INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' PATHWAY: MAINLAND CHINESE STUDENTS IN SINGAPORE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

CHUA YUE ER
17th August 2015

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Summary

Going beyond the simplistic understanding of international student mobility as a form of educational exchange and human capital development, this thesis attempts to investigate the Mainland Chinese student migratory flows as a particular life stage where the attention is paid towards how the experience of studying abroad shapes the Chinese youths' pathway in life. Situated in the transitional phase of emerging adulthood, the student migration trajectory is tied to the simultaneous demands from the Chinese youths' commitment to education and their youthful desires for experimentation and exploration. Yet embedded in these processes are also the Chinese parents' aspirations and expectations, which arise out of the fetishization of the single-child, in directing the youth people's pathway in life. Therefore, this thesis seeks to examine how the Chinese youths' student migration trajectory is structured by the interplay of the commitment to education, the youthful aspirations for exploration and the parental aspirations as they navigate their life alongside the transition to adulthood.

(159 words)

Chapter 1: Introduction

As China emerges as the largest source of mobile students in the world today (UNESCO 2014), the phenomenon of Mainland Chinese student migratory flows has captured the academic attention of many scholars (e.g. Orleans 1988; Xiang 2003; Xiang and Shen 2009; Zweig 2002). Most of the scholarship tends to construct the phenomenon of Mainland Chinese students migration as a form of educational exchange and human resource development where the academic attention remains focused on the debate on brain drain, brain gain and brain circulation (Bail and Shen 2008; Chen 2008; Shen 2009; Zweig *et al.* 2006). By constructing the student migration trajectory as a means to enhance one's human capital potential in preparation for the exchange of economic rewards in the labor market after study, such explanation, however, undervalues the dynamism and complexity of international student mobility. The over-emphasis on human capital flows also negates the broader social relationships and experiences that are embedded in the student migration trajectory. The questions to ask are: under what circumstances were the 'push' for overseas education created? Is the student migration experience only about the pursuit of human capital in preparation for the transition to work in the future? If not, what did the Chinese youths experience abroad? How did these experiences shape the pathway of the Chinese youths?

Going beyond the simplistic emphasis of international student mobility as a form of human capital flows, this thesis attempts to investigate international

student mobility as a particular life stage by examining how the experience of studying abroad influence the Mainland Chinese students' pathway in life. As the experience of studying abroad typically occurs in the youthful phase of the life course, this thesis situates the student migration trajectory in the liminal phase of emerging adulthood where the boundaries between youth and adulthood are blurred (Arnett 2000). In this sense, the student migration trajectory intersects with the simultaneous demands from the commitment to education in preparation for the future transition to adulthood occupational roles as well as the youthful aspirations for experimentation and exploration of the self. Yet as the single-child is also the fetishized object of the Chinese parents (Anagnost 1997), the student migration trajectory is also characterized by the influence of the Chinese parents' aspirations and desires in directing the Mainland Chinese students' pathway in life. As such, this thesis reconstructs international student mobility as a site where the young people negotiate their aspirations and commitments vis-à-vis those of their parents at the transitional phase of emerging adulthood. Through the examination of the motivations, aspirations and experience of the student migrants in the context of the Mainland Chinese student migratory flow to Singapore, this thesis seeks to examine how the interplay of these social processes and relationships shape the Mainland Chinese students' pathway as they navigate their life alongside the transition to adulthood.

Most of the Mainland Chinese students in this study are single-children who are born after the Economic Reforms in 1978 in which a new imagination of the world and the self was created (see Cheng and Berman 2012; Fong 2004a,

2004b, 2007, 2011; Wang 2006). Most notably, parental resources are concentrated on the single-child's education as access to elite education and academic achievement become increasingly identified as the route to success in life (Jiang and Ashley 2000; Tsui and Rich 2002; Veeck *et al.* 2003). In other words, the Chinese families' interests in academic investment is tied to the accumulation of cultural capital (i.e. elite credentials and skills) and its conversion into other forms of economic capital (i.e. employment opportunities and wealth), symbolic capital (i.e. social prestige) and social capital (i.e. elite network) that allows for upward social mobility (Bourdieu 1986). Studying abroad therefore arises as an alternative route to the accumulation of cultural capital when the door to elite education is closed at home for many of the Mainland Chinese students in this study.

Nevertheless, the accumulation of cultural capital is only one aspect of the student migration trajectory. Free from direct parental influences and institutional supports from home, the experience of studying abroad intersects with the youthful desires for fun, exploration and the experimentation of the self (see Waters *et al.* 2011). For this group of post-80s and post-90s Chinese youths who has learnt to see the outside world with a strong sense of curiosity and yearning under the influx of foreign influences during the Chinese Economic Reform and Liberalization (Cheng and Berman 2012; Fong 2011; Wang 2006; Yang 1997), studying abroad creates the possibility for them to fulfill their dream to step out of China in the search for global experiences. In addition to the possibility for fun and exploration overseas, the process of individuation also has significant implications on the Chinese youths' sense of

self as they negotiate with the new sense of responsibilities in the absence of institutional support from home (Brown 2009; Ghosh and Wang 2003; Tse and Waters 2013). If youth mobility is characterized by the search for fun overseas and the discovery of the self, then there is room to examine the transformative power of youth mobility and its impact on the young people's transition to adulthood.

Embedded in the Mainland Chinese student migration trajectory is also an intergenerational transfer of aspirations from the parents to the child where the Chinese parents seek to compensate for the loss of their dreams through the indulgence of the child (Sabet 2011) and a reciprocal expectation for the child to repay the parents' investment when the child come of age (Bodycott 2009). In addition to a material repayment for the Chinese parents' investment in the single child, the familial obligation demands the Mainland Chinese students to provide emotional care for the parents through the performance of filial duty and an entrance into a married life after study, of which the latter is highly gendered. In this sense, the allowance for the discovery of the self during the student migration trajectory must also be balanced with the responsibilities that arise out of the familial obligations.

By situating international student mobility in the transitional stage of emerging adulthood, this thesis seeks to examine how this group of Chinese youths navigates their life in response to the demands from academic pursuit, the youthful aspirations for fun and freedom and the familial aspirations and obligations. Biographical interviews were conducted with three groups of

student migrants: (1) current Mainland Chinese students in Singapore's national universities, (2) graduates who remain in Singapore and (3) graduates who return to China in order to examine the different stages of life in the student migration trajectory. Going beyond the simplistic examination of international mobility as human capital development and human capital flows, this thesis argues for the need to provide a more nuanced account of the Mainland Chinese student migration trajectory as one that is embedded in the Chinese youths' lived experiences as well as their interactions with broader social and cultural process as they navigate their life alongside the transition to adulthood.

1.1 Overseas Education in China: From a State Project to a Private Investment

> "I support sending more students abroad to study; not a dozen more, but thousands, tens of thousands more." (Deng Xiaoping, 1978)[1]

Although China has a long history of Mainland Chinese student migration (see Shen 2009), the contemporary phenomenon of Mainland Chinese student migratory flows is born out of Deng's Opening Up Policy in 1978. Started as a state-project for a selected group of government scholars and researchers, overseas education has, however, grown into a private family investment over the last three decades of Chinese economic development. In 2014 alone, 459 800 Chinese students left China to study overseas, of those, 92% were self-funded in contrast to the majority who were sponsored by the Chinese state during the 1980s (ICEF Monitor 2015).

[1] Cited from "Appeal of Overseas Studies Grows" (China Daily 17 October 2008).

[2] 自支留学，鼓励回国，来去自由。

The transformation of the Mainland Chinese student migratory flows is marked by three waves of development (Bai 2008; Xiang and Shen 2009; Huang 1997; Li 2006). Confronted with China's backwardness when the Chinese Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, education, science and technology were identified as the core of China's modernization project. Overseas education was made possible in 1978 with the aim of acquiring the advanced skills and knowledge from the developed world that could be transferred to China's modernization project. Most of the outgoing students were sponsored by the Chinese state or by their associated organizations for postgraduate programs or short-term training courses in America or European countries. The first wave of Mainland Chinese student migrants refers to this group of 'national treasure' who "brought home not only degrees from western countries but the most advanced technology and management experience that China required" (Bai 2008:209). Therefore, the first wave of student migratory flows is characterized by the state project-induced 'student mobility' in the sense that the exchange was prearranged by the state instead of the students themselves, with an expectation that the students would return home after their sojourn (Xiang and Shen 2009:516). In this sense, international student mobility was first constructed as a form of human capital development that was rooted in the transfer the technology and skills acquired from Europe and America to the development of the Chinese economy.

The formal recognition for self-financing overseas study in 1981 sparked the second wave of Mainland Chinese student migratory flows. A new policy

introduced in 1992 also granted the Mainland Chinese students the freedom to leave and return the country (Zweig and Chen 1995:23). Although most of the outgoing students were sponsored by the government scholarships in the 1980s, those who went abroad in the 1990s were either supported by scholarships overseas or by themselves. Still rooted in the state discourse of modernization, the new policy line is "*zhizhi liuxue, guli huiguo, laiqu ziyou*[2]*",* meaning "support study overseas, encourage returns, guarantee freedom of movement" (Xiang and Shen 2009:515). However, reversing 'brain drain' became one of the most important tasks of the Chinese state since the 1990s, as the highly talented Mainland Chinese students appropriated the route of overseas education as a springboard to move to the developed countries like United Kingdom and America (Zweig 1997, 2006). Through the introduction of preferential treatments to encourage return migrations from the overseas-educated Mainland Chinese students, Xiang and Shen (2009) noted the important role of the Chinese state as a major provider of symbolic capital in the recognition of foreign degrees and 'lifting' the social prestige of the returnees, thus facilitating the conversion of the foreign degrees into employment opportunities in the Chinese labor market[3]. The consequence was the development of a new term – *haigui*[4] –to describe the returnees as

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[2] 自支留学，鼓励回国，来去自由。

[3] According to Xiang and Shen (2009), "by appropriating particular discourses of human capital, meritocracy, globalization and competitiveness, the state adds political value to internationally acquired degrees in the national context, encourages and assist foreign degree holders to ''cash in'' their human capital, and at the same time projects itself to be progressive, pragmatic and capable, thus reinforcing its legitimacy in the era global competition and mass communication" (2009:514). As a major provider of symbolic capital, the Chinese state therefore facilitates the conversion of cultural capital (i.e. foreign credentials) into other forms of economic capital (i.e. employment opportunities) and symbolic capital (i.e. social prestige) in the China.

[4] The term h*aigui* (海归) is used commonly to refer to the overseas educated Mainland Chinese who have returned to China. As a homophone, this group of returnees are also referred as sea turtles (*haigui,* 海龟) who have travelled for a long distance.

those who are highly sought after by businesses, hold important positions in well-established companies and command a high level of social prestige in the Chinese society (Bai 2008; Zweig *et al*. 2004). In other words, overseas education became identified as a symbolic good that is expected to convert into valuable economic rewards and prestige in the Chinese society.

The third wave of the Mainland Chinese student migratory flow solidifies the transformation of overseas education into a private investment of the Chinese families. By the late 1990s, the outgoing students are made up of the first generation of single-children[5]. Regarded as the 'only hope' (Fong 2004b) of the Chinese families, Chinese parents mobilize resources in order to give their only child the best form of education, which, to many, is an overseas education partly due to the inadequate provision of tertiary education in China or to avoid the competition from the domestic education system (Li 2006; Li and Bray 2007; Shen 2009). Most notably, the frantic investment in overseas education has resulted in the development of 'wild chicken colleges' (*yeji daixue*[6]) that allows the Mainland Chinese students to 'buy' the foreign degrees, instead of going through competitive selection procedures and examinations overseas (Xiang and Shen 2009:517-520). By the 2000s, however, the symbolic value of foreign credentials can no longer be taken for granted. Unlike the previous two groups of student migrants, the brain deficit has shifted to a brain surplus characterized by an oversupply of foreign degree holders who have returned to China (Xiang and Shen 2009; Zweig and Han 2010; Zweig *et al.* 2004). While there was not much distinction in the type of

[5] The one-child policy was introduced in 1978.

[6] 'Wild chicken colleges' refer to illegitimate schools that fall outside of the established tertiary education system.

‘foreign degrees’ in the past, the evaluation of ‘foreign degrees’ in today’s context is increasingly distinguished and stratified by the international hierarchies of the institutions’ reputation in response to the credential inflation in the Chinese society. In other words, the value of overseas education in the current context becomes intrinsically linked to the access to *elite* universities overseas in order to maximize the symbolic value of the foreign credentials.

Although the Chinese state continues to endorse the discourse of Chinese modernization in accounting for the importance of overseas studies today (China Daily 17 October 2008)[7], the initial ‘student mobility’ facilitated by the state has transformed into ‘student migration’ “that is driven by students’ own initiatives, more open-ended, [and] less predictable” (Xiang and Shen 2009:516). In this sense, the contemporary phenomenon of overseas education is no longer driven by the state discourse of modernization but rather, the personal aspirations of the Chinese families and the student migrants themselves. While the aspirations of the Chinese families and the Chinese youths created the condition for the ‘push’ for student migration, the increasing trend of Mainland Chinese student migratory flows is only possible because of a simultaneous expansion of international education infrastructure and the development of a multi-billion dollar international education industry that allows for the absorption of the student migrants (MacDonald 2006). This next section will bring attention to how the internationalization of higher

[7] In 2008, Zhang Xiuqin, director of the ministry’s international exchange department, remarks: "Increasing the number of people studying abroad was one of the first steps taken in the reform and opening up drive, and that has greatly enhanced the country's economic development and diplomatic relations. The country views foreign study as a top development strategy and welcomes students back to use their knowledge to help build a better country." (China Daily 17 October 2008)

education in Singapore created the structural condition that supports the Mainland Chinese student migratory flow to Singapore.

1.2 Singapore – A Host to Mainland Chinese Students

In 2002, Singapore launched the 'Global Schoolhouse' project with the aim of offering "a diverse and distinctive mix of quality education services to the world, thus becoming an engine of economic growth, capability development and talent attraction for Singapore" (Contact Singapore 2011:13). In other words, the objectives of internationalizing the higher educational industry are economically driven for revenue as well as a broader strategy for Singapore's human capital management (see Olds 2007; Sidhu 2005; Sidhu *et al.* 2011). In response to the Global Schoolhouse initiative, the development of Singapore's higher education industry reflects a proliferation of private institutions and joint programs with foreign charters (Altbach and Knight 2007) and an internationalization of the national universities as they seek to achieve world-class status through an emphasis on research, the inclusion of a global dimension to its curriculum and an internationalization of its student profiles (Ho and Ge 2011; Ho 2013; Wong *et al*. 2007).

According to Gribble, the international student market is an important source of revenue and a way of addressing skill shortages in key areas for the host country (2008:26). On the one hand, the internationalization of education serves the pragmatic purpose of sustaining the lucrative business of education by transforming education into a consumer product and extending it to the full-fee paying international students (Altbach and Knight 2007; Olds 2007).

On the other hand, it acts as a tool for Singapore's human capital management. Given the premium placed on global talents and the intense competition for global talents, the search for talents starts before they enter the labor market – "through the attraction of top students from overseas" (Wong *et al.* 2007:943). To achieve the second goal, Ng (2011) noted Singapore's extension of scholarships and Tuition Grant Scheme[8] to international students who are enrolled in Singapore's national universities in exchange for their service obligation in a Singapore-registered company after study as part of the broader strategy to retain the international students as foreign talents in Singapore. Conceived as potential high skilled foreign talents, international students are therefore one of the important groups of talents that the Singapore state tries to attract and hold on to.

In 2005, it was reported that the Mainland Chinese students constitute the largest proportion of the international student population in Singapore (Straits Times, 3 December 2005). Identified as one of the key groups of foreign talents that Singapore seeks to attract and retain (Hing *et al.* 2009), a bulk of the Mainland Chinese students in Singapore's national universities are awarded with full-scholarships provided by Singapore's Ministry of Education in exchange for their service obligation in a Singapore-registered company after study (Yeoh and Lin 2013). In this sense, the financial incentives and state's policy on talent attraction created the structural condition that support the Mainland Chinese student migratory flows to Singapore. Although the

[8] The Tuition Grant Scheme was introduced by the Singapore government to subsidize the high cost of tertiary education in Singapore. In exchange for the tuition grant subsidy, international students are obliged to work in a Singapore-registered company for 3 years upon graduation.

premise of this thesis centers the experiences and aspirations of the Mainland Chinese student migrants, the flows of the Mainland Chinese students to Singapore and their post-study trajectory also have implications on the development of Singapore's higher education and its human capital management that would be discussed in the concluding chapter.

1.3 The Problematic

Following Katz (2008), contemporary childhood is a site of accumulation and desire. The former refers to the investment in the child and the accumulation of capital in preparation for the young people's transition to adulthood roles, while the latter refers to the youthful aspirations in the present. By situating international student mobility phase of emerging adulthood, this thesis seeks to examine international student mobility as a site that intersects with the simultaneous processes of accumulation and desire. In other words, studying abroad creates the possibility for the materialization of academic pursuit and the youthful aspirations for fun and explorations. The aim is to examine how these processes shape the Mainland Chinese students' pathway as they negotiate their way through life alongside the transition to adulthood.

