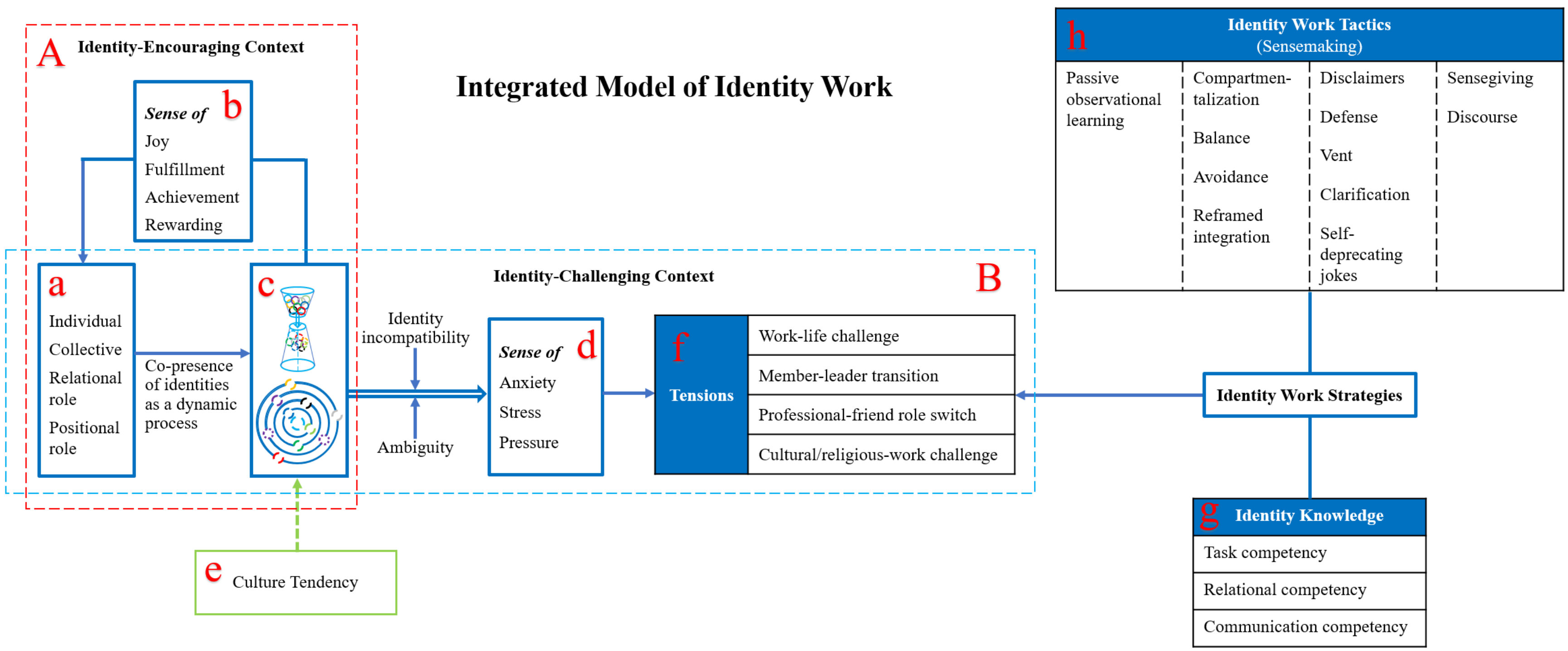

Figure 5: An integrated model of identity work.

experiences. Identification with the cultural ordering at the societal level and personal religious beliefs appeared to influence participants' work lives. Collective identities then recognized their workplace memberships with various targets.Relational and positional role identities indicated participants' engagement in various interpersonal relationships: roles associated with designated or formal positions, and roles acquired in the naturally prescribed and developed social relationships.

Participants' salient identities co-presented as mutually enhancing or incompatible, or ambiguous, reflected in identity encouraging and identity challenging contexts (See the two dashed boxes A and B). Identity compatibility was communicated into existence. In identity-encouraging situations (See Box A), participants recognized the synergistic relationships among collective identities as they made sense of various discursive contexts. They frequently acquired positive feelings and emotions in identity-encouraging contexts (See Block b). Participants' stories and descriptions revealed contexts and contents that involved aligned values, goals, knowledge, and identity behaviors in both constant (e.g., company's charitable mission of giving back to the community) and temporarily created (e.g., the management's communication in the national political change) messages. For instance, honing specialties in international project cooperation enhanced participants' commitment to career goals and generated a sense of fulfillment. In the meantime, they also gained social support, emotional connections, and valuable mentorship in the team-based project coordination, which was built into the development of team identity. During this process, becoming an experienced and recognized employee, team member, and further a leader corresponded to company cultures and missions. Therefore, occupational, organizational, team identities, and potentially leader role identities were deemed synergistic. Collective identities were generally compatible. Interestingly, American participants' roles in community service were mainly realized through their occupations, closely connected to their company, and embedded in various small groups. Along this line, positional role identities, such as the supervisory identity, and particularly American participants' community role identities, appeared compatible with their collective identities.