As social reproduction gradually shifted from the state to the individual and his or her family, the consequence is an increased material and emotional investment in children and a concomitant scramble to ensure that the offspring can 'make it' (ibid:10). Perhaps more than any other societies, the fetishization of the child is much more salient in China as the one-child policy transforms the post-80s generation of single-children into the 'only hope' (Fong 2004b)

of the Chinese families. As a site of accumulation, frantic investments are concentrated on the single-child's education overseas, in the hope of accumulating cultural capital (i.e. elite credentials and skills) that could be converted into valuable forms of economic capital (i.e. employment opportunities and wealth), symbolic capital (i.e. social prestige) and social capital (i.e. elite network) (Bourdieu 1986), especially when the route to the accumulation of cultural capital is denied at home (Waters 2006, 2008). Although the parental investment in the single-child's education overseas is about creating a better future for the precious child, it is also about securing a better future for the Chinese parents themselves who would be dependent on their only-child's material and emotional support in the future (Bodycott 2009; Fong 2004a, 2004b; Liu 2008; Sabet 2011). While attention must be paid to the link between education, spatial mobility and social reproduction in the examination of international student mobility (Waters 2006), its significance must also be examined in relation to how the Chinese youths negotiate with the parental expectations and the impending familial obligations as they navigate their life alongside the transition to adulthood.

As a site of desire, childhood and youth are also simultaneously about the pursuit of fun, experimentation and exploration (Arnett 2000; Smith and Holt 2007). Although underexplored in the existing studies on international student mobility, going abroad for further education encompasses the possibility for the youthful aspirations for fun, exploration and freedom overseas as well as the strategic pursuit of academic qualifications (Waters *et al.* 2011). For this group of Chinese youths who grew up with a sense of curiosity about the

outside world brought along by the influx of foreign influences during the Economic Reform and Liberalization (Fong 2004a, 2011), studying overseas creates the possibility for them to fulfill the youthful desires to explore the outside world. Yet as a process of individuation (Tse and Waters 2013), the development of new experiences in the absence of parental scrutiny and institutional support from home during this malleable stage of life also has serious implications in shaping the young people's pathway in life (Brannen and Nielsen 2002). In other words, the student migration trajectory is more than a means to the accumulation of cultural capital. Rather, attention should be directed at the transformative power of the student migrant experience in directing the young people's sense of self.

In short, this thesis seeks to situate international student mobility at a site that intersects with the accumulation of cultural capital and the youthful desires for exploration and experimentation overseas. Embedded in the student migration trajectory is also the broader influence of parental aspirations and expectations that arise out of the fetishization of the single-child in the Chinese society. In this sense, although the accumulation of cultural capital and the youthful desires for exploration and experimentation overseas created the 'push' for student migration, the room for the development of these two processes are also enabled and constrained by the parental aspirations and the conditions of familial obligations in structuring the Chinese youths' pathway in life. Through an examination of the Mainland Chinese students' lived experiences in the student migration trajectory, the aim of this thesis is to examine how

these processes shape the Mainland Chinese students' pathway as they navigate their life alongside the transition to adulthood.

1.4 Key Dynamics in Youth Education Mobility

International student mobility is commonly explained by the pursuit of a more valuable degree overseas (Findlay *et al.* 2012; Li and Bray 2007; Pyvis and Chapman 2007; Robertson et al. 2011;), especially when the access to elite credentials is closed at home (Brooks and Waters 2009; Waters 2006, 2008, 2009), and the desire to develop cosmopolitan sensibilities such as language competency (Baláž and Williams 2004; Doerr 2003; Davies and Pike 2009) in the search for further distinction from those who attend domestic institutions. Appropriating Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital, studying abroad is therefore explained by the pursuit of institutionalized cultural capital (i.e. academic credential) and embodied cultural capital (i.e. cosmopolitan sensibilities). Following Bourdieu's concept of capital accumulation, international student mobility is constructed as a strategic pursuit of cultural capital that could be easily convertible to economic rewards in the labor market (see Brooks *et al.* 2012; Cai 2012, 2013; Crossman and Clark 2010; Wiers-Jenssen 2008). Besides the calculable strategies of enhancing employment prospect, another aspect of international student mobility also includes the 'experiential' dimension of the student migration trajectory (Krzaklweska 2008), where the international students seek to experience foreign cultures and have fun during the sojourn (Fong 2011; Waters and Brooks 2011; Waters *et al.* 2011), Therefore, there is room for the examination of international student mobility as one that is simultaneously

embedded in the 'employment' dimension (accumulation of capital) and 'experiential' dimension (youthful aspirations) (Krzaklweska 2008). Nevertheless, the room for the navigation of the young people's pathway in life is not infinite, but is shaped by broader structural conditions especially the familial obligations to the parents that arises out of the fetishization of the single-child in the Chinese society (Anagnost 1997; Sabet 2011). Therefore, the conceptual framework for this thesis is informed by the construction of international student mobility as a simultaneous process for the accumulation of capital and the materialization of youthful aspirations, albeit one that is also constrained by the familial obligations as the young people negotiate their life alongside the transition to adulthood.

1.4.1 The Accumulation of Capital and Social Mobility

According to Bourdieu, "academic investment has no meaning unless a minimum degree of reversibility of the conversion it implies is objectively guaranteed" (1986:248). Since the Chinese Economic Reform and the Opening-Up Policy in 1978, "social class has been determined basically according to occupation, educational credentials, capital, and income[9]" (Li and Bray 2006:412). The consequence is a construction of education as the most reliable tool for upward mobility in the Chinese society (Jiang and Ashley 2000; Tsui and Rich 2002; Veeck *et al.* 2003), based on a presumption on the convertibility of educational credentials into employment prospects and economic rewards. The socioeconomic change in China is also accompanied by the introduction of the one-child policy in 1979 that further exacerbated the

[9] Prior to the Reform, "social class was determined mainly by inborn elements such as family identity together with subjective political awareness and attitudes" (Li and Bray 2006:412).

frantic investment on the child's education. The consequence is the development of an 'unmet demand' for higher education (Marginson 2004), partly due to the inadequate provision of tertiary education in China and the competition from the domestic education system (Li 2006; Li and Bray 2007; Shen 2009). Overseas education, therefore, creates an alternative route to the Chinese families' frantic search for academic pursuit that are unmet at home.

Bourdieu distinguishes three principal forms of capital: economic capital, "which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights"; cultural capital, 'which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications"; and social capital, "made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of a title of nobility" (1986:243). These forms of capital are to a large extent, interchangeable. When these forms of capital are combined, they determine social stratification and mobility (Li and Bray 2006:409). Following Bourdieu, the value of academic investment lies in the convertibility of cultural capital into different forms of capital:

> "By conferring institutional recognition on the cultural capital possessed by any given agent, the academic qualification makes it possible to compare qualification holders and even to exchange them (by substituting one for another in succession). Furthermore, it makes it possible to establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital. This product of conversion of economic capital into cultural capital establishes the value, in terms of cultural capital, of the holder, of a given qualification relative to other qualification holders and, by the same token, the monetary

> value for which it can be exchanged on the labor market." (1986:248)

Nevertheless, not all academic qualifications are equal when it comes to its convertibility to employment opportunities (Waters 2008:8). Instead, the value of cultural capital lies in its distinctive value that is informed by a symbolically constructed hierarchy among education institutions, thus transforming academic credentials into a 'positional good' that allows holder to purchase certain kind of occupations and status (Collins 1979; Marginson 2004). Academic investment is therefore about the accumulation of elite credentials that can command the highest value of economic capital through the labor market. In this sense, international student mobility is tied to the search for a 'positional good', albeit through the strategy of spatial mobility especially when there is an 'unmet demand' at home.

However, the conversion of academic qualifications is not as straightforward as the human capital theory[10] proposes (Becker 1980, Schultz 1961). Instead of a direct link between educational investments and economic rewards, the conversion of academic credentials into economic capital is influenced by various social factors such as one's ties to privileged networks and spatial differences (see Brooks et. al 2012; Cai 2012, 2013; Waters 2008). As a social process, the conversion of cultural capital hinges on social recognition that is awarded by one's access to social capital or even economic capital (Bourdieu 1984), of which the former can be awarded by educational ties that has the

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[10] According to the human capital theory, education is perceived as an investment of skills and knowledge on the individuals that can be translated to employment opportunities. More importantly, the level of education will determine the individuals' future monetary income in the job market (Becker 1980:9). Hence the human capital theory privileges an individualistic attitude by emphasizing the direct link between educational investment and rewards.

potential to operate transnationally (see Hall 2010; Waters 2007, 2008; Waters and Leung 2013). In her study on the transnational students between Hong Kong and Canada, Waters remarks:

> "While students will subsequently acquire a host of cosmopolitan traits and valuable cultural capital (not least a fluency in English), they are also inculcated into an exclusive, transnational and elite group status through a further process of separation and 'distinction' (2007:490)".

While the value of academic credentials lies in its scarcity and exclusivity, the exclusivity of the academic credentials is also enabled by networks. Both aspects of cultural capital and social capital reinforce each other in creating a socially distinctive group, whose members are tied together by their membership in a elite school, with an exclusive identity that is also "widely recognized by others and by itself as worthy of being so" (Bourdieu1996:102). In this sense, the value of academic investment is more than the accumulation of cultural capital. Instead, the cultural capital allows for the conversion into valuable social capital that facilitates the conversion of academic credentials into economic capital through the provision of social recognition and assistance from the members tied together by the 'esprit de corps'[11] (Bourdieu 1996). In short, social mobility is highly dependent on the access to the various forms of capital, of which the accumulation of institutionalized cultural capital (elite credentials) creates the possibility for its conversion to economic capital and social capital.

[11] "This esprit de corps is the precondition for the constitution of cultural capital, that collectively held resource that enables each of the members of an *integrated* (original emphasis) group to participate in the capital individually held by all the others" (Bourdieu 1996:183).

1.4.2 Globalization, Aspirations and Geographical Mobility

Existing research on youth transitions and emerging adulthood has noted the temporal extension of youth that is attributed to a lengthened period in the commitment to education in preparation for future employment, as well as an extended present that is rooted in the ideology of youth as a period of fun awarded by the hiatus from adult responsibilities (Arnett 2000; Côté 2002; Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Jeffrey and McDowell 2004; Katz 2008; Krzaklweska 2008; Nielsen 1999). As international student mobility typically occurs at the youthful stage of the life course, it therefore intersects with the exploratory and experimental elements of emerging adulthood, in addition to the significance of capital accumulation in preparation for future employment. Yet except for a few studies (e.g. Fong 2011; Krzaklweska 2008; Waters and Brooks 2011; Waters *et al.* 2011), the significance of youthful aspirations remains underexplored in the examination of international student mobility. The questions to ask are therefore: how can geographical mobility be used for the student migrants' self-development and what are its impacts on the student migrants' transition to adulthood?

In her study on the Dalian youths, Fong argues that "the increasingly globalized nature of the media, language, and educational pilgrimages available to young Chinese citizens in cities like Dalian encourages them to aspire to belong to an imagined developed world community composed of mobile, wealthy, well-educated, and well-connected people worldwide" (2011:6). She then constructs overseas education as a route for the Chinese

youths to acquire the cultural citizenship[12] of the developed world. While the use of a 'neoliberal global system'[13] in Fong's study to explain the Chinese youths' admiration of the outside world sits uncomfortably in the context of China's economic prowess today (Li 2006), what is clear is, however, the Chinese youths' desire to explore the unknown world outside of China and the possibility for overseas education to satiate that desire (see Waters and Brooks 2011; Waters *et al.* 2011). In other words, international student mobility is as much about the desire to go abroad as the means to the accumulation of academic qualifications.

The link between youth and mobility is often examined in the context of the 'gap year' or 'overseas experience', where the young people search for global experience through paid work overseas for a temporary period (e.g. Conradson and Latham 2005, 2007; Haverig 2011; Haverig and Roberts 2011; Heath 2007; Yoon 2014). At the heart of these studies is the claim that overseas experience has the potential for the resubjectification of the self, thus making the sojourn a journey for self-development, exploration and freedom. Following Bourdieu (1986), the transformative potential of a gap year can arguably be interpreted as an accumulation of embodied cultural capital due to

[12] According to Fong, "cultural citizenship processes can transcend national boundaries, as individuals are made and make themselves in the context not only of the societies in which they live and hold legal citizenship but also of the global neoliberal system, which assumes that all who acquire developed world discipline, skills, and affluence can become social and cultural citizens of the developed world, regardless of where they live or what is written on their passports" (2011:15-6).

[13] Fong proposes the concept of a 'global neoliberal system' that sees the world as one that is characterized by teleological, dichotomous and unilineal evolutionist division between developed countries and developing countries, in which the latter should play by the rules of the global neoliberal system in order to acquire the status of a developed country (2011:41). For Fong, the consequence of the 'global neoliberal system' is a production of a hierarchical worldview shared amongst the Dalian youths in which China is constructed as an 'underdeveloping' or 'developing' country that needs to catch up with the foreign developed countries.

the acquisition of soft skills and a change of disposition that emerge from the experience overseas. In their study on the youth mobility from New Zealand to London, Conradson and Latham suggest:

> "For a large proportion of these individuals, relocation to the United Kingdom is only partly about employment opportunities. [...] But the city is also attractive to Antipodean transnationals because it enables a certain degree of experimentation and exploration, whether in career or personal terms. Within a place some distance from 'home', the self can be worked upon in modest but nonetheless significant ways" (2007:232)

However, the spectrum of experimentation and exploration must be problematized. As much as the young people seek for new experiences, the search is also about a search for 'acceptable familiarity' or 'knowable difference' (Waters and Brooks 2011), in which the host country was chosen due to its cultural and historical affinity with home country (Conradson and Latham 2007). In this sense, going away is about a search for an individualized biography through global experiences and exploration (Yoon 2014), albeit within the limits of 'knowable difference'.

Although the process of 'individuation' is commonly tied to the idea of autonomy and independence (Conradson and Latham 2005; Holdsworth 2009; Tse and Waters 2013), the freedom from parental scrutiny also carries the potential of prolonging the experiences of adolescence through the emphasis on fun, exploration and experimentation in the extended present and keeping the future at bay (Brannen and Nielsen 2002; Waters et al. 2011). In this sense, the student migrants' time perspective during their experience in the host country has serious implication on how they anticipate their transition to

adulthood in the future (Brannen and Nielsen 2002; Du-Bois Reymond 1998). As such, attention should be paid towards the transformative power of youth mobility and its impact on the student migrants' entrance into adulthood roles after the completion of their educational trajectory.

1.4.3 The Familial Obligation: Filial Piety and Marriage

According to Bynner, the rates and forms of transition to adulthood are "strongly dependent on both the institutional factors (how the transition from school to work is managed) and structural factors such as social class, gender, ethnicity and locality" (2005:372). While the exit from school to work is a key factor in the Chinese youth's transition to adulthood, Yeung and Hu (2013) also noted the cultural emphasis on filial obligations to family members and marriage in directing the young people's transition to adulthood in China. Influenced by the Confucian concept of *xiao* or 'filial piety', the parent-child relationship is governed by an 'intergenerational reciprocity contract' (Ho 2008) in which the child is expected to respect and take care of their parents in the Chinese society (Shen 2009:225). As such, tied to the investment of the child's education abroad is also the expectation for the child to return home for his or her filial duty after study (see Deutsch 2004). Coupled with the construction of filial piety is also an obligation for the child to make their parents happy by getting married and having children (Wang and Abbott 2013), albeit in a highly gendered fashion as seen in the pressure for females to marry early in life (Wang and Abbott 2013). As a result of the strong cultural and gendered norm for marriage, there is an immediate pressure for the female students to return to China in order to enter into a married life after

study (Xiang and Shen 2009). In addition to the bind of the intergenerational reciprocity contract, attention must therefore be paid towards how the Chinese youths negotiate with the gendered expectations on the marriage norm as they negotiate their pathway alongside the transition to adulthood. If exit from school involves a transition to adulthood, then the question is also how do the Chinese youths negotiate with the impending transition to adulthood roles as a filial child who is expected to adopt the caregiver role for their parents as well as to enter into a married life. Therefore, insofar as the freedom abroad creates the possibility for the Chinese youths' exploration and experimentation of the self, their transition to adulthood must also be examined in relation to the broader structural influences tied to the construction of familial obligations that operate transnationally.

1.5 Prospectus

Situated in the transitional phase of emerging adulthood, the Mainland Chinese students' experience of spending a critical period of their life abroad has the potential of sharpening the processes that structure the transition to adulthood. By examining the motivations, aspirations and experiences embedded in the student migration trajectory, this thesis seeks to examine how these processes shape the Chinese youths' pathway as they navigate their life alongside the transition to adulthood. This chapter has provided an overview on the objectives of this research. Chapter 2 will introduce the comparative logic of analysis and my positionality. Chapter 3 unpacks the Mainland Chinese students' motivations and aspirations for studying overseas. Chapter 4 will bring attention to how the Mainland Chinese students reground their life

in Singapore and how they negotiate with the new sense of freedom from the parental scrutiny and institutional support from home. As the Mainland Chinese students come of age at the completion of their educational trajectory, Chapter 5 will bring attention to how they negotiate with the new sense of adulthood responsibilities in the post-study trajectory. Finally, Chapter 6 will conclude this thesis with a discussion on the significance of the findings.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University

It was reported in 2010 that Singapore ranks fifth after the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia as the most popular study destination for outgoing Mainland Chinese students (Straits Times, 8 June 2010) and more than 40 000 Mainland Chinese students were in Singapore at that point in time[14] (Straits Times, 16 November 2010). This thesis samples National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) as the sites of investigation in the examination of the Mainland Chinese students' motivation for overseas education and their student migration experience. Characterized by its high international student profile, up to 20% of undergraduates and 50% of postgraduates are made up of international students in these universities (The Business Times, 26 May 2007).

Just as China is dependent on the rest of the world to train its students, Singapore also relies on China's demand for overseas education in its search for foreign talents through the attraction of outstanding Mainland Chinese students to Singapore as part of its human capital management. Identified as one of the key groups of talents Singapore seeks to attract, a preliminary research by Hing *et al.* (2009) have noted the extension of scholarships and grants as a popular conduit through which the Mainland Chinese students

[14] There is no official statistic on the international student population in Singapore. However, it was reported in 2005 that the number of Mainland Chinese students estimated at 33 000 constitute the largest proportion of the international student population in Singapore (Straits Times, 3 December 2005). The Mainland Chinese students can be found at various levels of the education system from primary to tertiary education and in both public and private sectors (Lim 2011:2).

enter the higher education institutions in Singapore (also see Yeoh and Lin 2013). Most notably, the Senior Middle School (SM) Scholarship introduced in 1992 as a collaboration between Singapore's Ministry of Education and its Chinese counterpart plays a pivotal role in facilitating the Mainland Chinese student migratory flows to NUS and NTU. Furthermore, as Singapore shifts towards the development of a Global Schoolhouse, its development of joint-programs with the Chinese universities, such as the NTU-Wuhan Joint Education Program, also facilitates the student migratory flow from China to Singapore. The substantial population of Mainland Chinese students in NUS and NTU therefore creates an opening for the examination of the Mainland Chinese students' motivations, aspirations and experiences in the student migration trajectory.

2.2 Post-Study Destination

Circular migration can no longer be taken for granted in accounting for the student migrants' post-study trajectory. Rather, international education opens the possibility for the student migrants to choose their location after study (see Alberts and Hazen 2005; Li et al. 1996; Ziguras and Law 2006). Although returning home may appear to be a natural choice due to the pull of the "the students' existing stock of knowledge and personal capital and significantly their filial obligations to family" at home, staying in the host country is also a possible choice due to the development of a "set of friendships and a deeper knowledge of the host society and its people" that tie the student migrants to the host country (Ho 2014:165). In other words, more than just a calculated decision based on the anticipated economic rewards between the two countries

(see Waters 2006, 2008; Alberts and Hazen 2005), the post-study trajectory must also be examined in relation to the student migrants' social relationships that operate across the home country and the host country. This thesis adopts a dual-site sampling technique in order to examine the social processes that influence the evaluation of the capital acquired through education.

Beijing:

As China emerges as an economic superpower in the world, returning home is becoming an increasingly attractive option for many overseas-educated Mainland Chinese students (Shen 2008a, 2008b; Li 2013; Teo 2011; Bail and Shen 2008). However, the return home may not necessarily be a return to the home city. Instead, a government report in 2014 revealed that 57.94 percent of the Mainland Chinese returnees are drawn to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen because of the perceived employment opportunities available in these first-tier cities[15] (Sina News, 7 December 2014). This thesis sample Beijing as a site of investigation in the examination of returning Mainland Chinese students.

In 2004, the Chinese state announced its plan to develop Beijing into a modern cosmopolis (China Daily, 21 February 2004). Since then, Beijing has shifted towards a globalizing economy through a search for international skilled talents and attracting foreign direct investments (Newman and Thornley 2011). Amongst these developments includes the call for overseas Mainland Chinese students to return to Beijing through the introduction of preferential

[15] The first-tier cities are characterized by its economic development, advanced infrastructure, and historical, cultural and political significance in China (Sohu News, 30 March 2014).

policies[16] that place a high premium on the returnees' cross-cultural experiences and advanced skilled acquired from overseas (Biao and Shen 2009). Just like the highly skilled talents who are drawn to the economic potential of the metropolis (Beaverstock and Smith 1996; Findlay et. al 1996; Ong 2007), Beijing is selected as a site of investigation because of its economic potential in drawing the returnees to such economic center, where the premium placed on their knowledge and skills can be fully maximized. Therefore, this thesis samples the Mainland Chinese graduates who return to Beijing in order to examine their post-study trajectory.

Singapore:

The internationalization of student enrolment in Singapore's higher educational institutions is imbued with the state's strategy on human capital management for its global economy. Identified as potential 'foreign talents', the Mainland Chinese students are one of the key groups of international students that Singapore tries to attract (Hing *et al.* 2009). In addition to the ease of obtaining a student visa in Singapore, the Mainland Chinese students are offered generous financial grants such as the Tuition Grant Scheme[17] or the SM Scholarship that are only available to those who intend to study at Singapore's national universities. In exchange for the financial grants, the Mainland Chinese students are obliged to serve a 3 to 6 years service

[16] For instance, Mainland Chinese students who have obtained a post-graduate degree overseas can change their *hukou* ('household registration') to Beijing residence. For the Mainland Chinese, the *hukou* is more than a household registration. It also signifies their entitlement to state welfare such as housing and healthcare benefits that are only available to those who are registered within the geographical area. Therefore, it has significant material impact on the Mainland Chinese's everyday life. Further, institutions such as Beijing Zhongguancun International Incubator are set up to offer incubation services to the returned students.

[17] The Tuition Grant Scheme is offered to all international students who are enrolled in Singapore's public tertiary institutions in exchange for 3 years of service obligation in a Singapore-registered company upon graduation.

obligation in Singapore after graduation, thus facilitating the their transition into Singapore's workforce after study. It was reported in 2012 that most international students served out their bond after study, thus suggesting the substantial number of Mainland Chinese students who continue to stay in Singapore after study (Yahoo News, 27 March 2012). This thesis samples the Mainland Chinese graduates who remain in Singapore after the completion of their studies in NUS or NTU in order to examine their experience the post-study trajectory.

2.3 Biography and Research Objectives

If international student mobility is embedded in the dynamics of education, aspirations and students' status, then I need to interview the following categories of students in order to address the research objectives of this thesis. Three groups of student migrants were selected: (1) Mainland Chinese students who are currently studying in NUS and NTU, (2) Mainland Chinese students who remain in Singapore after study and (3) Mainland Chinese students who return to Beijing after study. While these three groups can provide information on their decision for overseas education and their experience in Singapore, only the graduates can reflect and account for their experiences on the transition to adulthood roles after study. In other words, the accounts from these three groups of student migrants complement one another to provide a nuanced account on the Mainland Chinese students' experience in the student migration trajectory as they negotiate their life alongside the transition to adulthood.

The majority of the informants in this study are single-children who grew up in the post-Mao era. In general, the interviewees' age of arrival is between 17 and the mid 20s[18] and none of them is married at the point of studying in Singapore. The sample consists of a combination of scholarship recipients[19] and self-funding students in either undergraduate or postgraduate studies. The self-funding students are generally from middle-class background, whereas the socioeconomic backgrounds of the scholarship recipients are more diverse[20]. Most of the undergraduates came to Singapore through the SM Scholarship, while there are also a few informants who enrolled into NTU through the NTU-Wuhan Joint Education Program.

Interviews with current Mainland Chinese students and Mainland Chinese alumni in Singapore were sought through a snowballing technique that involved the referrals from my acquaintances and their subsequent recommendations between September 2014 and November 2014. Contacts with the Mainland Chinese returnees were mainly established through the referrals from my friends in Singapore and the assistance of a gatekeeper from the Beijing NUS alumni network. I contacted and presented my research objective to the NUS Beijing Alumni Chapter before I left for the fieldwork in

[18] Some of the SM Scholars came at 17 when they have just completed the second year of high school in China. This group of SM Scholars would then participate in a bridging course in Singapore for a period between 6 months to 1.5 years before they begin their university education. The post-graduate students are generally in the 20s when they first arrived in Singapore.

[19] Refers to the SM Scholarship for the undergraduates and the Research Scholarship awarded by the post-graduate research programs at the national universities. In this study, only Shuhui was awarded with a scholarship from a private organization in Singapore. Refer to appendix 2 for more information on the informants' profile.

[20] The social exclusion of international student mobility is well noted in the existing scholarship (e.g. Brooks and Waters 2009; Li and Bray 2007). While international students from middle-class families tend to rely on self-financing, those from the working-class rely on the extension of scholarships in financing their student migration trajectory

Beijing. B, a gatekeeper in the Beijing Alumni Chapter, and I had an informal agreement where he would refer informants to me through his personal friendship with the NUS alumni in Beijing. Thereafter, the interviews with the returnees in Beijing were conducted between June and July 2014. In total, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 Mainland Chinese students who are, at the point of interview, still studying in NUS and NTU; 9 Mainland Chinese returnees in Beijing; and 12 Mainland Chinese graduates who remain in Singapore after study. Out of the 33 interviewees, 10 are females. Verbal consents were sought before the interviews were conducted. The informants were also informed on the purpose of the research and the digital recording of the interview. To ensure the anonymity of the informants, the names in this thesis are fictitious. This thesis relies on the method of biographical interview in generating empirical accounts of the Mainland Chinese students' lived experience in their educational trajectory in order to have a nuanced account on the informants' student migration trajectory.

2.4 Biographical Interviews: Capturing a Slice of the Pathway Critical to the Transition to Adulthood

The transitional stage between childhood and adulthood is arguably the most malleable phase of the life course as it opens up numerous opportunities and possibilities for multiple potential futures of the self (Arnett 2000). By situating the student migration trajectory the malleable phase of emerging adulthood, the objective of this thesis is to examine how the experience of spending a critical period of the life course abroad influences the Mainland Chinese students' pathway in life. This thesis is therefore anchored in a particular slice of the Mainland Chinese students' biography, which is an

approximate period of 5 to 8 years that is the most critical to the young people's transition to adulthood. Appropriating Liz Stanley's work on sociological biographies, this thesis adopts the biographical interview as the method for data generation:

> "From one person['s biographical story] we can recover social process and social structure, networks, social change and so forth, for people are located in a social and cultural environment which constitutes and not shapes only what we see, but also how we see [and how we move in life]" (1993:45).

This thesis seeks to extrapolate the Mainland Chinese students' lived experience at a specific phase of their emerging adulthood, namely, the move from China to Singapore, the experience of studying in Singapore and the Chinese youths' entrance into adulthood after study. Through an examination of the Mainland Chinese students' biographical stories anchored in a particular point of the life course, this thesis seeks to recover the social and cultural processes that not only direct what and how they see their life, but also how it influence their life as they move in life alongside the transition to adulthood. Therefore, the objective of adopting a biographical interview is to examine how the Mainland Chinese students negotiate with the interplay of these processes at the most critical point of their life course and its impact on their pathway in life.

Despite the inductive nature of qualitative research, the conceptualization of this thesis is also informed by the investigator's prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (Ryan and Bernard 2003:88). As a joint-production, the biographical stories are sensitized by the interview's

prior theoretical framework in asking certain questions that addresses the research objective, even though the reliance on the informants' narrative creates the possibility for new themes to arise. In the case of this study, the interview guide[21] was designed to address the question on the portability of academic credentials due to an earlier conceptualization of this thesis. However, the research evolved into an analysis on the Chinese youths' transition to adulthood in response to the new themes that emerged from the biographical accounts generated. Therefore, I tried to practice theoretical sensitivity in threading between the themes that emerged from the biographical accounts and the researcher's conceptualization in the generation, analysis and interpretation of the data (Pidgeon and Henwood 1994).

Nevertheless, the reliance on the Mainland Chinese informants to recount their biographical stories points to potential bias that may threaten the validity of the data generated. To address this issue, it is important to emphasize the fact that reality is not a given:

> "when a person defines a situation as real, this situation is real in its consequences… the researcher has to see the world from the angle of the subjects he or she studies". (Stryker 1976:259, cited in Flick 2002:17)

In contrast to a search for an objective reality that is grounded in positivist assumption (Kirk and Miller 1986), the inductive and interpretive nature of this thesis directs attention towards an examination on 'how' the subjective reality is constructed by the social actors. Reality, then, is not a given but a

[21] The use of the interview guide was flexible and subjected to change in response to the interview context. Refer to Appendix 3

construction by different actors (Flick 2002). Therefore, the empirical data for the proposed research is generated by the informants' construction of their lived reality. The objective is to uncover how the Mainland Chinese students conceive their overseas education experience as an influence in their subsequent trajectory, instead of falsifying the "truth" in their claims.

In general, the interviews were conducted in English. For those who expressed a discomfort in the use of the English language, Mandarin Chinese was used instead. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and analyzed in the original language. Due to time constraint, only certain key quotes were translated from Chinese into English. As I am effectively bilingual and competent with the two languages, I tried my best to stick to the original meanings as close as possible in order to prevent the loss of meanings through translation. Each interview lasted between 60 minutes to 90 minutes. At times, I also proceeded with a follow-up interview with a few key informants to address the gaps identified during the analysis. While there is some validity to the claims of thinness, the richness of the data generated cannot be based on a sole judgment of time commitment to the data generation process. Instead, the richness of the data generated is also dependent on the context in which the empirical data is generated, the rapport between the interviewer and the informants, and the interviewer's sensitivity and reflexivity in directing the flow of the interview. In other words, extended interview time should "not be regarded as an inflexible rule of methodology" (Handel 2000:7) in the biographical interview method. More importantly, attention should be directed

towards the emphasis on the interview's sensitivity and reflexivity in the interview process that would be discussed in detail in the next section.

2.5 Reflections on My Position

> "The interviewee is a storyteller, the narrator of the story being told, whereas the interviewer is a guide, or director in this process. The two together are collaborators, composing, constructing a story the teller can be pleased with." (Atkinson 1998:19)

Rather than data collection, the epistemological position of this thesis is grounded on the premise of data generation where the empirical data generated is a result of a joint production between the interviewee and the interviewer. Although the process of data generation centers on the informants' accounts of their lived experience, 'how' the story is told is dependent on the interviewer's guidance and his or her position in relation to the interviewee. In this sense, the process of data generation is also shaped by my own position as Singaporean Chinese, a fellow student at NUS, and a female who is in the mid 20s.

As a post-graduate student in NUS, my position as a fellow student allows me to tap into the alumni network and the international students' network in the campus in my search for informants for this study. Very often, the Mainland Chinese students, especially the returnees in Beijing[22], express a sense of affection towards me as they consider me as their junior (*xiaoshimei*) or fellow

[22] For instance, during my fieldwork in Beijing, I was invited to many informal lunch and dinners with the returnees. Not only was it considered as proper courtesy for them to welcome their Singaporean friend through a proper treat, the invitation was also part of the manifestation of their affection towards the alma mater.

schoolmate (*tongxue*)[23]. Furthermore, being in the similar age group bridges the distance between me and the current students and recent graduates. As someone who is still in the youthful phase of the life course, my position creates an opening for the Mainland Chinese students to share about their youthful experiences of 'experimentation' and 'exploration' (see Arnett 2000). For instance, Chapter 4 brings attention to the exploratory qualities of youth in which the student migration experience is constructed as a period for fun and enjoyment instead of mere academic investment. In this sense, being in the common stage of life as the Chinese youths has created the opportunity for me to tap into the exploratory dimension of the student migration trajectory, where the Chinese youths share with me about their 'playfulness' without the fear of judgment.

In the initial conceptualization of this study, I have never expected gender to be an issue of concern till the female students raised the issue of marriage in accounting for the decision on their post-study destination. For instance, Jialing speaks of the need to return to China in order to fulfill her father's wish for her to participate in the matchmaking sessions in Chapter 5. I believe my position as a female, and also one who would probably face the issue of marriage soon due to my age, has created a sense of empathy that allows for such accounts to arise from the female students in this study. In this sense, my position as a female who is in the mid 20s has also allowed me to tap into the gender dimension embedded in the student migration trajectory, which would

[23] The NUS alumni usually address me as their junior, or *xiaoshimei* (小师妹). For the recent graduates, I am considered as a fellow schoolmate, or *tongxue* (同学) because of the closer age difference.

perhaps be more difficult to extract should a male researcher be conducting the process of data generation.

Nevertheless, I am also an outsider to the Mainland Chinese students' world due to my position as Singaporean Chinese. The Mainland Chinese students often articulate a sense of surprise at my fluent command of Mandarin Chinese. Although my Singaporean Chinese identity may appear to be culturally similar to the Mainland Chinese, the articulation of surprise is also a sign of the cultural divide between the Mainland Chinese and the Singaporean Chinese (see Tong and Chan 2001)[24]. More than just a language difference, there was often a sense of taken-for-grantedness in the Mainland Chinese students' articulation of their student migration experience that makes it difficult for me to comprehend due to the my position as an outsider to their lived reality. To address this issue, I tried to exercise cultural sensitivity and reflexivity by further questioning and verifying the sense of taken-for-granteness during the interview in an attempt to bridge the cultural distance between the informants and I.

A more challenging issue is the Mainland Chinese students' discomfort in articulating their experience or challenges faced in Singapore because they were afraid of critiquing 'my home country' or 'my university'. At times, I

[24] Very often, I am reminded of the singularity and the fluidity of Chinese identity. To my Mainland Chinese informants, the Singaporean Chinese is a different type of Chinese subject. Their imagination of the Singaporean Chinese appears to be one who is Westernized (*xifanghua*) and modern (*xiandaihua*). To them, we are 'less Chinese' than the *real* Chinese who came from China. Clearly, their imagination of the Chinese identity resembles Tong and Chan's argument that racial and ethnical identity could be "one face (racial), many masks (cultural)" (2001:386). A prominent cultural marker in distinguishing the two ethnicities is the use of language where the Singaporean Chinese are imagined to be English-speaking rather than Mandarin-speaking.

faced the question of "whose side are you on" (see Becker 1967; Liebing 2001) when the informants misunderstood my research objective as an attempt to 'glorify' the national universities and the Singapore government. During such occasion, they would ask me if my research is about extracting the positive attributes of NUS in influencing their life. I had to explain that I am interested in *their* stories as a student migrant and it does not matter to me whether NUS is put in a positive light or not, because it is *their* experience that matters. Nevertheless, when the interview topic switched to the difficulties faced in Singapore, it was often brushed aside very quickly. During the rare occasion when the informants were open towards sharing their difficult experience in Singapore, they would often normalize it as a joke in order to mask their discomfort.