Further, positional role and relational role identities acquired stronger perceived importance than the collective identities. Role identities emerged from participants' social relationships and were personalized in interpersonal communication (i.e., personalization). However, collective identification, as reviewed, depersonalized individuals' interactions and drove them to communicate according to the prototypical characteristics of the most salient grouping (e.g., Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Therefore, personalization strengthened participants' positional role identities in the company and in related community service, as they acquired more interpersonal knowledge, emotional connections, and social support from daily communication (e.g., observed personalities, work performance, mentorship, and partnership). This finding was similar to Miller's (2002) review that personalization brought positive effects such as perceived similarity and interpersonal attraction. In addition, role identities involved participants' socially constructed self-understanding from performing roles and identifying others' expectations for their role performance. That is to say, role identities were built and internalized into participants' self-meaning as relatively stable explanations, as reviewed in the literature (e.g., Hogg et al., 2011; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Some role identities, such as family roles and friend roles, appeared to be stable and warrant continuance regardless of where participants would work (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Therefore, positional and relational role identities were deemed to gain greater subjective importance.

Communication also signaled the existence and the state of identity incompatibility and identity ambiguity in challenging contexts (See Box B), as described in the integrated model. Incompatible identities triggered struggles, stress, or anxiety (See Block d) in managing conflicting identity goals, values, and behaviors. Participants' narratives or complaints about workplace friendships, arguments over work-life management, or gossip about "negative examples" with others exposed identity struggles. In addition, participants' sensemaking of identity-challenging contexts also exposed identity ambiguity. When participants encountered member-leader role switches, for instance, role identity ambiguity occurred because the identified social interactions (e.g., communicating with a former peer as the promoted leader) brought up unclear identity cues (Bodenhausen & Peery, 2009). They labeled and categorized such complicated experiences with particular terms, such as playing the "squeeze" between a senior leader and the former peer. The struggles drove participants to make sense of situations, starting from "What's going on?" comparing their preferences, and deciding on appropriate course of action. Such a process, in turn, uncovered participants' perceived importance of multiple identities, in other words, subjective identity salience, in the justification of their actions. Similarly, participants' sensemaking of work-life and cultural/religion-work challenges prioritized the family role identity and religious identity. Participants frequently engaged in activities that turned into conflicts or struggles about their authority, cultural understanding, family roles, and religious beliefs. The conflicting situations indicated that relational and individual identities can be ambivalent to positional and collective identities.

Constant sensemaking allowed participants to draw some conclusions: family roles were the most important; religious identity remained relatively stable and frequently took priority for American participants. Team identities appeared as the basis of participants' daily work practices in which leader roles stood out to those who took new positions, and workplace friendship emerged; American participants also extended to team cooperation in community service. Occupational identity, comparatively speaking, took more lead in participants' justifications of workplace preferences (e.g., what type of companies to work for; what programs to join; and what type of clients they would like to have) most of the time due to the constant emphasis on personal growth and career development. However, identity hierarchy, as argued in Chapter 1, appeared either not clearly ranked, or subject to individual and situational variations in this study.

To address this issue, two identity structures emerged in the co-presence of various identities: holistic and kaleidoscope identity structures (See Block c). While the holistic model emphasized integrated ways of thinking, the kaleidoscope model indicated a fluid perception, with a strong situational consideration. More specially, to most Chinese and a few American employees, multiple identities presented a holistic philosophy of fusion because each role or membership supplemented and enriched their lives. The kaleidoscope model, however, represented most American and a few Chinese employees' identity structure in this study because each identity could be matched and combined, depending on their similarities and connections in a given situation, which drove different matching patterns to emerge. Comparatively speaking, identities in the kaleidoscope model were perceived as more independent than in the holistic model.

Notably, this project did not aim to compare the U.S. and Chinese cultural influences on employees' identity management; however, the findings suggested participants in the two countries did display tendencies in their organization of identities, and tended to identify with an identity structure (Block e). Specifically, more Chinese participants aligned with the holistic identity structure whereas more American participants fit the kaleidoscope model. Such tendencies resonate with Nisbett et al.'s (2001) seminal arguments about the holistic perspective in East Asian cultures, and the analytic perspective in Western cultures. Along the line, Nisbett et al. (2001) then studied the basis for judgments of association and organization between Chinese and European Americans. They found that Chinese preferred to group elements based on relationships, the relational-contextual organization, whereas Americans preferred to group them based on categories or shared object features. These tendencies were reflected in the two identity models. The holistic perspective lies in the "whole-card" philosophy that describes, "parts exist only within wholes, to which they have inseparable relations" (Munro, 1985, p. 17). The holistic identity model reflected such a philosophy in participants' description of "each identity as a valuable piece to the jigsaw puzzle." An analytic perspective centers on a categorical and rule-driven system of thought, which the kaleidoscope model appeared to connect. Participants tended to follow the rule of priority and separation in structuring identities, seen in the phrases such as " trying to put each role into different boxes." The kaleidoscope model also exposed the categorical grouping revealed in situational patterns that emerged from given activities. Identities can be classified and matched based on their similar identity contents, values, and beliefs, activated in certain activities or desired by the participants (i.e., identity cues).