Clearly, my identity as Singaporean Chinese puts me in a position of an outsider to the Mainland Chinese students' lived reality. The challenges faced in this study could only be eased by a strong rapport between the informants and I. Given the time constrain, I tried to do my best in building a good rapport with the informants through a casual chit-chat before the start of the interview. During the interview, I switched to a casual conversation whenever the informants expressed any sense of discomfort. The aim was to conduct interviews that resemble a friendly conversation without causing any emotional harm or pressure on the informants. I also adopted Spradley's (1979) principle of explanation such that the research objectives were articulated clearly, and sometimes repeatedly, to minimize any doubts.

Chapter 3: Motivations for Overseas Education

Situated in the transitional phase of emerging adulthood, the student migration trajectory intersects with the ideology of youth as a period for fun and the commitment to education in preparation for the future transition to adulthood and work. For the Mainland Chinese students in this study, studying abroad creates the possibility for them to travel out of China in the search for global experience. However, the possibility for exploration and experimentation is also rationalized by the discourse of overseas education as a route to academic pursuit. In this sense, these two processes reinforce each other in the examination of the Mainland Chinese students' motivation for overseas education. This chapter will bring attention to how the motivations for overseas education are driven by the interplay of youthful aspirations as well as the commitment to education.

3.1 The Chinese Youths' Aspirations: The Desire to "Open Eyes"

> "The moon is rounder on the other side. (laugh) It's true, it's true. Because the world is unknown, so maybe full of opportunities. You can experience new, brand new stuff. Meet people, yeah… young people dare to dream, to adventure I guess?" (Junyang, male, undergraduate, SM scholarship)[25]

Situated in the youthful phase of the life course, the student migration trajectory intersects with the exploratory and experimental qualities of youth in which young people are expected to try out 'all the fun things' (Brannen and Nielsen 2002), albeit one that is anchored in the search for foreign

[25] The informant's profile is listed as: (name, gender, student status, type of financing). Refer to Appendix 2 for the informants' biography.

experience overseas (see Krzaklewska 2008; Waters *et al.* 2011). For this group of Chinese youths who are born into the Post-Mao era of Economic Reform and Liberalization, the exposure to the influx of foreign influence brought along by the opening of China has led to a formation of a strong sense of admiration and curiosity about the outside world (see Fong 2011; Yang 1997; Liu 1997; Cheng and Berman 2012; Wang 2006). Just as Junyang who describes 'the moon as rounder on the other side', the admiration and curiosity translate to a desire to step out of China in order to verify the image of paradise that the Chinese youths have constructed in their imagination of "the other side". Unlike the previous generation whose aspirations are suppressed by China's bamboo curtain, the characteristic of 'openness' (Lian 2014:971) has become part of the post-80s and post-90s Chinese youths as going abroad becomes both possible and desirable today. Studying overseas therefore creates an opening for this group of Chinese youths to satiate their hunger and curiosity about the outside word as they seek to acquire an eye opening experience through the search for new adventures and interactions with foreign cultures outside of China. Embedded in the Chinese youths' desire to step out of China is also the Chinese parents' wish to compensate for their suppressed desire in the previous generation through the investment in their child's education overseas, albeit one that must be problematized in relation to a gender constraints. Rooted in the imaginary that arises out of China's opening up, this section will bring attention to the conception of studying abroad as an opportunity for the Chinese youths to step out of China in hope of expanding one's worldview.

Subjected to the influence of the opening up policy, the Chinese youths in this study "grew up with images of wealthier [foreign] societies that abounded in movies, advertisements, television shows, the news media, foreign products, and tales told by the elite few who had been abroad" (Fong 2004a:631). Not only do the Chinese youths learn to see the outside world with a lens of curiosity and admiration, the exposure to the numerous possibilities in life brought along by China's Reform has also created a common belief that going abroad is both possible and desirable. For many of the Mainland Chinese students in this study, studying abroad therefore creates an opening for them to fulfill their dream to step out of China in the search for foreign exposure and global experience. For instance, Zhicai explains:

> "Well, my objective for going overseas was not to do research. I just wanted to go outside to have a look at the world. Before going to Singapore, I have never been abroad. I am a very *tu* ('old fashion'[26]) person… […] I feel that China has always been in seclusion since the Qing dynasty. Although the Chinese Economic Reform was introduced in 1979, I have never gone overseas. Everyone, such as my teachers, always claim that the moon is the West is rounder. I would like to see if the moon in the West is really rounder than the one in China." (Zhicai[27], male, postgraduate, research scholarship)

Situated in the youthful phase of the life course, the student migration trajectory coincides with the exploration and experimental qualities characterized by 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett 2000) as the Chinese youths negotiate their pathways in response to the multiple potential futures awarded by the freedom from the constraints of social roles. Although the student migration trajectory is commonly characterized as a transitional period for

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[26] In this context, *tu* also denotes a lack of exposure to the outside world.

[27] Translated from Mandarin Chinese

academic pursuit in preparation for the young people's impending transition to adulthood roles, it is also about the possibility for fun, enjoyment and the pursuit of happiness abroad (Waters *et al.* 2011). In this sense, while the historical moment of China's opening up creates the imaginary and hunger for the Chinese youths to travel out of China in the search for global experience, studying abroad provides the rationalization and justification that allows the them to step out of China.

At times, the motivations for overseas education intersect with the intergenerational transfer of aspirations from the parents to the child. Rooted in the construction of overseas education as an avenue for the Chinese youths to "open their eyes" is also the parents' desire to compensate for what has been lost and denied to in the previous generation through the investment and indulgence in their only-child as noted in Ziting's account:

> "Maybe just want to open eyes. Simply is just to open eyes. […] I think there's some mixed reason from the talents who moved overseas. It's like… your parents want you to do that? Or your parents, because all the Chinese parents, especially our 1980 generation, only child in family. Family has quite high expectations to you and erm because… *our parents' generation, they don't have much experience overseas, to, to go overseas. That's why they would, they really want their kids… to just see the world for them*. So if your kid is smart enough to study in the top universities in China, your parents will always want you to push you to go outside." (Ziting, female, postgraduate, self-funding)

For many of the Mainland Chinese students in this study, the desire to step out of China is also about seeing the world for the parents who were denied from the possibility of going abroad in the previous generation. In this sense, the

investment in the child's education overseas encompasses the parents' aspiration for the child to "fulfill the dreams their parents had for themselves that they were unable to achieve" (Sabet 2011:544). Therefore, going beyond the discourse of international student mobility as a mere avenue for academic pursuit, the motivations for studying overseas also include the search for an eye opening experience outside of China that are embedded in the Chinese youths' desire as well as the parental aspiration.

Nevertheless, the parental desire for their child to acquire global experience can be constrained by the strong cultural and gendered norm for marriage, especially for the females who intend to pursue a postgraduate education overseas after the completion of their Bachelor education at home. In contrast to many of the Mainland Chinese students who are encouraged by their parents to go abroad, Yutong's mother opposed her decision to do a postgraduate program overseas due to her mother's wish for her daughter to marry early and to stay closer to home. Yutong's account therefore directs attention to how the youthful desire for adventures overseas can potentially come into conflict with the strong cultural norm for marriage imposed on the females:

> "For my mum, she thinks that it's better for girls to stay near home. […] My mother sometimes say, why did you study so hard and why did you want to, for example, go to a lot of places? Just stay here and enjoy what you got and get us a stable salary every month. That's ok. They will be *super happy* [original emphasis]. So yeah… so I think the pursuit of their life is steady and happiness so I think that's a good… good pursuit I acknowledge but sometimes I think yes, *if you really settle in that way, I will feel not so much fulfilled because I haven't experience other things.* So yeah… I want something. I don't know. Probably just continue and try to

> experience something more, yes… More freedom […] *So I just want to see if some place will provide me education that let me to be free for several more years.* Then I will be very happy to do this. […] so she hopes me to… just graduate from Master, do not go on and come back and find a job and marry husband and stay… stay with the family. That's what my mum hopes." (Yutong, female, postgraduate, research scholarship)

More than just a 'youthful escape' for fun and enjoyment overseas (Waters *et al.'s* 2011), studying abroad is also about resisting and escaping from the parental objections and gendered constraints at home, especially for the postgraduate female students who are confronted with the immediate pressure to enter into a married life as they come of age. The anticipated freedom awarded from going abroad is nevertheless temporary because the female students would once again be confronted with the strong cultural and gendered norm for marriage after study as reflected in Yutong's mother's expectation of her. In this respect, the Chinese youths' desire to "open eyes" encompasses a gendered dimension that demands the female students to negotiate the room for self-development overseas vis-à-vis the gendered constraints which would be further elaborated in Chapter 5.

Although the prospect of leaving China is tied to a sense of excitement to explore the unknown world, leaving home is also filled with a sense of uncertainties, as individuals would be alienated from their sense of community and social identities at home (Bruhn 2005). To assuage this sense of anxieties, the Chinese youths speak of their choice of destination in relation to the immediate concerns of adjustment during the period of study, of which many are drawn to Singapore's affinity with "Eastern culture". Zhicai explains:

> "I feel that it will be better to go to Singapore first before I travel to Europe or America. It will be easier to adjust to Singapore because it is a middle point where the Eastern culture intersects with the Western culture." (Zhicai, male, postgraduate, research scholarship)

For many of the Chinese youths in this study, the "Eastern culture" effectively refers to the predominance of 'Chinese culture' in Singapore due to its characteristic as a Chinese dominated society[28], thus allowing for an imagination of Singapore's cultural proximity with China. Borrowing Giddens'[29] (1991) concept of 'ontological security' as stability and a continuity to individuals' identity, the potential to extend one's cultural identity in the host country awarded by the (perceived) cultural proximity between Singapore and China therefore creates the 'ontological security' and stability for the student migrants, who would otherwise be uprooted from their sense of social and cultural identities from home during the sojourn. Yet as a "middle point", going to Singapore also offers the student migrants the possibility of experimenting with new experience awarded by the "Western culture". In this sense, the desire for exploration in the outside world is essentially about a desire to explore safely within a 'knowable difference' (Waters and Brooks 2011), thus mediating many of the uncertainties associated with the act of migrating (Conradson and Latham 2005).

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[28] In 2014, 76.2% of the population is made up of the Chinese ethnic group in Singapore (National Population Talent Division 2014).

[29] Ontological security refers to a "person's fundamental sense of safety in the world and includes a basic trust of other people. Obtaining such trust becomes necessary in order for a person to maintain a sense of psychological well-being and avoid existential anxiety" (Giddens 1991:38–39).

For many of the Chinese youths, the motivation for overseas education is anchored in the youthful aspirations that arise out of the globalization of China during the post-Mao era. Situated in the youthful phase of the life course, the student migration trajectory coincides with the experimental and exploratory qualities that create an opening for the Chinese youths to construct themselves as free subjects in the search for global experiences overseas, albeit one that is also subjected to the influence of parental aspirations, gendered norms and the sense of uncertainties of leaving home. Nevertheless, the construction of overseas education as an "adventure" of the unknown world is only one of the rationales in accounting for the Mainland Chinese students' motivations for overseas education. Equally important is the rationalization of overseas education as a route for academic pursuit in creating the possibility for the Chinese youths to go abroad. The next section will bring attention to how the motivation for studying abroad is rooted in construction of education as an avenue for the pursuit of cultural capital and social mobility for the middle-class families.

3.2 Middle-Class Families' Pursuit of Cultural Capital and Social Mobility

> "I mean... in China, the thing is, you don't really plan for anything. So Chinese society basically is still a society whereby education is highly valued. So being the only child in the family, your parents basically will hold a lot of resources on you to get you a great education. When you have a great education, you can climb the socioeconomic ladder, all the way up." (Liqin, male, postgraduate, self-funding)

Seen as the 'vanguard of modernization' in China (Fong 2004b)[30], the one-child policy has resulted in the formation of a shared interest in the investment of the single-child's education due to the common belief in academic achievements as the route to success in life (Tsui and Rich 2002). As a form of institutionalized cultural capital, academic investment is meaningless unless a minimum degree of convertibility between cultural capital and economic capital is objectively guaranteed by the monetary value of a given academic capital (Bourdieu 1986). In other words, the link between academic investment and social mobility lies in the linear assumption on the conversion of values between academic qualifications and employment opportunities. However, the high expectation on every child to become a winner through academic investment also translates to an intense competition in the Chinese education system, in which the *gaokao* ('National Higher Education Entrance Examination') is commonly understood as 'life's most important test' (China Daily, 23 November 2012) as the Chinese youths compete to get into the most prestigious universities in China. In response to the intense competition in the Chinese education system, the middle-class families in this study exercise their 'rights' as consumers of education through the search for an alternative route in the pursuit of academic distinction overseas (see Waters 2006). Although overseas education is part of the middle-class families' strategic move to help their precious child escape from the competition at home, it is also rationalized by the opportunity for the middle-class students to acquire valuable cultural capital from high-prestige universities overseas that allows for the reproduction of their middle-class identity. This section seeks to bring

[30] The aim of the one-child policy is to create a generation of ambitious and well-educated children who would be responsible for the economic development and the modernization of China (see Fong 2004b; Liu 2008).

attention to the middle-class families' strategic use of overseas education as an escape from the competition at home as well as a pursuit of cultural capital and social mobility.

In response to the prospect of failure[31] in the education system at home, the middle-class families are confronted with the options of their children entering the labor market while "potentially risking their family's 'status'", or the search for a alternative route to educational success through a 'roundabout' route of overseas education (Waters 2007:486). In other words, the link between education, spatial mobility and social reproduction are brought to the fore in the prospect of the middle-class students' failure in the local education system (Waters 2006:184). In the case of this study, the middle-class families' strategy of helping the child escapes from the anticipated failure and intense competition in China is a manifestation of the search for a roundabout route in the pursuit of academic distinction and social mobility. For instance, Ruiting was sent to a British international school[32] for her high school education in preparation for her to study abroad due to her father's strategic attempt to help her escape from the pressurizing competition in the Chinese education system:

> "Because he erm…. He doesn't want me to be educated in China I think. Because… you know all the exams in China very very stressful. And he want me go overseas and to experience. They feel very like, if your child stay in China, it will be tortured by the education system… I think they have this concept to go overseas, you will receive better education. Like they dream their children

[31] 'Failure' is less about failing the *gaokao* than the failure or increasing difficulty to get into the elite universities in China.

[32] Under the UK education system, Ruiting sat for the GCE 'A' Level instead of the Chinese *gaokao*. This had implications on her university trajectory, as the 'A' Level certificate had effectively denied her from the possibility of entering into the Chinese universities.

> can get into Harvard, Cambridge yeah, Oxford." (Ruiting, female, undergraduate, self-funding)

Backed by the resources available from her middle-class background, the strategic move to escape from the pressure in the Chinese education system through the route of overseas education also illustrates the indulgence of the single-child in the middle-class families. Nevertheless, the escape from the intense competition at home does not translate to a renunciation of the belief in the intrinsic link between academic success and a 'good life' in China. Rather, the 'escape' is about taking a 'roundabout route' in the search for an alternative access to high prestige universities overseas that allows the Mainland Chinese students to compensate for the anticipated failure in the highly competitive and unforgiving education system in China. Therefore, the motivation for overseas education is still tied to the pursuit of academic credentials from elite universities, albeit through a less pressurizing and less competitive means of studying overseas.

Not only is studying abroad an avenue for the middle-class students to escape from the competition at home, the search for academic distinction via international education is also an important mechanism in the maintenance and reproduction of their social status (Li and Bray 2006). Borrowing from Bourdieu's (1986) concept of symbolic capital, the motivation for overseas education is at times articulated in symbolic terms where some of the Mainland Chinese students seek to acquire "face" through the entrance into high-prestige university overseas. For Liqin, although employability is more of a utilization of his family's social capital than about the conversion of

credentials into employment opportunities for the middle-class family, the search for academic distinction overseas is nonetheless necessary because of the family's "face":

> "Also, you can also imagine that some of us who came here actually have very powerful family background so they actually want their children to finish fast so that they can go back to China to take good positions. […] Erm… they value this kind of value positions whereby you have an overseas degree. It's kind of just a… it is like make your parents' life easier. And in Chinese culture, you have face issue. Sometimes you have failure, if I'm a guy who are in a good position in the job and he didn't have any degrees and everybody knows what happens right… you got connections, relationship with the government so you get this kind of jobs. For the educated ones, they don't want that. They still want their children to receive good education even though without that, they still can have decent job." (Liqin, male, postgraduate, self-funding)

According to Bourdieu, as a rite of institution, schools have "the responsibility for performing the magical action of consecration" in producing a universally recognized noble title, thus "entitling its members to a determined category of power, as well as to recognition and respect" (1996:116-117). For Liqin's parents, studying abroad is precisely about the search for the symbolic effect of credentials in imposing recognition and respect to its holders through the credentials acquired from the high-prestige universities overseas. The "face issue" is effectively an attempt to reproduce the middle-class status not only in the material sense, but also symbolically where the members' status can be recognized and respected as legitimate through the acquisition of noble title from elite universities. In this sense, the motivations for overseas education is intrinsically linked to the parental aspirations to enhance the prestige ("face")

of the middle-class family through the accumulation of symbolic capital from elite universities.

If the motivation for overseas education is tied to the search for academic distinction via a roundabout route, it is not surprising that many of the Mainland Chinese students in this study consider the elite universities in U.S. and UK as their top choice of destination. However, many Mainland Chinese students in this study encountered difficulties in entering their ideal universities in the U.S. and UK due to their inability to meet the strict entrance requirements of their desired universities. Singapore, as one of the best providers of higher education in Asia[33], is in turn considered as the next best option for this group of Mainland Chinese students who are denied from their ideal choice. At times, the appeal of going to Singapore is also tied to the institutional bridges between the higher educational institutions in Singapore and its Chinese counterparts in facilitating the Mainland Chinese student migratory flows to Singapore. For instance, Liqin speaks of the convenience of the NTU-Wuhan Joint Education Program[34] in accounting for his decision to study in Singapore:

> "The thing is if you apply to US university, I was planning to erm… my parents are not so comfortable with the arrangement because my sister is in US, Chicago University in Chicago. The

[33] According to London-based education and career consultancy Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), NUS ranks at number 1 in Asia, while NTU stands at number 4 in 2005 (Straits Times, 10 June 2015).

[34] Under the NTU-Wuhan Joint Education Program, the Mainland Chinese students from Wuhan University would spend the fourth year doing their final year project at NTU's School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Subsequently, they will transit to a Master Program (MSc or MEng) at NTU's School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (Nanyang Technological University 2015).

> thing is my parents visit her a few times, not related sister[35] but you know so… they didn't like the environment there… She lives in a Black neighborhood, you know all these kind of, everything have to buy yourself… Then it comes the opportunity whereby you know, they actually have the program, which is around 30 students. You know in Wuhan University, you apply for this program and they approve your candidacy then you will go with the group. And Singapore is very famous for being a safe and you know, safe and secure country so my parents was like, ok why don't you just go for this program. So actually this program doesn't require TOEFL and GRE and it's quite straightforward. It's just three years at Wuhan University and you can go. So it sounds like a express way." (Liqin, male, postgraduate, self-funding)

Aside from the pragmatic considerations on the attributes of the university, the student migration trajectory is also embedded in social relationships, especially the bind of the parent-child relationship in the case of the Mainland Chinese students in this study. As Sabet noted (2011), the single-child is both an investment and a possession of the parents. As much as the Chinese parents are willing to invest in their child's education overseas, the separation from their precious child is also filled with a strong sense of anxieties for the Chinese parents. The consequence is the salience of parental influence in directing the choice of destination for their child's sojourn. As a Chinese-dominated society, the Chinese families are drawn to the greater sense of predictability awarded by Singapore's (perceived) cultural proximity with China. Furthermore, the imagination of Singapore as a 'safe' and 'secure' environment also reassures the Chinese parents on their precious child's wellbeing during the sojourn[36]. In this sense, the choice of destination for

[35] Refers to a non-kinship sister who shares an intimate relationship with the Liqin and his family.

[36] In their study on the international students' motivation for studying in Singapore, Sidhu *et al.* that "safety is uppermost in the minds of the international students, with 58.9% of those

overseas education encompasses the selection of the universities and the attributes of the host countries in providing a sense of assurance and ontological security for the Mainland Chinese students who are leaving and for their parents, whose precious child is leaving them. Though not considered a dream study destination, Singapore emerges as 'a realistic choice of study destination' (Lim 2011:56) for the Mainland Chinese students in this study.

As suggested by Sidhu *et al.*, education "is a site where family and individual aspirations for socio-economic mobility are materialized" (2011:26). For this particular group of middle-class students, the motivation for overseas education is precisely a manifestation of the middle-class families' aspirations for social mobility through the search for cultural capital overseas when such route is denied to them at home. Yet at the same time, their desire to gain access to elite universities overseas is also limited by the practical constraints of entry requirements and the bind of the parent-child relationship in directing the choice of destination. Therefore, the choice of Singapore as a destination for overseas education is constructed as the next best option for this group of middle-class students who seek to acquire credentials from elite universities as part of the broader strategy for the reproduction of the middle-class identities. Nevertheless, the middle-class families are not the only actor in directing the student migratory flows. In an attempt to attract top students to Singapore as part of its human capital management, the Singapore government also plays a significant role in creating the structural conditions that facilitate the Mainland Chinese student migratory flows to Singapore. The next section will bring

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surveyed mentioned Singapore's safe environment as a reason for them studying in Singapore" (Sidhu et al. 2011:35).

attention to how the Singapore government's extension of full scholarships has created the opportunity for some of the Mainland Chinese students to compensate for the failure at home through a second chance at entering elite universities in Singapore.

3.3 Seize that 'Second Chance': A Critical Moment in the Mainland Chinese Students' Life

> "You maybe get disappointed… Then they [the Singapore government] give you this chance, then you may think about it, it's another chance to choose a university again, even choose the subject or major…" (Meiting, female, undergraduate, SM scholarship)

Drawing from Bourdieu's (1996) concept of an 'honorable substitute', Brooks and Waters' study (2009) on the UK students' motivation for overseas education suggests for a conceptualization of overseas education as a search for an honorable substitute that compensates for the group of high achieving and high aspiring students who have failed at gaining access to the elite universities at home. In this sense, overseas education is about a 'second chance' at gaining access to elite universities through the strategy of transnational spatial mobility. For some of the Mainland Chinese students in this study, studying abroad is precisely a search for a 'second chance' for them to gain access to elite universities to compensate for their failure at home, albeit one that is made in response to a serendipitous opportunity when they were selected as a candidate for the SM Scholarship offered by the Singapore government. In a society that constructs academic achievements as the route to success in life (Jiang and Ashley 2000; Tsui and Rich 2002; Veeck *et al.* 2003), the acceptance of the SM Scholarship is therefore a 'critical moment'

(Thomson *et al.* 2002) for this group of Mainland Chinese students who are given another opportunity to reinvent themselves as winners through the access to the elite universities in Singapore, thus compensating for their failures at home. This section seeks to examine how this particular group of scholars imagines overseas education as a critical moment that provides them with a second chance at success.

Identified as the route to success in life, gaining access to the best forms of education is the primary goal of many Chinese youths. For this group of high aspiring and high achieving Mainland Chinese students, entering into the top universities in China like Peking University and Tsinghua University was often imagined as the only option worth considering (also see Brooks and Waters 2009). In other words, 'success' can only be materialized when the Mainland Chinese students have successfully gained access into the elite universities at home. For instance, Junliang, a high achiever in terms of his academic performance, repeatedly claimed that his only aim before going to Singapore was to enter Peking University (PKU) or Tsinghua University during the interview. However, failure to enter PKU and Tsinghua translated into a huge sense of disappointment:

> "The aim, your target is to get into best university so other than that, I don't really have a wilder dream or something, no. Yeah. (Laugh) yeah so actually I mean, my grade was quite good so they really expect me to get into the top universities so I almost spent every minutes, every second studying… It's like the top 5 in my school. I have lots of expectations on me. You know the best university is Tsinghua and *beida* (PKU), they all say I can get into Tsinghua *beida*. When I actually see the [*gaokao*] score, it was very very huge disappointment for me, for my parents, for my

> teachers so and…" (Junliang, male, postgraduate[37], research scholarship)

When his grades for the *gaokao* failed to meet the entrance requirements of PKU and Tsinghua, he had to enter Dalian University of Technology (DLUT) as the next best option until he was offered an opportunity to participate in the SM Scholarship Program. For Junliang, the appeal of the SM Scholarship lies in the provision of a second chance for him to search for an honorable substitute that could compensate for his failure to enter PKU and Tsinghua:

> "So actually after the *gaokao*, I was enrolled in a university in Dalian... When I opened the administration letter package, there was a sheet of paper say that you also have this opportunity and only after that, I start to think of going overseas… I heard of this and then I fight[38] for it and I get a chance to come to Singapore but if I never like, heard that, I will still be back working in China now I guess? […] It's like you're always dreaming for a race car and suddenly you know you cannot get it and then somebody offer you like a second tier race car then, it's so tempting! Tsinghua *beida* is the racing car for me and erm… NUS or the scholarship is like the second tier, *it's like a replacement of my loss of my dream of something*. I mean it's quite childish but it's quite true." (Junliang, male, postgraduate, research scholarship)

According to Bourdieu, 'honorable substitutes' provides "a second chance, as it were, to students who have not received from the academic world the recognition they had been anticipating" (1996:217). For this group of high aspiring youths, it was not the appeal of overseas education per se that attracted them. Rather, the appeal of studying abroad lies in the opportunity

[37] Juliang came to Singapore through the SM Scholarship program in 2008. After completing his Bachelor in 2013, he continued with a PhD program in NUS.
[38] The candidates have to sit for a number of tests before they are awarded with the SM Scholarship.

for this group of high aspiring youths to reset the failure at home through a second chance at gaining access to elite universities overseas. In this sense, the SM Scholarship creates the opportunity for them to search for the recognition they had been anticipating but was denied to them at the domestic education system, albeit through a 'roundabout route' of overseas education. As such, studying overseas is imagined as a critical moment that offers this group of Mainland Chinese students, who have already failed at home, with a second chance to reinvent themselves as winners.

Conclusion

Going beyond the understanding of international student mobility as a mere form of human capital development, this chapter therefore brought attention to how the motivations for overseas education are anchored in the crossroad of the Chinese youths' hunger for global experiences and the commitment to academic investment that arise out of the Chinese Reform and the fetishization of the single-child. In this sense, studying abroad is also about the project of the self in two aspects. While the accumulation of elite credentials is important in enhancing one's cultural and symbolic capital, the Chinese youths also seek to craft a particular subjectivity that embraces risk and challenges of a bigger world in their search for an eye opening and life changing experience overseas (see Haverig 2011). More often than not, both aspects complement one another in providing the rationalization and justification for youth mobility. In this respect, studying abroad encompasses both the possibility for fun and academic investment for many of the Mainland Chinese students in this study. The question is, however, how do the Mainland Chinese students balance the

youthful desire for fun and discovery with the commitment to education in their experience abroad, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Nevertheless, this chapter also brought attention to the multiple players involved in directing the Mainland Chinese student migratory flows through the examination of the middle-class family's fetishization of the single-child and the broader Singapore state strategy of talent attraction as reflected in the discussion of the SM Scholarship scheme. Although the attempt to help the precious child escape from the intense competition at home is a manifestation of parental indulgence, the investment in their child's education overseas is also tied to the intergenerational transfer of aspirations as they seek for postponed gratification through their child's accomplishments From the Singapore state's perspective, if the internationalization of higher education is part of its broader strategy of human capital management, then the state ambition can only be realized if the student migrants remain in Singapore after study. In this sense, the Mainland Chinese student migratory flows are imbued with broader ambitions tied to the Chinese parents and the host country. Therefore, the Mainland Chinese students' pathway in life after study has significant implications on the materialization of these ambitions, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Settling in Singapore

Entrance into university represents a transitional stage in the life course, where the young people are confronted with an ambiguous sense of the self as adult and non-adult (Smith and Holt 2007). In the case of the Mainland Chinese students in this study, however, this sense of ambiguity is compounded by a sense of anxieties associated with the act of migrating. 'Uprooted' from the existing social ties and support from home, the Mainland Chinese students are confronted with the need to 'reground' their life through a negotiation within unfamiliar social, cultural and spatial setting in Singapore (Ahmed *et al.* 2003). This chapter seeks to bring attention to how the Mainland Chinese students navigate their life in Singapore in response to the new sense of freedom from the parental and institutional support from home.

4.1 Living a 'China Life' in Singapore

> "I really had a happy time. We also have many Mainland Chinese students in our class so we are all very close… We always play and eat together. During the exam period, we would all study together. So we really have many friends. I didn't feel particularly lonely because the life was really rich here… Apart from the distance from my family and relatives at home, *my life in Singapore is really not very different from my life in China*." (Lihong[39], male, postgraduate, self-funding)

Although going abroad is filled with a sense of excitement to explore the unknown world, leaving home is also tied to a sense of anxieties as the Mainland Chinese students would be uprooted from the existing ties and social life that they are familiar with at home (see Ahmed 1999; AmaraSingham

[39] Translated from Mandarin Chinese

1980; Bruhn 2005). In other words, the need to reground their life is one of the very first tasks encountered by the student migrants during their arrival at the host country. Several studies have noted the important role of co-ethnic friendships in providing emotional comfort that could assist the student migrants' adjustment to the host country (e.g. Al-Sharideh and Goe 1998; Brown 2009; Campbell and Li 2008; Wu and Hammond 2011). In the case of this study, the formation of a co-national friendship network is rooted in the Mainland Chinese students' desire to recreate the familiarity of a 'China life' in Singapore, albeit one that is only possible due to a strong sense of reciprocal obligation amongst the members to help one another in their everyday life in Singapore. Borrowing from Smith and Holt's observation of friendship formation amongst UK student, the formation of co-national friendship with individuals of the same cultural values and beliefs is therefore important in consolidating a group membership that can give rise to a sense of 'ontological security' within unfamiliar social, cultural and spatial setting (2007:151). This section seeks to bring attention to how the Mainland Chinese students search for an 'ontological security' through a replication of their 'old world' in Singapore.

In their study on the Taiwanese students in America, Ying and Liese noted the importance of "a support network consisting of people who know the students' old world but also live in the new world alongside the students (1991:360)" in enhancing the student migrants' emotional wellbeing in their adjustment to the host country. For many, the extension of the 'old world' is awarded by the membership in an co-ethnic or co-national network that allows the student

migrants to reaffirm the same cultural values and practices that they are familiar with in the host country (see Klineberg and Hull 1979; Yang and Clum 1995; Wiseman 1997). Similarly for the Mainland Chinese students in this study, the search for co-national friendships is important in providing an emotional comfort that facilitates their adjustment to Singapore, of which some exist prior to the student migrants' arrival while others developed in Singapore through the deployment of the Mainland Chinese identity (also see Collins 2008). For instance, Qinghan explains:

> "Firstly, I have a classmate who came together with me. Then there are also some Mainland Chinese students in my major. *After all, we are all from China*[40]*. You can't possibly become good friends with Indians right? It is easier for Mainland Chinese to get along with fellow Mainland Chinese.* You need a longer time for adjustment when you interact with foreigners. [...] I have *no common language* with the life Singaporeans are used to. Their childhood is completely different from mine. Their lifestyle is different from mine. It will be more difficult for us to become good friends because we don't have a common language. So we are merely acquainted. [...] However, if you come from the same place, we can become closer very quickly. So it's easier to become friends in this manner. Furthermore, they will be nicer. *They will be more willing to help one another... When we get together, or when we go to class together, we will naturally become closer*." (Qinghan[41], male, postgraduate, research scholarship)

In contrast to the sense of disconnection in the Mainland Chinese students' interactions with the cross-cultural students, membership in a co-national friendship network acts as an emotional refuge in providing a sense of cultural continuity that eases the migrants' anxieties in their transition to a new

[40] Ironically, it disregards the diversity of ethnic differences amongst the Mainland Chinese nationals in Singapore.
[41] Translated from Mandarin Chinese

location (see Ahmed 1999; AmaraSingham 1980; Fontaine 1986; Kang 1972). The search for a co-national network therefore illustrates the Mainland Chinese students' attempt to create a support network that can recreate the sense of familiarity and continuity with their 'old world', while also lending support and emotional comfort for one another as they transit to the 'new world' together. The consequence is a replication of a "China lifestyle" in Singapore that is enabled and reinforced by the Mainland Chinese students' interactions with fellow members in the high-density co-national friendship network as reflected in the sense of taken-for-grantedness and exaggeration of cultural differences and separateness in Qinghan's account (also see Kim-Ju and Liem 2003; Lee *et al.* 2007; Li 2010).

Nevertheless, the significance of the co-national friendship network is more than a provision of ontological security through the extension of cultural values and practices in the host country. Instead, the co-national friendship network also acts as an important source of social capital in supporting the student migrants' everyday life in Singapore. Appropriating Bourdieu's concept of social capital, Portes contends for the creation of social capital through the strategic investment oriented towards the institutionalization of group relations (1998:3). As foreigners who are uprooted from the parental and institutional support from home, the formation of a co-national friendship network reflects a deliberate construction of sociability for the purpose of creating a resource of social capital that could be converted into instrumental support that faciliates the Mainland Chinese students' settlement process in the

host country (see Collins 2008; Conradson and Latham 2005; Faist 2000; Ghosh 2007). Zhirong' explains:

> "We help our own people. Everyone have many places that require help. I think accommodation, food and language would rank pretty high. So when you have a place. You know the language and you are cool with the food, you don't necessarily need that student cycle anymore. If I stay in my hometown I wouldn't need much help from senior... but they are newer than the locals. This kind of thing I can only use relative concepts. I certainly do better than someone who just arrived. But I still need to seek accommodations *because I am not born here*. […] Because senior helped me before. It's my responsibility to continue the tradition. Or maybe you should ask me why not? It does no harm helping another person... it's like everyone receive help from seniors before. *So why not continue that thing since we all are the beneficiary of the helping system?* I offer help because of *reputation*, good karma and the self-fulfilling sense of decency. *It gets people to trust me, it may do good to me in the future*, and it makes me feel good because I help someone else." (Zhirong, male, undergraduate, SM scholarship)

Although the Mainland Chinese students are dependent on the co-national network for the exchange of information and instrumental support that can facilitate the practical negotiation with the unfamiliar spaces in their everyday life in Singapore, the "helping system" is also characterized by the members' strong sense of reciprocal obligation to render help to one another. Appropriating Yang's concept of guanxi ('interpersonal relationship'), "the manufacturing of obligation and indebtedness" through the provision of help is "the primary and binding power of personal relationships" (1994:6) in the co-national network. Governed by rewards and sanction, the act of rendering help allows one to accumulate *renqing* ('favors') and *mianzi* ('face'), of which the former is an important resource that an individual can present to another

person in the exchange of favors in the future (Huang 1987)[42]. However, by refusing to help others, the individual damages *renqing* and risks building a bad reputation that mar the relationship within one's social network. Enabled by the interactions with fellow members in the co-national network, a "China life" will also crumble should an individual build a bad reputation through the refusal to render help. In this sense, the act of rendering help to fellow members in the co-national network is more than a deliberate accumulation of social capital, but a necessity in order to sustain their membership in the co-national network that allows for the replication a 'China lifestyle' in Singapore.