To this end, the notion of identity compatibility not only uncovered the complex identity structure of multinational company employees, but also the associated identity tensions. Both identity structures indicated the existence of identity integration while the holistic identity structure undoubtedly was highly integrated across time, whereas the kaleidoscope identity structure was more situationally integrated over time. Previous studies have found that identity transition can be less complicated in identity integration since it requires less cognitive and behavioral changes, as seen in participants' occupational, organizational, team, as well as community role identities. The desired identity goals, values, and schema did not vary much in various workplace practices. However, high identity integration can also trigger identity ambiguity because it becomes harder to create and maintain identity boundaries and separation (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2000; Fitzsimmons, 2013; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2005). In addition, individuals' experiences of self-defining frequently remain plausible because they are subject to shifting situations. The findings addressed these challenges by presenting four major types of identity tensions: work-life challenge, member-leader transition, professional-friend role switch, and cultural/religious-work challenge.

The four suggested identity tensions (See Block f), essentially, referred to the struggles, anxiety, or stress of managing ambiguous or incompatible identity contents in various discursive work or related practices, which involved identity goals ("I want"), identity values ("I care about"), identity schema ("I'm expected to do"), identity knowledge (“I can do and I’m good at doing”), and particularly, identity behaviors (“I do”). Communication served as the tangible expression of these problematic or ambivalent experiences, as seen in participants’ complaints about role-referencing in work-life management, their sensemaking in member-leader transitions, or the gossip and discussions about cultural conflicts with international employees. As they made sense of workplace interactions, participants engaged in identity work to address the identity tensions. They acquired identity knowledge (See Block g) from both observational learning and also the daily communicative interactions, such as labeling self or others, talking about stories, or joking and judging, as well as imitating others. Participants’ specific internal and external tactics were then identified (See Block h): functional approaches that involved compartmentalization, avoidance, reframed integration; rhetorical tactics that included making disclaimers, defending, venting, clarifying, and making self-deprecating jokes; and conducting sensegiving and discourse. Participants engaged in identity work to construct and co-construct the meaning of the identity tensions, and to sustain, modify, adapt, or revise their identity behaviors.

Participants’ identity work strategies were rooted in workplace communication and socialization. Observation of both role models and negative examples provided guiding messages in the mentorship, partnership, and passive learning, such as the attention to identity goals and identity knowledge, two notions that involved necessary communication competencies. The discussions of role transition difficulties and role models in RQ4 and RQ5 showed that a well-defined identity goal enabled participants to act effectively on role responsibilities, recognize expected collective norms and rules, and fulfill personal needs. Identity knowledge was perceived to embrace not only task and relational competencies (Barge & Hirokawa, 1989), but also the communication competencies. Task competencies included the ability to adapt from simple (e.g., being one part of the work flow) to complex tasks, for example, big-picture thinking, coordination (getting people to work together), and task decomposition (e.g., managing the work flow and breaking tasks to delegate to others). Relational competencies emphasized more on the ability to develop relationships through different interactions when performing given identities. Communication competencies, in participants' eyes, referred specially to the social skills and awareness, such as sensitivity and self-monitoring in role positioning. In other words, role models who "knew what they should do" were able to interpret and process contextual cues of others' expectations and situational norms effectively.

Combined with identity knowledge, participants also developed a set of tactics in sensemaking throughout the whole identity work process. Specific identity work tactics allowed them buffer, reduce, or remove identity tensions. The identified tactics addressed what participants do with and to others to manage identities, such as compartmentalization and sensegiving in professional- friend role switches. Some participants followed situational consideration to clarify work-friend relationships for former peers. Rhetorical tactics, such as defense, also involved external identity work since employees participated in conversational arguments with other interactants, so did in venting and making clarification. Moreover, some tactics also dealt with participants' internal inconsistency, as seen avoidance in culture/religion-work challenges, compartmentalization, balance, and reframed integration in work-life balance, and stating disclaimers in professional-friend role switches. These tactics mainly dealt with participant' internal tensions. Sensemaking, sensegiving and discourse enabled participants to engage in both internal and external identity work. For instance, participants clarified the role ambiguity in the member-leader role transitions for themselves and others; sensegiving, as discussed, cannot be separated from senseamking. Participants conducted sensegiving for young leaders, which constructed a set of interpretations that defined the role transition, maintained a congruent self, and adapted to the leader role. These identity work tactics were not "either/or," but "both/and." Employees may apply more than one tactic depending on the situation, such as clarification in sensegiving. Effective identity work then, allowed participants to sustain feelings of legitimacy and authenticity, construct an "appropriate" image, and meet expectations through a role or membership (e.g., Ibarra, 2003, Kunda, 1992; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Sutton, 1991; Van Maanen, 1998).