As foreigners who are uprooted from the existing support from home, the replication of a 'China life' through the membership in a co-national network allows the Mainland Chinese students to acquire a sense of ontological security provided by the continuity of cultural ties and practices as well as instrumental support that eases the sense of uncertainties in the unfamiliar social, cultural and spatial spaces. However, a 'China life' is also rooted in the strong sense of obligation for the Mainland Chinese students to render help to the members in the co-national network in order to sustain one's membership in the co-national network. Enabled by the strong sense of trust, reputation and reciprocal obligation built on the interpersonal relationships amongst the members in the co-national network, the creation of a strong co-national network therefore allows the replication of a 'China lifestyle' that facilitates

[42] According to Huang, "the principle of *renqing* implies not only a normative standard for regulating social exchange but also a social mechanism that an individual can use to strive for desirable resources within a stable and structured social fabric" (1987:946), while "the so-called *mianzi* denotes an individual's social position or prestige gained by successfully performing one or more specific social roles that are well recognized by others" (1987:960).

the Mainland Chinese students' settlement in Singapore. Nevertheless, if the adjustment to Singapore is about living a 'China life' through the interpersonal relationship with the members in a co-national network, then it is also about negotiating the freedom in the absence of the familial support and scrutiny from home. In this sense, the ontological security awarded by a 'China life' creates the ontological stability for the Mainland Chinese students to confront the new sense of freedom found in their student migration trajectory that will be discussed in the next section.

4.2 Negotiating with the New Sense of Freedom: Growing Up or Prolonging Youth?

> "I guess it's the freedom. You can, you can choose to become the, you can choose to grow in your life. I like the state where I am now. I guess it's the… yeah…" (Junliang, male, postgraduate, research scholarship)

According to Holdsworth, "the meanings produced through student mobility are not just linked to being a student, but are intricately linked with projects of the self and transitions to adulthood" (2009:1857). As a process of individuation, the absence of parental scrutiny translates to a new sense of freedom encountered by the student migrants during their sojourn. Situated in the malleable stage of the life course, how the student migrants negotiate with the new sense of freedom has significant implications on their sense of self as they navigate their life alongside the transition to adulthood. Although the freedom from parental scrutiny is often understood as a catalyst that speeds up the student migrants' sense of personal growth as they learn to become accountable for themselves (Holdsworth 2009; Tse and Waters 2013), it also

allows room for some to appropriate the freedom to prolong their youth by living in the extended present. In other words, the student migration trajectory intersects with the liminal period of the life course in which “the boundaries between independent adulthood and dependent childhood meet, mesh, and often conflict” (Smith and Holt 2007:151). This section seeks to examine how the Mainland Chinese students negotiate with the new sense of freedom found in their sojourn as they navigate their life alongside the transition to adulthood.

Going away for university is synonymous with the idea of freedom, autonomy and independence that are unhindered by the interference from others, especially parents (Holdsworth 2009). This sense of freedom is particularly striking for the student migrants due to the geographical distance that further limits parental influence and control on their life in the host country, thus pointing to a process of individuation in the student migrant experience (Tse and Waters 2013). Situated in the malleable stage of the life course, this process of individuation in the student migrant experience, therefore, has significant impact of the student migrants’ sense of self. Most notably, the Mainland Chinese students speak of their student migrant experience as a training that reinforces their sense of independence as they learn to become accountable for themselves in the absence of their parents’ support from home. The consequence is a sense of personal growth that is manifested in the Mainland Chinese students’ articulation of their student migrant experience as a catalyst in speeding the process of growing up. For instance, Meiting explains:

> "It's kind of you feel like *you suddenly grow up, become an adult*, decide the whole day what you want to do like that. But of course lah, you need to go to lecture right. Some lecturer they ask you to sign right. But actually it's quite free lah. Not all the lecturer do that. So if you find the slide is easy, or boring? You don't want to go, then you can just… don't go… Because you need to be responsible for all the things wah. Erm… such as even they give you allowance right, in the beginning of the month right, how you spend it. You cannot first few days finish all right? Then the time you need to monitor your time. Then weekend you need to whether go out with friends or do some activities yeah." (Meiting, female, undergraduate, SM scholarship)

For the Mainland Chinese students in this study, the freedom from home also translates to an exposure to a plethora of new demands in accounting for their everyday life in Singapore. They often speak of an urgent need for them to navigate their life as an independent and responsible adult in Singapore, in contrast to their dependency on their parents' support when they were in China. Therefore, growing up is rooted in the acquisition of new forms of competence and responsibility as the Mainland Chinese students learn to take charge of their life while negotiating with the new sense of freedom embedded in their student migrant experience.

In contrast to the imposed discipline in China, studying in Singapore is characterized by an absence of institutional surveillance on the Mainland Chinese students' academic development. For many, the freedom translates to a greater demand for a sense of self-discipline in the management of their studies. Ruiyang explains:

> "In general, I have a greater amount of freedom here. Therefore, I feel that I have also cultivated a sense of self-discipline. Since most of the classes do not mark the attendance, some people

> would not want to attend the class… For example, the Chinese universities would mark the attendance in every class. So in reality, Singapore demands more self-discipline. You have to be disciplined in your studies. Maybe some people think that this arrangement is not that good, but I feel that this is a form of training… You work harder to get good results, so that it will be easier for your job search later. ” (Ruiyang [43] , male, undergraduate, SM scholarship)

Rooted in Ruiyang's account is the salience of the discourse on academic success in constructing an imagination of academic achievement as the passport to a successful, middle-class lifestyle in the Chinese society (Fong 2004b, 2011; Liu 2008; Tsui and Rich 2002). Although many of the Mainland Chinese students anticipate success from their academic investment, they do not necessarily have a concrete occupational goal towards their future. Rather, their academic investment resembles the contingency mentality proposed by Brannen and Nielsen, in which the future is viewed as malleable by "shaping it in short steps and making the necessary adaptations as they went along" (2002:524). In this sense, the anticipated success is contingent on the Mainland Chinese students' self-discipline in acquiring the necessary cultural capital and skills in the present in preparation for their future transition to work. Rather than a concrete occupational goal, the emphasis is on the discourse of choice and the right to choose from the wide range of jobs through the deployment of their academic qualifications and skills when they encounter with the transition to work later. For some of the Mainland Chinese students in this study, self-discipline in the academic development is a necessary condition in order to have a sense of control in forging the future. Therefore, the student migrant experience is constructed as a step towards the

[43] Translated from Mandarin Chinese

anticipated success in their impending transition to adulthood and work after study.

Nevertheless, youth is also about a time for "experiences around issues of fun, exuberance, and the excitement of new opportunities and possibilities" (Evans 2008:1675). As Waters (2011) and associate propose, the flexibility and space awarded by studying abroad can be constructed as 'youthful escapes' for the student migrants' search for fun and enjoyment. As such, if the freedom embedded in the student migrant experience is about a need for a greater sense of self-discipline in preparing for the future, it is also about the room for some to search for fun and enjoyment in the absence of the institutional and parental scrutiny. For instance, Jiajun remarks:

> "There were many Mainland Chinese students who were very diligent in doing their revision everyday. I was not that kind of student. Of course, you should not do too badly. An average score was good enough for me. I preferred to play or do something else. I didn't spend too much time at studying. […] I didn't have any goal. I just muddle along everyday. We have money for food. We even have time to play. I had some savings at that time. I didn't lack money so there was no pressure. I was not interested in engineering at all so I thought I should just take it as it goes." (Jiajun[44], male, undergraduate, SM scholarship)

Although Jiajun's lack of drive is partly rationalized by the sense of disinterest in the course he was enrolled in, it is also embedded in a 'getting by' perspective that emphasizes on living in the immediate present (Maguire *et al.* 2001). In response to the heightened sense of freedom and self-autonomy, the sojourn is constructed as a period for leisure and play while he muddles along

[44] Translated from Mandarin Chinese

without a concrete goal or plan for the future. Jiajun's account reflects the appropriation of the freedom for the construction of an extended period of youth in which the emphasis is on living in the extended present while keeping the future at bay for the time being (Brannen and Nielsen 2002). Although the student migration trajectory is anchored in the commitment to education in preparation for the future, the possibility for play awarded by the freedom therefore brings attention to the ambiguity in the transitional stage of the life course where the boundaries between the preparation for the entrance into adulthood and the youthful aspirations "meet, mesh, and often conflict" (Smith and Holt 2007:151) with one another.

At times, keeping the future at bay also involves deferring the transition to work. According to Côté (2002), the individualization of the life course has resulted in the disjuncture among the institutional networks (like the university–work and youth–adulthood transitions). This sense of individualization is even more pronounced in the context of international student mobility because the dislocation from existing norms and institutional support at home translates to an absence of a clear frame of reference that can guide the student migrants' life trajectory in the host country. For some of the Mainland Chinese students in this study, the consequence of a lack of guidance in one's career development is a sense of loss and fear towards the future transition to work, which is also partly exacerbated by a lack of preparation for the future due to the comfort of living in the extended present during the sojourn. In response to the sense of fear towards the future, a number of Mainland Chinese students in this study attempted to defer their

transition to work by enrolling into a post-graduate program immediately after the completion of their Bachelor program in Singapore. For instance, although Chengbin claimed that he was not very interested in life sciences, he decided to continue with a PhD program because of his greater fear of entering the workforce:

> "Because I never have a clear vision of what to do in five years time, in ten years time. Which is one of the reasons why I continued this PHD… If you have to work somewhere with no clear clear path, why not you just do a PhD right? I mean it's just similar to working elsewhere except you do research for work right? You might earn a little bit less but you don't have to pay for the CPF[45] and all that. The money you get is about the same and you got more flexibility in your times and all that. Erm… plus what if you just work outside without knowing what you want to do afterwards, you will be doing work for four years and all of a sudden, this is not what you want to do. Why not you just do a PhD? At least after four years, you get a PhD right?" (Chengbin, male, postgraduate[46], research scholarship)

According to Du-Bois Reymond, 'choice biographies' are determined by the paradox that is typical in modern life: "although (western) societies provide more options to choose from, modern (young) people are forced to reflect on the available options and justify their decisions" (1998:65). As Chengbin noted, although enrolling into a PhD program is similar to work, the former provides a greater sense of certainty and freedom in contrast to the risk of entering the workforce without a concrete goal, thus creating a justification that rationalizes his choice of deferring the transition to work. In this sense, the enrollment into a post-graduate program is effectively an attempt to gain

[45] Referring to the Central Provident Fund
[46] Chengbin came to Singapore through the SM Program in 2006. He then continued with a PhD program as a Research Scholar at NUS after he completed his Bachelor in 2010. He was about to graduate from NUS at the point of the interview.

extra time for those who are undecided towards the future, thus deferring the transition to work and adulthood.

Several studies have noted the decoupling of the transition between education and work, and youth and adulthood as a result of the destandardization of the life course (e.g. Arnett 2000; Côté 2002; Nilsen 1999; Valentine 2003). In other words, there is no clear timetable in governing the young people's navigation through the multiplicity of life's pathway (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). In the case of the Mainland Chinese students in this study, the disjuncture among these institutional networks is even more pronounced due to the freedom from the existing social ties and the old world that they are familiar with. On the one hand, the freedom from parental and institutional scrutiny speeds up the Mainland Chinese students' sense of growth. On the other hand, the same freedom also creates room for leisure and play that effectively lengthens the sense of adolescence in the extended present, while keeping the future at bay. In this respect, the student migrant experience intersects with the ambiguous, transitional status of the Mainland Chinese students as 'emerging adults' (Arnett 2000), who negotiate with the boundaries of youth and adulthood in response to the freedom awarded by the sojourn. It is under such context in which the Mainland Chinese students encounter the simultaneous, and sometimes, conflicting processes of growing up and prolonging the sense of youth in their transition to adulthood.

Conclusion

For this group of Mainland Chinese students, regrounding their life in Singapore involves a replication of a 'China life' that is not that different from the one they are familiar with in China despite the absence of parental and institutional support from home. Chapter 3 has brought attention to the importance of exploring within a knowable cultural difference in the Mainland Chinese students' desire to explore the outside world. This chapter reinforces the importance of an ontological security that is rooted in the cultural and social stability enabled by the interpersonal relationships in a co-national network in the unfamiliar world. Rather than a dislocation with the old world associated with the act of migrating (Bruhn 2005), the membership in a co-national network enables the Mainland Chinese students to replicate the old world in the new world through an extension of cultural values and practices that the student migrants are familiar with. Going beyond the analysis of co-national networks as merely a form of social capital, this chapter attempted to highlight the importance of co-national networks in enabling a certain type of lifestyle that gives rise to a sense of ontological security for the student migrants.

Detached from the parental scrutiny and institutional support from home, the Chinese youths enter into an age moratorium that allows them to explore and experiment with the project of the self. This chapter however moved beyond the simplistic conception of individuation as a positive and enriching experience for the self that is commonly found in the existing study on youth mobility and overseas experience (Conradson and Latham 2005, 2007;

Haverig 2011; Haverig and Roberts 2011; Heath 2007; Yoon 2014). On the one hand, the process of individuation can positively reinforce the Chinese youths' sense of independence and autonomy. On the other hand, the over-emphasis on fun and play in the extended present can also be corrosive to the young people's sense of the self as seen in some of the Mainland Chinese students' inability to anticipate and prepare for their transition to work and adulthood. In this sense, the room for self-development can come into conflict with the youthful desire for fun, thus sharpening the ambiguous boundaries between youth and adulthood during the study experience overseas.

In short, this chapter attempted to situate international student mobility at the crossroad of emerging adulthood and higher education through the examination on the young people's project of the self in response to the heightened sense of freedom in the student migration trajectory. If adjusting to the host country is about searching for an ontological security in the everyday life through a replication of a 'China lifestyle', then the ontological security is also instrumental in allowing for the exploration and experimentation of the self. Nevertheless, the allowance for the discovery of the self will end once the young people enter into adulthood roles after study. In this sense, the Chinese youths' sense of self at this stage of life has significant repercussions on their pathway in life after study, which would be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Post-Study Trajectory: To Return or to Stay?

More than a mere exit from school, after study denotes an entrance into adulthood where the Mainland Chinese students are confronted with new sense of responsibilities. While the prospect of career advancement is an important criterion in accounting for the post-study destination, there is also a need for the Mainland Chinese students to negotiate with the demands from the filial obligations and marriage expectation as they progress into adulthood roles. In other words, the Mainland Chinese students' post-study trajectory must be examined in relation to their biography, interpersonal relationships and sociocultural influences that operate across the home country and the host country. Therefore, this chapter seeks to examine how the Mainland Chinese students decide on their post-study destination in response to these considerations.

5.1 The Bind of Familial Ties: The Single Child, the Precious Child, and the Filial Child

> "So in Chinese culture, it's quite different from the rest of the world where the children are everything. The child is everything, it's the center of gravity…" (Liqin, male, postgraduate, self-funding)

According to Geddie, balancing family and personal relationships is intricately linked with where the international students hoped to position themselves after study (2013:200). In general, existing studies on international migration have also noted the importance of familial ties and familial obligations in pulling the migrants back to the home country (see Gmelch 1980; Lidgard and Gilson 2002; Ho 2008). In the case of the Mainland Chinese students in this study, the

bind of familial ties is even more pervasive because of their single-child status. As Fong (2004a) suggests, the single-child is both emotionally priceless and economically valuable. As the precious child, the single-child is a 'fetishized object' in which the family invests and indulges heavily (Anagnost 1997). Yet at the same time, the single-child is conceived as the 'only hope', who is assigned with the role of a primary provider of support and care for their aging parents (Fong 2004a). In other words, the single-child is also a filial child who is bound to an 'intergenerational reciprocity contract' (Ho 2008). In this sense, as much as the post-study trajectory is commonly examined as a transition to work (see Alberts and see Hazen 2005; Robertson et. al 2011; Waters 2006, 2008), the decision on the post-study destination is also influenced by the bind of familial ties as the Mainland Chinese students confront a new sense of familial obligations in their transition to adulthood after study (Yeung and Hu 2013).

Strong family ties and the desire to be in the companionship of family and friends are often cited as one of the most important reasons in accounting for return migration (Gmelch 1980; Lidgard and Gilson 2002). In the case of the Mainland Chinese students in this study, however, returning home is as much about the desire for familial companionship as the bind of the 'intergenerational reciprocity contract' (Ho 2008) in constructing a strong sense of filial obligations towards the parents. Therefore, a return to China in order to stay closer to home is part of the Mainland Chinese students' filial

duty in providing care and companionship for the parents at home[47]. For instance, Weiqi explains:

> "I want to be closer to my family. After all, my family is still in China… Beijing is closer to my hometown and there are more opportunities for career development in Beijing than in my hometown. Working in Beijing allows me to return home every weekend. It takes only about 3 or 4 hours for me to travel back to Hebei. I can stay over for 2 days and then come back to work. I think this is more convenient." (Weiqi[48], female, undergraduate, self-funding)

Family is an importance part of the social structure in the Chinese society. Most notably, the salience of the Confucian concept of *xiao*, or 'filial piety', demands individuals to respect and take care of their parents (Shen 2009:225). Failure to fulfill the filial duty to the parents is often considered a shameful thing in the Chinese culture, especially for the post-80s generations of single-children who are conceived as the primary caregiver of their parents. Just as "familial logics may work to bind transmigrants to particular geographical and national contexts" (Ho 2008:166), the strength of the parent-child relationship is much more binding for the Chinese student migrants due to the sense of guilt and responsibility for their parents and other family members at home.