Theoretical Implications

This project advanced scholarly understanding and contributed to the identity literature, including SIT and identity theory, organizational identity and identification, and identity management, in multiple ways. First, the findings revealed a wider range of identities in multinational companies, and contributed to the theoretical integration of social identities and role identities literatures. The identification of four types of salient identities highlighted the associated identity characteristics. As reviewed, many scholars have not differentiated, or misused the definitions of role and social identities in their studies, despite that fact that these two concepts entail different theoretical implications. As Sluss and Ashforth (2007) pointed out, although SIT has been dominant in the organizational identity and identification studies, it emphasizes that individuals' relationships are depersonalized, and does not provide a mechanism for personalized interactions such as "friendships born of interpersonal attraction" (p. 26). Role-based identities, however, described participants' commitment to relational attachment and attraction through personalization. Therefore, the categorization proposed in this project (individual, collective, relational, and positional identities) addressed both social and role-based identities salient to multinational employees. The categorization offers a more holistic consideration of multiple identities in organizations and how they impact employees' work lives from both collective and relational perspectives. It allows future research to examine organizational employees' identities with a more comprehensive understanding. Each type of identities entailed unique characteristics that defined individuals' association with the identities.

Second, the identification of salient identities further provided important reference to our understanding of the interrelationships among multiple identities, instead of a single identity that exists at only one level of analysis. Most identity research has paid attention to one particular level, such as the individual, group, organization, or occupation levels, while ignoring the others (Ashforth, Rogers, & Corley, 2011). To address this issue, this project presented how multiple salient identities were either compatible or incompatible in identity encouraging and identity challenging contexts. The findings also highlighted embedded identity goals, values, and expected identity behaviors for each identity that can either align or conflict with others. Moreover, friend role or cultural identities were traditionally perceived as transitory and proximal; however, these two identities in this study appeared to impact multinational company employees' work lives significantly, as seen in professional-friend role switches and culture-work challenges. This finding brought up the importance of "informal identities" in organizational functioning (e.g., intergroup relationships and intercultural cooperation) and individuals' decision-making (e.g., work preference and work style).

Third, the two identity structures proposed in this discussion also assisted to integrate SIT and identity theory. These two models provided more comprehensive insights to current literature on identity organization. Several lenses have been used to study identity organization (e.g., Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Ashforth et al., 2008; Fitzsimmons, 2013); however, these lenses are largely proposed based on a Western-oriented perspective. More importantly, they either appeared exclusive, by focusing only on role or collective identities, or ignored the possibility of individuals' unclear identity hierarchy. Identity hierarchy cannot explain fully how multinational employees in this study structure various identities since they either were not driven to rank each identity clearly, or assigned accurate interpretations to each identity.

The holistic and kaleidoscope identity models supplemented current literature by incorporating individuals' important social roles and memberships, and by suggesting the fluid nature and situational characteristics of individuals' subjective identity salience. These two models first considered identities inclusively by looking into both personal, social roles, and social collective identities in the traditional sense, which bridged the gap that only one of the three types were studied in identity organization.

In addition, the two proposed identity models indicated that employees might not structure identities into a stable, clearly ranked pattern, as the integration-segmentation model or nested identity model would predict. The two models reflected that employees perceived identities were fluid rather than stable in the complex workplace environment. More importantly, each identity structure contributed to the identity literature with their unique characteristics. The holistic identity structure revealed the notion of synergy valued by participants. The employees, indeed, perceived various identities as contributing to "the amalgamated self." Role-referencing, as opposed to interfering with work-life separation, also generated advantages to help them get work done (e.g., "experiences with each role help with my performance of other roles."). The kaleidoscope identity structure described various possible identity patterns that employees may follow in given situations, supplementing to Gibbs's (2009) cultural-based identity model.

Another major theoretical contribution of this project specified identity work tactics that were used not only internally—what employees do for and by themselves, but also externally—what employees did to others in dealing with tensions. Compartmentalization, avoidance, disclaimers, reframed integration, and self-deprecating jokes appeared to be the identity work tactics employees adopted to deal with internal cognitive inconsistencies. Defense, venting, clarification, and sensegiving were identity work tactics in response to external triggers. The identity work tactics embraced functional, rhetorical, and discourse approaches, providing additional insights into participants' identity management.

In addition, the identification of various tactics spoke directly to unobtrusive control theory and organizational learning in identity and identification studies. The identified organizational discourse in Chinese multinational companies, "competitive individualization and flexibility" exposed an internal organizational tension, going beyond individual and group levels. The management communicated the normative rules that emerged from value-laden premises (e.g., being "fit," "contribution is encouraged.") that gradually evolved into rational rules for employees to follow (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). Flexibility did not entail the full support to work-life balance; instead, employees felt somewhat burdened to utilize company resources. The discourse of competitive individualization became embedded in employees' social interactions, strengthened through daily communication and practices, especially when "personal excellence is valued" were enforced in various team coordination. In other words, it became hard to break the rules because most employees chose to work for excellence and they highly identified with such company cultures, as seen in RQ1. The control system became hidden, unobtrusive, and only surfaced when participants struggled if they could practice "flexibility." Therefore, this project provided a glimpse on unobtrusive control theory in organizations located in a non-western country, providing an alternative context for future studies.