While a return to China may be a manifestation of the self-imposed filial obligation towards the parents at home, Deutsch (2004) also noted the salience

[47] For many of the Mainland Chinese students in this study, a return to China is less about a return to the hometown than a return to China's major economic center such as the first-tier cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou due to the pull of the economic opportunities that will be discussed in 5.3. Like Weiqi, a desire to be closer to home is about staying in a city that is geographically closer with the hometown, thus giving them the convenience of returning home on a regular basis.

[48] Translated from Mandarin Chinese

of parental influence in directing the graduating Chinese university students' life plans. Most notably, the parents of the Chinese university students in her study often expressed a strong desire for their children to stay closer to home, even if it is at times at the expense of their child's aspirations. In this sense, the single-child is not only a filial child but also a precious child whom the Chinese parents seek for emotional gratification through the intimacy and the companionship with the child. For instance, coming from a middle-class background, Liqin's parents wish for him to return to China is less about the need to provide material care than the desire for their precious child to be closer to them and his grandparents:

> "Actually I was originally planned to go home… Our parents expect us to go back because my parents' argument is quite simple, if you can earn the same in China in a job like that, why you want to stay in Singapore right? Tire yourself. I mean, your grandparents want you to be by their side, especially if you're a boy, I mean a man. So it's kind of traditional Chinese values like man need to stay near the parents. My parents are quite ok but even grandparents just keep nagging, nagging so they were like, you know, why don't you just go home, I can give you a good job. That's it, simple right?" (Liqin, male, postgraduate, self-funding)

Liqin's account provides an interesting twist to the conception of the single-child. As the precious child, the parental indulgence is manifested in Liqin's parents attempt to carve a comfortable life for him through an arrangement of a good and "less tiring" job in Wuhan. Yet it is such parental indulgence that Liqin sought to escape from. Although the initial plan was for Liqin to return to Wuhan for the job arranged by his parents, he expressed a discomfort to his parents' arrangement and eventually returned to Singapore because of his desire for a greater sense of self-autonomy:

> "I can't imagine a different me that have been in China all along. It's because you go outside, you know that every single thing you do is for yourself. Nobody will fend for you. Nobody will know who your parents are. So you work hard, and you see the results yourself. Meaning, you know the results is you personally achieved. Nobody help you. Nobody can say they have a stake in it. This kind of achievement for me is quite important. The feeling of achievement is quite important. Because that's how I value myself… I feel quite free to hold my own destiny. But in China, it's quite different. Your parents will claim everything, even if you don't ask them to so that's the thing. *That's why my parents feel quite powerless right now. They don't like…* You know in China, we call it *jiang zaiwai, junming yousuobushou*[49]. Meaning, you're too far away from the kingdom, you don't need to listen to the king… I don't feel the pressure. Money is not a pressure. My parents have enough for their own retirement" (Liqin, male, postgraduate, self-funding)

The discussion in Chapter 4 earlier has brought attention to the heightened sense of freedom awarded to the Mainland Chinese students during their student migrant experience in Singapore. According to Brown (2009), the freedom awarded by the sojourn has a transformative power in cultivating an individualistic outlook amongst the international students (also see Tse and Waters 2013). Despite his initial plan to return home, Liqin 'learn[t] to migrate' (Li *et al.* 1996) as a consequence of the individualistic experience during his student migrant experience in Singapore. Rooted in his account is a strong desire for an individualized pathway that is absent from his parents' interference. Yet at the same time, it is the financial comfort from his middle-class background that frees him from the filial obligations, thus giving him the room to search for self-autonomy in Singapore. While Liqin enjoys the freedom awarded to him in his post-study trajectory in Singapore, his parents

[49] 将在外，君命有所不受

pay the heavy price for the loss of companionship and control of the precious child.

Not every Mainland Chinese student in this study enjoys Liqin's sense of freedom from the filial obligation to the parents at home. Izuhara and Shibata (2002) noted the emotional guilt experienced by the Japanese migrant women for being unable to provide care for their aged parents. Similarly, many of the Mainland Chinese student migrants in Singapore are confronted with a dilemma of wanting to stay in Singapore vis-à-vis the emotional struggle with leaving their parents at home. Unlike Liqin who articulates a sense of freedom from his parents, the inability to fulfill their filial obligations is a source of emotional struggle for many of the stayers in this study. For instance, the inability to be closer to his father[50] is a source of concern for Jiajun, who intends to stay and work in Singapore on a permanent basis:

> "To be honest, I have a 6 years bond[51] so I have to stay in Singapore. However, if I don't stay here, there's nothing for me even if I return home. So actually the only constraint is I am away from my family… Otherwise, I want to work in Singapore, at least in the next 10 or 20 years. Hopefully, I can make something big out of myself over here. […] I am thinking of this issue now. Maybe it will be the best if I can bring him over. However, he is already used to the lifestyle in China. He also has many friends in China. I believe even if I insist, he would not agree. We'll see. I feel that this is a difficult issue that cannot be resolved at the moment. Although I asked him to come over now, he refused. He said he wanted to wait. I know he is actually very sensible. He did not want me to spend too much money…" (Jiajun[52], male, undergraduate, SM scholarship)

[50] Jiajun's parents are divorced. His mother has subsequently remarried so his major concern is his aging father who is living alone in China.
[51] Referring to the service obligation tied to the SM Scholarship
[52] Translated from Mandarin Chinese

The sense of longing to be together with their family often translates to a desire to bring their parents over to Singapore once the Mainland Chinese students have established financial stability. For the time being, however, the emotional pain is rationalized by the anticipated economic rewards in Singapore in contrast to the anticipated struggle in their return due to the lack of resources at home, which will be discussed in this chapter later. Just as the parents are willing to sacrifice the companionship of their precious child for the sake of their child's career development, the filial child also pay the price of emotional guilt due to their inability to fulfill the filial obligations that are expected of them as a result of the geographical and emotional distance with their parents at home. Therefore, the stay in Singapore is characterized by a strong sense of dilemma due to the tug-of-war between the bind of the transnational familial ties at home and the rationalization of the economic rewards in the host country.

For some of the stayers in this study, however, an eventual return to China is also a possibility due to the salience of the filial expectation on the single child. Ruiting remarks:

> "I will be in Singapore and unless they have request for me, they need me or very like, they want me be there. Because I'm the only child, I have to be responsible for them." (Ruiting, female, undergraduate, self-funding)

Like Ruiting, some of the stayers in this study are willing to compromise their personal aspirations should there be an urgent need for them to return for their

parents in China. Hence Ruiting' remark reiterates the salience of the intergenerational reciprocal contract in structuring the parent-child relationship in the Chinese society. In other words, the stay in Singapore may not necessarily be permanent due to the strength of the transnational familial ties in binding the filial child to his or her home in China.

As "the center of gravity", the Mainland Chinese students are the precious child in the family. Yet their single-child status also denotes the need for them to become a filial child for their aging parents as they transit into adulthood after study. For the returnees, returning to China is part of the filial obligations in the intergenerational reciprocity contract. In contrast, the inability to fulfill the filial duties is an emotional struggle for those Mainland Chinese students who chose to stay and work in Singapore after study. In these two instances, the salience of the filial norms in China is manifested in the influence on the returnees' post-study trajectory and the emotional guilt experienced by the stayers. Another type of behavior that results from the precious child treatment is the desire to escape from the parents' grasp through the refusal to return home as seen in Liqin's account. In stark contrast with the emotional struggle experienced by Jiajun and Ruiting, Liqin's account resembles the 'little-emperor' who has now grown up and seeks to escape the parents' grasp. Free from the filial obligations awarded by the financial comfort at home, it is the parents who pay the price for the loss of companionship from the precious child. Therefore, while many are confronted with the strong sense of filial obligations to their parents, staying abroad can also be constructed as a means to escape from the familial ties at home.

More than any other form of familial ties, the bind of the parent-child relationship is particularly pronounced for this group of single-children who are both the precious child and the filial child of the parents. In this sense, the post-study trajectory is also about the negotiation with the expected transition into the role of a filial child alongside the Mainland Chinese students' transition to adulthood after study. Nevertheless, a central marker of adulthood is also marriage and family formation (Yeung and Hu 2013), of which women are susceptible to a greater pressure for them to enter into marriage by a certain age. For the female students in this study, after study is, therefore, also the beginning of their next phase of life towards marriage. The next section will bring attention to how the female students negotiate with the cultural and gendered expectation on marriage in their post-study trajectory.

5.2 Cultural and Gendered Norm for Marriage: Returning for Marriage and Staying for a Higher Possibility of Marriage

According to Yeung and Hu (2013), there is a strong cultural expectation in China on marriage and familial obligation as the Mainland Chinese youths progress into adulthood. In other words, the Mainland Chinese students' post-study trajectory also involves a consideration on their anticipated transition into a married life as they enter into adulthood roles after study. However, the cultural expectation on marriage is highly gendered. As Gaetano (2014) suggests, women who are characterized by the "three highs" (high levels of education, high income, and advancing age – starting from their mid 20s) are deemed as increasingly unmarriageable in China. Furthermore, the social stigma of singlehood is extremely costly in a society where marriage is nearly

universal[53] (see Situmorang 2007). In the recent years, China has adopted a derogatory term – *shengnu* or "leftover women" – to describe unmarried, highly educated, urban professional women who are from the mid-20s onwards (see Gaetano 2014; To 2013). For the female Mainland Chinese students who would already be in the 20s after study, their post-study trajectory therefore denotes a confrontation with the immediate pressure for them to transit into a married life upon graduation or risk being stigmatized as *shengnu*. This section seeks to bring attention to how the female Mainland Chinese students negotiate their post-study trajectory in response to the cultural and gendered norm for marriage.

As Gaetano (2014) has noted in the discourse of the "three highs" in explaining female singlehood in the Chinese society, the prioritization of marriage sometimes interferes with the female students' educational and occupational aspirations. For instance, Jialing's return to China reflects a submission to the gendered and familial expectation on marriage at home, albeit at the expense of her own aspiration:

> "After I completed the Master program, I actually wanted to continue with a PHD program. However, my parents did not agree with it. From a Chinese viewpoint, they feel that it will be too difficult for girls to get married if they were too highly educated. So they wanted me to return to China to look for a job. […] To my parents, the most important thing for girls is to get married. When I was in Singapore, I did not have the chance to interact with many

[53] Marriage and family formation are the central markers of adulthood in Chinese culture. In contrast to the rapidly declining marriage rate in many East Asian and Southeast Asian countries, Yeung and Hu's study have observed the pervasiveness of the marriage norm in Chinese society such that by age 35 almost everyone in China had already been married (2013:162). The pervasiveness of the marriage norm is also reflected in the common saying, "a bad marriage is still better than singlehood" in the Chinese society (ibid; Gaetano 2014; To 2013; Wang and Abbot 2013).

> people. I was always in the lab or at the library. So my parents probably thought I couldn't find a marriage partner. So they requested me to return home. They wanted me to return for the matchmaking sessions." (Jialing[54], female, postgraduate, self-funding)

While Jialing's account illustrates the pervasiveness of the cultural and gendered expectation on marriage, it also brings attention to the significant role of parental influence in reinforcing the marriage norm due to the construction of marriage as a form of filial duty in the Chinese culture. As Wang and Abbot noted, "filial piety is based on Confucianism which states that single women should make their parents happy by getting married and having children, especially male children" (2013:226). Furthermore, the social stigma of singlehood is not only experienced by the single women themselves. Instead, it is a family affair because the family members are also subjected to their friends and relatives' scrutiny of their daughters' unmarried status (ibid). As such, Chinese parents often intervene in the single women's marital decision making, whether in terms of the choice of spouse or the arrangement of matchmaking sessions for the child (To 2013). As noted in the discussion on the single-child in the previous section, the sense of filial duty to the parents is an obligation that the single-child in China finds difficult to escape from. Therefore, Jialing's return to China is not only a submission to the gendered expectation on marriage. Rather the pervasiveness of the marriage norm lies in its conflation with the notion of filial piety in the Chinese culture, in which Jialing's return and acceptance of the matchmaking request is also a manifestation of filial duty to her parents.

[54] Translated from Mandarin Chinese

If a return to China is about a submission to the gendered and cultural expectation on marriage, then the refusal to return to China underlies a desire to escape from the gender constrains at home. According to Yeoh *et al.* (2002), the impulse to migrate for particular individuals, especially for women, may be rooted in their desire to escape from the structures of the gender constrains in the home country. After completing her studies in 2012, Huixian decided to stay instead of returning to China partly because of her then boyfriend in Singapore. Although they eventually broke up, Huixian articulates a refusal to return to China due to the perceived difficulty of finding a romantic partner in China as a result of her age:

> "For me, I'm 20, 26 years old, almost 27 and I'm still single. If I at my age go back to China, Shanghai, I can hardly find a boyfriend so nope. Nope." (Huixian, female, postgraduate, self-funding)

In contrast to the construction of the 'three highs' as the stigmatization of singlehood and the preconditions of non-marriage in the Chinese society, Jones and associate (2012) have noted the prioritization of career advancement, financial stability and material success instead of marriage and procreation amongst many singles in Singapore. In other words, the 'three highs' are reconstructed as the necessary justification for singlehood and preconditions for marriage in the context of Singapore as individuals invest in their education and career in order to acquire the financial stability for marriage at a later age. Therefore, these conditions also denote a higher possibility for the female Mainland Chinese students to find a romantic partner

in Singapore where academic qualifications and age are less of an issue than in China.

Furthermore, staying in Singapore allows the female student to escape from the parental and relatives' scrutiny on their marriage status and the social stigma of a *shengnu* at home due to the wide acceptance of singlehood and non-marriage among the general public in Singapore (Jones 2012). Appropriating Goffman's (1963) concept of passing as an identity management in which individuals transgress the boundaries of highly stigmatized identities by masking discreditable identities with more socially acceptable ones, staying in Singapore allows the female students to pass as singles who are socially accepted while their discredited identity as increasingly unmarriageable females in China remains hidden. In this sense, staying abroad is also about carving a space of sanctuary where the female migrants can enjoy their singlehood and date freely in a friendlier environment that is characterized by the absence of social and parental scrutiny on their marriage status (Ramdas 2012; Thang *et al.* 2002). Therefore, a refusal to return to China is not about a complete rejection of marriage per se but a rejection of the gendered and cultural construction of marriage norm in China as the female students seek to reconstruct the possibility and practices of marriage by staying abroad.

For the Mainland Chinese students, their exit from the university also denotes a beginning towards a married life, especially for the female students. Rooted in both Jialing and Huixian's decision on their post-study trajectory is a

response to the cultural and gendered expectation on marriage in which one is about conformity, while the other is about an escape. In Jialing's case, returning to China is a necessity in order to fulfill the cultural and familial expectation on marriage. In contrast, Huixian's account illustrates an attempt to escape from the social stigma in China while reconstructing the possibility and practices of marriage by staying in a friendlier environment overseas. Although the female students are confronted with the anticipated transition into a married life in their post-study trajectory, this section has also brought attention to how they negotiate and respond to the cultural and gendered expectation on marriage through the decision on their post-study destination. Since the exit from university denotes a transition to adulthood, the post-study trajectory, therefore, also demands the Mainland Chinese students to transit into work. The next section will bring attention to how the Mainland Chinese students decide on their post-study destination in relation to the evaluation on the economic opportunities that can award the highest values for their talents.

5.3 The 'Digestion' of Talents

> "Maybe it's easier for the natives from Beijing and Shanghai to return to China. If you are from the third-tier, fourth-tier city, what can you do when you return? *The city cannot digest your talent.* In that case, staying in Singapore is actually not very different from returning to Shanghai or Beijing…" (Qinhao[55], male, postgraduate, self-funding)

The anticipated financial and economic rewards are often seen as an important factor in influencing the international students' post-study mobility. Generally, the international students' post-study destination is conceived as a calculated

[55] Translated from Mandarin Chinese

decision based on the differential economic rewards between the home country and the host country (Alberts and Hazen 2005). Nevertheless, the evaluation of economic opportunities is not only dependent on the economic performance of the respective cities. Rather, it is a social process that encompasses broader social and political processes in influencing the management, or rather, the 'digestion' of talents in the respective cities. This section seeks to bring attention to how the Mainland Chinese students decide on the post-study destination in relation to their negotiation with these processes.

As Shen suggests, "from the world factory to a growing economic giant, China's economy growing by double-digits not only caught the eyes of the foreign investors but also drew the attention of the Chinese students and professionals abroad" (2008b:8). A return to China is often associated with the desire to reap a slice of rewards from the Chinese economic prowess[56] (Shen 2008a, 2008b; Li 2013; Teo 2011; Bail and Shen 2008). However, the return is less about a return to the hometown than about a return to China's major economic centers such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen[57] where the reward for talents is perceived as the highest. As non-natives in these first-tier cities, the returnees often encounter a lack of local cultural knowledge and social ties that could assist their job search, which is also

[56] For instance, in response to the changing economic situation in China, the rate of return from overseas educated Mainland Chinese students increased from 20 000 to 44 000 annually between 2003 and 2007 (Shen 2008a).