In addition, participants' defense tactics also can be linked to team learning in a cultural sense. Organizational scholars have argued that defenses, balanced appropriately can foster individual growth and maturity (Laughlin, 1970), but it may also be maladaptive, which is destructive to both employees and their collectives in most organizational interactions (Brown & Starkey, 2000). Chinese participants displayed ego defense to protect their cultural identity in the workplace conflicts and arguments. Such defense seemed to affect effective communication with international partners, and potentially the development of mutual trust, and collective learning in conflict management. This finding supplemented to the organizational identification studies that have examined formal collective social identities. In international organizational settings, maladaptive growth could also occur and affect organizational functioning. Informal identities, such as cultural identities and friend role identities, can be more powerful in employees' decision-making than the past literature described.

Along this line, this project also contributed new concepts of identity work tactics to the identity management literature. First, reframed integration was somewhat new to identity management repertoires. Pratt and Foreman (2000) proposed a seemingly similar concept, aggregation, to describe efforts to retain all distinct identities by creating interconnected links. Reframed integration differs from aggregation because it embraces both reframing and integration tactics. It not only showed participants' efforts at removing identity tension and linking two identities, but also implied that they had the ability for meaning-making and meaning-shaping through their communication and actions, which was missing in the aggregation tactic. Another new understanding lay in Chinese participants' interpretation of avoidance. Avoidance in cultural conflicts was deemed strategic, instead of passive, which displayed a cultural-based insight. This finding spoke to the Guo and Cionea' argument (2017) that avoidance in Chinese workplace represents a skillful approach, and a strategic choice in conflict communication.

In addition to specific tactics, identity knowledge stood out in the findings as a notable concept that has not received much attention in previous identity studies. Identity knowledge was perceived as a set of skills that enabled participants to define identity goals, clarify identity values and beliefs, and deal with identity tensions. In this study, identity knowledge seemed to embrace task, relational and communication competencies. Such knowledge was acquired from participants' daily observations and practices of dealing with identity tensions. It closely pertained to participants' abilities of juggling, balancing, switching, or positioning themselves in various social relationships and interactions. This project contributes to identity research by bringing this important concept to the front, and revealing its potentials of generating future studies.

Last, this project provided valuable reference to identity management studies by proposing an integrated model of identity work. This model described participants' engagement in forming identities in internal and external activities, how they organized and grouped various identities, and specific strategies adopted in managing identity tensions. While this model specifically examined multicultural company employees, it offered guidance to look into identity work of other social groups in the global market, such as ethnic and gender minorities, or similar intercultural organizational contexts, such as an NGO. To this end, this project expanded the identity management literature with an integrated model of identity work, applied to multinational companies, and provided more empirical reference to internal and external identity work strategies. This project also contributed to practitioners who are involved in the globalization, alluded to valuable future directions, which will be discussed in the next section, along with identified limitations.

Practical Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

Practical Implications

The proposed integrated model portrayed the process of employees' identity work and then offered important practical guidance to scholars and practitioners. First, as they participate in the globalized market multinational company, employees in the U.S. and China appeared to have unique identity characteristics associated with a set of contextualized understanding. The recognition of the salient identities can help leaders and the management of global organizations devise more focused and effective communicative practices. For instance, organizational identity entailed a value set that involved the commitment to diversity, globalization, competition, and in the U.S., a strong sense of corporate social responsibility. Effective message design that aligns with the implications can foster organizational identification, and potentially reduce organizational turnover. An example can be "reaching your dream by joining this dream group." Similarly, the recognition of American participants' emphasis on social impacts and connections with desired communities offered guidance to companies who aimed to attract "fitter" job candidates, or relate better with current employees.

Along this line, the discussion of identity-encouraging and identity-challenging contexts gave insights to impacts and functions of workplace activities. Potentially, identity-encouraging contexts can generate synergistic effects that benefit employees' workplace performance. For instance, promoting internal information exchange among branch offices online and offline may support employees' career development as they are offered the latest resources, and aid positive workplace interactions by enhancing their social networks. The increased familiarity among employees at the macro level may also boost organizational commitment and identity development.

Second, the two identity structures displayed employees' cultural tendencies of organizing multiple identities, which provids reference to multicultural organizational participants, especially expatriates, consultants, individuals who seek for opportunities of working overseas. Understanding the cultural implications behind identity structures can assist practitioners in intercultural communication. The two identity structures reflect distinctive system of thoughts and ways of organizing. However, the findings suggested that employees' preferences were not absolutely cultural-driven since a few American participants identified with the holistic model, and some Chinese employees identified with the kaleidoscope model. Therefore, the conclusion implies a space for mutual understanding and cooperation with practitioners' efforts. In addition, the transferability of the findings allows them to "read" Chinese and the U.S. partners' perceptions and behaviors better in various types of cooperation. For instance, Chinese participants' understanding of cultural conflicts can aid international practitioners with psychological and functional preparations. They may develop perspective-taking with such understanding and avoid cultural barriers. Similarly, religion is not necessarily a topic on the "DON'T" list. Practitioners can gain potential opportunities of developing respect, trust, and mutual understanding with American employees with a basic knowledge of their workplace preference.

Third, the identity knowledge revealed in the findings underlines potential directions for developing training programs to address company consultants' and leaders' needs. While communication skills have remained the top preference of various organizations in the job market, the internal progressive training are also essential, such as in role transitions. The role transition from a general employee to a leader role entailed a process of resocialization, involving disidentification from being a general employee to reidentificaiton with being a leader. Participants encountered identity tensions while many others were observed failing in the adaptation. Internal role transitions can negatively impact individual growth, as well as organizational routine and functioning. Therefore, this project specified the dimensions of identity knowledge and contributed to our understanding about necessary communication competencies expected in the role transition, such as the ability of coordinating, big-picture thinking, and conflict management strategies.

Relatedly, the identity tensions acknowledged in this project provide explanations to multinational employees' struggles in their workplace. Possible interventions may be developed to address issues such as work-life challenges or cultural and team conflicts. Some companies in this project have already developed programs to assist newcomers to establish work-life balance. Moreover, identity-challenging contexts, instead of always being a problem, can also foster organizational change. For example, team bubbles identified in the project appeared to set up strict group boundaries and triggered workgroup conflicts. Interventions such as setting up norm-breaking practices can challenge employees' team identity and activate a new sensemaking process. An example can involve mixing employees from each team and forming new teams in the company hiking activity. By introducing messages like "we are the one," practitioners may conduct sensebraking to reshape employees' understanding about cross-team cooperation.

Limitations

As with all research, this project presented some limitations. First, this qualitative study was conducted with a limited number of participants in both cultures even though the data collection and analysis reached saturation (Bowen, 2008; Morse, 1995), and enabled the development of an integrated model of identity work. More follow-up studies can further examine the model by incorporating more types of multinational company employees, such as ethnic and gender minorities. For instance, understanding of international employees in multinational companies located in the U.S. and China can expand the findings, and further, examine the transferability of the identity structures and the model of identity work proposed here.

Second, participants' occupations, work duration, and job positions varied across the Chinese and U.S. data, which can raise questions about the transferability of the findings. In addition, the companies involved in this study were mainly located in a specific region or cities, and were larger scale multinational companies, with approximately 120,000-230,000 employees. Smaller multinational companies were not included in this project. However, participants in this study all came from the service-based industry. They all worked in the companies that meet the requirements of theoretical sampling, and their experiences provided rich data to the research questions. Also, larger multinational companies tended to present more diverse workplace interactions and workforce compared with smaller ones, which can generate richer data. More importantly, intersubjectivity, the consensus and convergence of understanding the nature of reality (Charmaz, 2003), was achieved in the data collection and data analysis. The findings revealed the convergence of participants' understanding about their engagement in identity work, and how this process shaped their identity management experiences.

Third, this project did not differentiate participants' positional differences in the analysis since employees who took an entry-level position were not sufficient to make the distinction. This limitation might have interfered with the discovery of member-leader differences in organizing identities and their identity management. For instance, a middle manager may adopt different, potentially more assertive strategies than a general employee, due to the distinctive role expectations. Future research can be done to address this topic.

Fourth, identity tensions in this project mainly referred to struggles and anxiety caused by competing and ambiguous identities, which excluded other potential tensions such as identity threat and image maintenance. To demonstrate, culture-work challenges existed because participants were aware of tensions that emerged between cultural identities and professional identities that can be organizational (e.g., with clients) or subordinate role identity (e.g., with leaders) in a given situation. Identity threat that came from being questioned about occupational images (e.g., sales, accountant) was not the major focus of this study. Also, the analysis did not pay special attention to the duration of the reoccurrence of identity tensions, since the main focus of this project was to identify the main types of tensions. For instance, it did not examine how long tensions existed in participants' work lives and if the identity tensions, such as professional-friend role switch, reoccurred after participants' identity management efforts.

Future Directions

This project provided several potential directions for future research. The first interesting direction is identity schema or identity script. An identity schema or script is defined as a cognitive structure that entails the appropriate or normative behavioral sequence in a given goal-oriented situation or process (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Gioia & Poole, 1984). This finding suggests that role models demonstrate sophisticated skills for role positioning, detecting appropriate communication strategies, and transitioning among multiple roles. However, we do not fully understand how they figured out the appropriate images built, approaches adopted, or positions enacted in managing each role or membership. We also do not know how they developed scripted behavioral sequences for various social performances. The identity knowledge proposed in this study can be more comprehensive with the understanding of the role models' retrospective experiences, combined with observations from participants. More studies should look into how employees position themselves in a range of role performances and membership developments through, for instance, positioning theory (e.g., Bisel & Barge, 2011; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999), and how this positioning process impacts their identity forming, maintaining, or revising.

The second area of research work should address the nature of identity tensions. Identity tensions generally appeared negative in this study, whereas role-referencing was beneficial for those who prefer the holistic identity structure. Sluss and Ashforth (2007) also reasoned that ambivalent identities could be healthy by avoiding overidentification with one target. Overidentification can negatively affect organizational functioning because a strong identification with one specific target interferes with the overall interdependence on which an organization is built. Research shows that overidentificaiton with workplace friendships or leader-member relationships, tends to generate larger perceived person-based differences between a current partner and alternative partners. Such tendency contributes to boundary establishment and malfunctional cooperation (e.g., Buunk & Van Yperen, 1991; Johnson & Rusbult, 1989). Therefore, identity tensions may contribute to healthy social relationships and identity management. This project did not identify a shared understanding of perceived benefits of identity tensions, although two Chinese participants appreciated the growth process in reflecting and learning to manage leader-role transitions. Future research can follow this direction to gain further understanding of individuals' perceptions toward their identity struggles.

The third direction of future research concerns identity transitions in organizational socialization. Member-leader transitions have indicated the importance of studying socialization at the management level. Scholars have studied extensively how entry-level socialization occurs and the strategies individuals adopt (e.g., Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Morris & Feldman, 1997; Seymour & Sandiford, 2005). While early research has addressed the expatriates' socialization (e.g., Feldman & Bolino, 1999), less attention centers on communication involved in internal identity transitions and strategies at the management level. The findings about member-leader transitions provide a glimpse into this topic. More exploration should be made to understand how individuals navigate the gaps between their old and new self-understandings, as well as the communicative strategies they employ craft the appropriate role image in a transition (e.g., Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). In addition, the findings of this study suggest that when individuals cannot adjust well in a transition, they are likely to be evaluated negatively, as “weak,” or “not competent.” Also, strategies such as deliberate testing or hazing (Moreland & Levine, 1982; Kramer & Noland, 1999) were found to be employed by subordinates to challenge recently promoted leaders until the latter proved themselves. Therefore, how individuals respond to identity tensions caused by external forces can also be enlightening.

Fourth, the interrelationships between identity structures and identity tension remain underexplored. Studies have shown that individuals with highly integrated identities are more likely to encounter role-referencing, and undesired interruptions regarding which role to perform (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2005). Roccas and Brewer (2002) also argued, as reviewed in Chapter 1, that individuals with low identity complexity and high integration acquire less identity hooks or opportunities, so they are more likely to encounter identity transition problems. Following this reasoning, participants with holistic identity structure may encounter greater levels of identity tensions. Future studies may explore the interrelationships between identity organization and the occurrence of identity tensions with quantitative research methods.

The fifth direction that requests more attention pertains to gender differences in identity management. This study did not examine gender identity across the data. However, studies have identified that stereotypical beliefs about good leadership (i.e., leadership prototypes) tend to favor male characteristics much more than female characteristics (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Female leaders, then, may face the struggles of behaving in more masculine ways or retaining feminine identities.

Further, less prototypical members can challenge the taken for granted or dominant identity by increasing group tensions. Further research can explore this issue by focusing on a cohesive sample, such as the non-traditional sexual identities or female employees, and add to the model of identity work.

The last potential direction refers to the cultural impacts of identity management. As discussed in the findings, participants did exhibit cultural tendencies in structuring multiple identities. Given the goal of this study, the investigator did not look specifically into cultural differences between Chinese and Americans' identity management. It would be valuable if future studies examined potential cross-cultural differences between multinational company employees' preference for certain identity management strategies. For instance, Ashforth et al. (2000) argued that individuals from/in collectivist, feminine, low uncertainty avoidance, and low power distance cultures tend to integrate roles, whereas individuals from/in individualistic, masculine, high uncertainty avoidance, and/or high power distance cultures tend to segment roles. The argument does not support the reasoning that all Chinese employees tend to integrate roles as Chinese culture is collectivistic and high power distance. Therefore, the research gap here is obvious.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this project identified the salient social identities of employees in multinational companies located in the U.S. and China. Multinational company employees in this study actively made sense of both identity-encouraging and identity-challenging contexts, in which they formed and developed four types of salient identities (individual, collective, relational, and positional role identities). Employees engaged in identity work to form, maintain, revise, and modify various identities. The investigator further proposed two identity structures, the holistic and kaleidoscope identity structures, and presented employees' divergent organizations of multiple identities. Employees in both China and the U.S. experienced identity ambiguity and conflicting identifications in various communicative practices, labeled as four types of identity tensions: work-life challenge, member-leader transition, professional-friend role switch, and cultural/religious-work challenge. Each type encompassed a set of struggles that emerged from identity multiplicity. To respond to these identity tensions, employees developed a list of identity work strategies, involving observational, functional, and rhetorical tactics, as well as sensegiving and discourse approach to deal with internal and external identity tensions. The proposed integrated model summarizes the findings of the study and provides directions for further research.

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Appendix A: Interview Design

1. Basic information
    - Tell me about how you came to work for this company.
    - How long have you been working here? What is your job responsibility?
    - What do you like about working for this company? What do you dislike?
    - Who are the people with whom you constantly interact in your company?
2. Situations and moments when organizational members feel strongly identity with the organization, workgroups, various roles, or social groups in the workplace.
    - Tell me about a time when you felt proud to be a member of the company, the division, or any work team.
    - Please describe any other groups you are part of in the company.
    - Please describe any other groups you are part of outside the company.
    - Tell me about a time when you felt proud to be a member of the groups, if any?
    - What are your roles or jobs in the company/ team/ division…? What are some informal roles or jobs you take on in the company?
    - Please describe any other roles you are part of outside the company.
    - Please describe a time when you felt any of the roles mentioned are important to you.
3. How employees communicate to organize multiple identities
    - Please describe a time when you felt that belonging to one group helped with your performance in another one (e.g., a project team, a friend clique, or a newcomer/ leadership group).

- Please describe a time when you felt experience in one of your roles helped you with performing a different role (a mother/ father, a supervisor, a joker in a clique).
- Please tell me about a time or a situation when you felt a particular identity or role was more important than any others to you.
- How did you express the importance of that identity/ role?
- Please tell me about a time when you needed to switch to a different way of communicating due to the different people or situations.
- How did you find out and convey the differences?

4. When organizational members encounter identity crises in managing multiple identities.
    - Please describe a situation or moment that you felt you did not want to be associated with one of the organizations, groups, and roles you just identified.
    - Please describe a time when being a member of two different organizations or groups simultaneously created problems or created concerns for you.
    - Please describe a time when performing two roles simultaneously created problems or created concerns for you.
    - Please describe a time when you have a hard time switching among different roles.
5. Strategies they have employed in identity crisis
    - When you encounter the struggles and tensions between roles mentioned above
        - What did you do?

    - Is there anyone in your company who helps people manage the process? Have you talked to them about these issues?
    - What was the outcome?
    - How will you deal with similar issues later?
- Have you noticed someone else being a good example of dealing with the similar issue in your company?
- Have you noticed someone else being a poor example of dealing with the similar issue in your company?

Appendix B: Actual Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about how you came to work for this company.
2. How long have you been working here? What is your job responsibility?
3. What do you like about working for this company? What do you dislike?
4. Who are the people with whom you constantly interact in your company?
5. Please describe groups (e.g., work teams, cliques, divisions, or groups of social activities) you are part of in the company.
6. Please describe any other groups (e.g., groups of interests, informal social networks) you are part of outside the company.
7. Tell me about a time when you felt good about being identified
    - as a member of the company, if any?
    - as social groups within the company, if any?
    - as social groups outside the company, if any?
8. Please describe a time when you felt that belonging to one group helped with your performance in another one (e.g., a project team, a friend clique, or a newcomer/leadership group).
9. Please describe a time when being a member of two of the groups you mentioned simultaneously created troubles or brings concerns to you.
    - E.g., participating in formal or informal groups as a team member, team leader, a Chinese, or a friend.
    - How did you manage the situation?
    - Is there anyone in your company who helps people manage the process? Have you talked to them about these issues?

- What was the outcome?
- How will you deal with similar issues later?

10. Please describe a situation or moment that you felt you did not want to be associated with one of the organizations, the work teams, or groups you just identified.
    - How did you manage the situation?
    - Is there anyone in your company who helps people manage the process? Have you talked to them about these issues?
    - What was the outcome?
    - How will you deal with similar issues later?
11. Are there times or situations when you needed to switch to a different way of communicating due to the different people or situations?
    - E.g., communicating with team members, team leaders, Chinese, or friends.
12. How did you find out and express the differences?
13. When dealing with the difference and troubles,
    - are there times or situations when you felt a particular social membership is more important than any others to you?
    - how did you evaluate the importance among the memberships?
14. When you encounter the struggles and tensions of participating in multiple groups mentioned above,
    - how did you manage the situation?
    - is there anyone in your company who helps people manage the process? Have you talked to them about these issues?
    - what was the outcome?

- how will you deal with similar issues later?

15. What are your roles or jobs in the company/ team/ division…? What are some informal roles or jobs you take on in the company?
16. Tell me about a time when you felt proud to perform certain roles, if any.
17. Please describe a time when you felt experience in one of the roles you mentioned helped you with performing a different role (e.g., performing a mother/father, a supervisor, a joker in a clique).
18. Please describe a time when performing two roles simultaneously creates troubles or brings concerns to you.
    - How did you manage the situation?
    - Is there anyone in your company who helps people manage the process? Have you talked to them about these issues?
    - What was the outcome?
19. Please describe a time when you have a hard time switching among different roles.
    - E.g., performing as a mother, a supervisor, a joker, a subordinate
    - How did you manage the situation?
    - Is there anyone in your company who helps people manage the process? Have you talked to them about these issues?
    - What was the outcome?
20. Are there moments when you felt you did not want to be associated with one of the roles you just identified?
    - How did you manage the situation?

- Is there anyone in your company who helps people manage the process? Have you talked to them about these issues?
- What was the outcome?

21. When dealing with the difference and troubles,
    - are there times or situations when you felt a particular role is more important than any others to you?
    - how did you evaluate the importance among the roles?
22. When you encounter the struggles and tensions between roles mentioned above,
    - how did you manage the situation?
    - is there anyone in your company who helps people manage the process? Have you talked to them about these issues?
    - what was the outcome?
    - how will you deal with similar issues later?
23. Have you noticed someone else being a good example of dealing with the struggles between roles in your company?
24. Have you noticed someone else being a poor example of dealing with the struggles between roles in your company?