[57] Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen are commonly referred as the "Big 4". As China's first-tier cities, the "Big 4" is characterized by their strong economic development, political impact and advanced infrastructure. A government report in 2014 revealed that 57.94 percent of the Mainland Chinese returnees are drawn to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen because of the better employment opportunities available in these first-tier cities (Sina News, 7 December 2014). Beijing is selected as the site of investigation in this study.

partly exacerbated by their absence from China for a period of time (see Cai 2012, 2013). Furthermore, the rush to the first-tier cities has also resulted in a devaluation of credentials that is akin to Dore's (1976) 'diploma disease' due to an oversupply of highly educated *haigui*[58] in the labor market (also see Bai 2006; Zweig and Han 2010). Zhangjie explains:

> "Regardless of your competence, the *haigui* status itself used to be very valuable. However, the status of *haigui* has changed today. If you are just a returnee, it's not valuable. Even though my degree is from NUS, it's not very valuable. […] It could even be a disadvantage because China is a very special country. It has been developing for many years and it already has its own characteristics. When you spent so many years overseas, you no longer understand China. China is developing too fast. Too fast. Too fast. Too fast! You no longer understand China. Furthermore, you don't have many resources over here. Your classmates and friends are from overseas. You don't have many friends over here. This is a disadvantage. Or at least to me, this is a disadvantage." (Zhangjie[59], male, undergraduate, SM scholarship)

Although *guanxi*[60] or 'interpersonal ties' is well known as a guiding structure in the economic and social organization of Chinese society (Bian 1997; Bian and Ang 1997), some academics contend for its declining significance in urban China due to the labor market reform that rewards skills instead of connections (see also Guthrie 1998; Hanser 2002; Zang 2003). However, the exchange of cultural capital into economic capital is also a social process that hinges on the act of recognition (Waters 2006:174), thus questioning the simplistic conversion of credentials and skills into employment rewards proposed by the human capital paradigm (Becker 1980, Schultz 1961). As

[58] *Haigui* refers to the returnees from overseas. They are also referred as "sea turtles" (*haigui*).
[59] Translated from Mandarin Chinese
[60] According to Bian, *guanxi* refers to "a dyadic, particular and sentimental tie that has the potential of facilitating favor exchanges between the parties connected by the tie" (2006:312).

Bourdieu noted, "the economic and social return of academic capital depends in many cases on the social (or even economic) capital that allows it to acquire its full value" (1984:286). In other words, the mobilization of *guanxi* provides the social recognition that allows for the 'digestion' of talents, especially when credentials itself can no longer function as a signal of distinction in an overcrowded labor market.

At times, family connections can be mobilized to give the returnees a competitive advantage over the other rivals in the labor market at home (Li 2013:486). For instance, Ziyi, a middle-class student, speaks of the mobilization of her parents' connection in accounting for her employment in Beijing:

> "Sort of offered actually because it's kind of based on erm… my parents' connection but in China, it's a common thing. (Laugh) I actually didn't go for the interview or anything, it was just being offered to me. It's quite strange. How it came about… […] I mean I…. honestly I got hired mostly based on my English because the project they were doing is some overseas joint venture thing. They are contacting the Italian side. Luckily most of the Italians now speak English. Even though it's over 100 people company size, only 2 including me can speak English. So they need someone who can communicate with overseas on a regular basis. If I were… let's say if I held a education cert from Zhejiang University instead of NUS, I would not be hired." (Ziyi, female, undergraduate, self-funding)

As much as the NUS degree is important in signaling Ziyi's English competency, it is the recognition from her parents' connection that leads to her employment in Beijing. In her study on *guanxi* networks and job searches in China, Huang noted the importance of *guanxi* in exerting "essential influence

on hiring the applicant who is already qualified and seen as 'not bad'" (2008:475). Therefore, Ziyi's account brings attention to the interdependent relationship between credentials and social capital in which the recognition of competency is dependent on one's access to *guanxi* network, while the efficacy of *guanxi* is dependent on the competence of the job seeker in the Chinese labor market. In this sense, *guanxi* provides another basis of distinction amongst the *haigui* who are, by and large, equally qualified in the overcrowded labor market in Beijing.

One of the most valuable rewards from studying abroad is the license to join an exclusive network of elites. As Hall (2010) suggests, the acquisition of elite credentials position individuals in potentially powerful social networks beyond graduation. For the returnees, especially those who lack social connections in Beijing, the alumni network acts an important toolkit in providing information and assistance that support their career advancement in Beijing. Ziting explains:

> "You really need your alumni. You really need your alumni club to have this chest of resource... Or even if you're just in the WeChat[61] group, the group also pushes you to a lot of new information. It's this kind of, this chemistry that makes you think that oh, if I were to do something you think, oh maybe I can go to that brother, to give a call. Or I can drop back to that sister to have a chat. Then they will give me the confidence. They will give me the advice and this is network. *Network that gives me the confidence*. […] That's why the alumni network for NUS and NTU in China is very very strong. We believe each other are….

[61] Hall (2010) noted the importance of virtual networks in the reproduction and sustenance of educational ties in the post-study trajectory. WeChat is a mobile text and voice messaging communication service commonly used in China. The Alumni Chapter has created a group chat in WeChat that allows the exchange of information and resources, and interactions amongst the members, thus strengthening the bond of the alumni network.

> good enough to get a degree. They have good jobs, they [are] smart enough, maybe they are resourceful enough, ambitious enough. That's why this kind of belief bond the people together." (Ziting, female, postgraduate, self-funding)

The formation of an exclusive network of overseas trained elites provides another basis of distinction through the mutual recognition of talents and the perpetuation of local discourses pertaining to the inherent superiority of the members' credentials at the labor market in home country (Waters 2006, 2009). However, the importance of the membership in an alumni network is not only pertinent to the symbolic distinction of superiority. Instead, the common background as highly qualified *haigui* is the basis for the formation of 'esprit de corps' (Bourdieu 1996) that is characterized by a strong sense of reciprocal obligation and trust akin to the sense of duty in a familial or kinship network. The members are effectively bound by this sense of affection to help one another through the sharing of information and resources that could assist the members' career advancement in Beijing, thus translating the alumni network into an important "chest of resources" for the returnees to tap into. Therefore, the returnees' sense of confidence is dependent on the *guanxi,* awarded by their membership in an alumni network, in providing the recognition of talents in conjunction with the economic resources that can facilitate their career development in Beijing.

For the Mainland Chinese students who return to Beijing with the aspiration of participating in China's rapid economic development, the 'digestion' of talent can no longer be reduced to a simple conversion of talents into economic opportunities against the backdrop of credential inflation in China today.

Instead, the ‘digestion’ of talent demands a supplementary ‘digestive enzyme’ in the form of *guanxi* in providing local cultural knowledge on the economic situation and in exerting the recognition of the holders’ talents in the Chinese labor market. In this sense, the ‘digestion’ of talents, or the availability of economic opportunities, is enabled by social networks. For some of the Mainland Chinese students in this study, however, it is precisely the lack of social connections that deters them from returning.

If economic opportunities are enabled by the availability of social connections, then the evaluation of economic opportunities is also tied to one’s biography in allowing the accumulation of such resources. For the less privileged, staying in the host country after study is conceived as a more appealing option due to the lack of resources at home in supporting their career advancement in China in contrast to a greater degree of equality in the host country (see Gao 2014; Wang 2012, 2013). For instance, the prospect of returning to China is associated with a strong sense of anxieties due to the absence of resources at home that could support Jiajie’s career advancement in China:

> “There are many uncertainties in China… Like I said, if you come from a good background, you’ll probably do well. Otherwise… I have many friends, my childhood friends, they are not doing so well. Perhaps I may not do as bad as them but still… my cousin who is working in Shanghai also faces many hardships… After all China, how should I put it? We feel that you need to have a lot of resources in order to develop well. Maybe if you leave the country, the prospect may be better for you. […] I don’t know how it will be like if I were to go back to China… I have nothing. My family has no resources. My family is considerably poor... Maybe I lose the opportunities in China. However in comparison, I receive a fairer platform. Moreover, this platform is

> considerably more stable. It does not have as much uncertainties."
> (Jiajie[62], male, undergraduate, SM scholarship)

Jiajie's account echoes the importance of *guanxi* in exerting the recognition of talents and the evaluation of opportunities in the Chinese labor market as discussed earlier. In contrast, the institutionalization of equality and meritocracy in Singapore allows for a "fairer platform" in providing the less privileged with a chance at economic success that has little to do with one's socioeconomic background or social connections at home. It is precisely this greater sense of equality that constructs the economic opportunities in allowing the 'digestion' of talents and rationalizing the stayers' decision to stay in Singapore after study.

Nevertheless, the possibility of the international students' progression from study to work in the host country is highly dependent on the host country's reception (Li *et al.* 1996). According to Ho and Ge (2011), the internationalization of the higher educational institutions plays a pivotal part in Singapore's human capital management. Identified as potential high skilled foreign talents, the Singapore government seeks to retain the international students as skilled labor for its national economy. Most notably, the introduction of the Tuition Grant Scheme and MOE Scholarships is a manifestation of the Singapore government's attempt to convert the international students into a skilled labor force through the imposition of a 3 to 6 years of service obligation in a Singapore based company after study in

[62] Translated from Mandarin Chinese

return for the finance assistance[63] (see Ng 2011). In the case of this study, the service obligation scheme also accounts for a substantial proportion of the Mainland Chinese students' decision to stay in Singapore after study. Although the Mainland Chinese students' transition from study to work in Singapore is largely welcomed by the Singapore government, the Mainland Chinese students also encounter the issue of immigration restrictions due to a shift from an open immigration policy to an increasingly restrictive immigration policy since the mid-2000 onwards.

As Thompson (2014) suggests, the new immigration restrictions are not based on rational economic choices[64] but a response to the locals' dissent on citizenship rights, especially after the 2011 General Election where the immigration influx was constructed as the center of all 'social ills' in Singapore (also see Yeoh and Lin 2013). To address the citizens' discontents, the Singapore government responds with a further expansion of differentiation that privileges citizenship rights while imposing greater restrictions on the immigrants. Nationality is effectively politicized in the labor market as manifested in the tightening of Employment Pass (EP) Criteria in 2011 (Yahoo News, 16 August 2011), and the new Manpower Ministry rule that requires the openings for jobs less than $12000 to be listed on a MOM website, in which only the locals can access, before they can be offered to

[63] As discussed in Chapter 2, the SM Scholars are tired to a 6 years service obligation in Singapore. The Tuition Grant Scheme is offered to self-funding international students a subsidy for their tuition cost in Singapore. In return, they are tied to a 3 years of service obligation in a Singapore-registered company. Like the SM Scholars, most of the Mainland Chinese students in this study are the recipients of the Tuition Grant subsidy and are therefore, subjected to service obligation. Refer to appendix for the informants' biography.

[64] If anything, the shift towards a tightening of immigration policy is economically risky, "as they might drive away both job-creating corporate foreign talent and low-cost labor leading to wage and price inflation" (Thompson 2014:322).

foreigners introduced in 2013 (Today, 23 September 2013). The consequence is a clash between the economic rationality of foreign talents and the politics of citizenship in the current Singapore context. For the Mainland Chinese students in this study then, finding a job and getting an EP become increasingly difficult, despite the recognition of their local degrees in Singapore. For instance, Zhihao explains:

> "Singapore places a lot of emphasis on your degree. Therefore, having a local degree is actually very advantageous for us, especially when it is from the 3 local universities. SMU, NUS and NTU. So basically, the employers will recognize your skills… Many local employers will not recognize you if you don't have a local degree. They will not even look at you. […] Of course, the locals have their advantage. You look at the newspaper. When I was looking for a job [in 2010], the job requirements already stated 'PR[65] or Singaporean only'. It's even more exaggerated now. It's 'Singaporean only' now because the government introduced many policies to restrict the recruitment of foreigners. […] Do you know EP[66] needs to be renewed every one or two years? I am also trying to apply for PR now. Sometimes if you don't have a PR status, or a local status, it is very difficult for you to switch to a new job. My EP renewal was rejected in September this year. It was only approved in the second round. The policies are getting tighter now." (Zhihao[67], male, postgraduate, self-funding)

Although individuals do rely on social networks in the search for information, job placement and employability are generally based on distinction of academic credentials and skills in a city where meritocracy is institutionalized and characterized by an absence of credential inflation. In this sense, the social

[65] Refers to the Permanent Residence

[66] Refers to the Employment Pass. EP can only be applied through the endorsement of a Singapore-registered company. It will be cancelled immediately if the holder quits his or her job. He or she would then have 30 days to find a new job and to secure a new EP. Thereafter, he or she would have to leave Singapore.

[67] Translated from Mandarin Chinese

networks in Singapore, while still instrumentally important, may not go as far as the kind of *guanxi* network seen in the returnees' accounts in Beijing. Nonetheless, a more problematic issue is the immigration restrictions in limiting the Mainland Chinese students' job prospects in Singapore. Often, the Mainland Chinese students articulate a sense of frustration and helplessness in their predicament especially for those who are tied to the service obligation. Although most of the international students remain in Singapore to fulfill the service obligation (Straits Times, 21 February 2014), there is also an increasing sense of disenchantment due to the contradiction of the service obligation scheme that continues to bond the international students, despite the increasing difficulty for them to find employment in Singapore (Straits Times, 29 April 2014). The contradictory attitudes towards foreign labors have the potential of creating a vague attitude amongst the international students towards their future in Singapore (also see Wang 2012). In effect, the sense of disenchantment is potentially an expensive cost in Singapore's human capital management should the international students decide to leave Singapore or default on the service obligation. For those who intend to stay in Singapore on a permanent basis, however, applying for Permanent Residence becomes a necessity in order to ease the uncertainties of EP and the politics of citizenship as seen in Zhihao's account.

In short, the Mainland Chinese students' post-study destination cannot simply be explained by the pull of the economic performance in the respective cities per se. Instead, the evaluation of economic opportunities hinges on the social recognition of talents. In a city like Beijing that is characterized by credential

inflation, academic qualifications itself is no longer a signal of distinction. Instead, the recognition of talents is enabled by *guanxi*. In contrast, although Singapore is characterized by a greater degree of equality and an absence of credential inflation, the distinction of academic qualifications is undermined by the politics of citizenship. In both instances, academic qualifications are not as portable as what the human capital paradigm proposes. Rather, the evaluation of academic qualifications and the availability of opportunities are tied to broader economic, political and socioeconomic processes in the respective cities. In this sense, the Mainland Chinese students' post-study destination is dependent on how they negotiate with these processes in the search for opportunities that can 'digest' their talents.

Conclusion

Migration decision is neither a free choice nor a voluntary act (Cassarino 2004). Instead, it is made in relation to the roles individuals are embedded in. Just as an exit from university is about an entrance into work and financial independence, the Mainland Chinese students' exit from university also exposes them to new demands of filial obligations and marriage expectations that intersect with their status as the only child in the family. In this sense, the attractiveness of returning to China or staying in Singapore is made in response to these demands as the Mainland Chinese students negotiate with the transition into adulthood roles after study.

Although this chapter presents the three points of familial obligations, marriage expectation and the 'digestion' of talents separately, these factors are

in reality interrelated and equally important in influencing the Mainland Chinese students' post-study trajectory. A return for the family coincides with the employment opportunities available in Beijing as seen in Weiqi's account. Similarly, a stay in Singapore for career advancement is also about achieving the financial success that allows the filial child to create a comfortable environment in the hope of their family members joining them in Singapore in the future. Therefore, the scholarship on the international students' post-study trajectory cannot simply be explained by the pull of the economic performance of the respective cities. While important, it also encompasses broader process that demands existing scholars to examine the economic opportunities in relation to the interplay of individuals' biographies and relationships embedded in the post-study trajectory.

As Ho (2006) noted, the formation of a cosmopolitan city is both a result of attracting talented workforce around the world and a precondition for attracting such workers. As Beijing and Singapore attempt to push the cities into world city status (Newman and Thornley 2011), this group of Mainland Chinese students are also identified as important talents that these cities attempt to attract and retain (Ho and Ge 2011; Bail and Shen 2008). Nonetheless, the issue of human capital management in these cities is a tricky issue as the credential inflation in Beijing may potentially translate to brain wastage, while Singapore may face the risk of brain drain should the international students leave the city in response to the politics of citizenship. Therefore, the Mainland Chinese students' post-study trajectory also has important implications on the city formation of Beijing and Singapore.

Situated in the Mainland Chinese students' transition to adulthood, the exit from the university also demands the student migrants to negotiate with the new sense of responsibilities that they are subjected to as they progress into adulthood roles. In this sense, the post-study trajectory is as much about the entrance into work as about the transition into a filial child for the parents and a transition into a married life. Therefore, going beyond the understanding of post-study destination as a response to the economic performance of the respective cities, this chapter contends for the need to examine the post-study trajectory in relation to individual's biography and broader social and cultural processes.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Going beyond the simplistic understanding of international student mobility as a form of educational exchange and human capital development, this thesis attempted to anchor the student migration trajectory the transitional phase of emerging adulthood, thus bringing attention to how the experience of studying abroad influence the young people' pathway as they navigate their life alongside the transition to adulthood. The objective of this thesis is therefore to bring attention to the dynamism and complexity of international student mobility that occurs at a particular life stage that is arguably the most critical to the young people's transition to adulthood.

6.1 Significance of Findings

Situated in the transitional phase of the life course where the demand for capital accumulation and youthful desires are at the strongest, studying abroad creates the possibility for the Mainland Chinese students to search for a 'roundabout route' (Waters 2006, 2008) to the access to elite universities as a compensation for the (anticipated) failure at home as well as to fulfill their aspirations to explore the unknown world outside of China. Moving beyond the understanding of overseas education as a form of human capital development, this thesis contends for the need to examine the motivations for international student mobility as one that is simultaneously embedded in the accumulation of cultural capital and the youthful desire to venture out of China, albeit one that is only possible due to the middle-class family'

fetishization of the single-child and the Singapore state's strategy of talent attraction in supporting the student migratory flow.

Imagined as a route to upward mobility, overseas education is a site of accumulation where individuals seek to acquire a more valuable form of cultural capital (i.e. elite credentials and skills) that could be converted into precious forms of economic capital (i.e. employment opportunities), social capital (i.e. alumni network) and symbolic capital (i.e. prestige) after study. Despite the common belief in academic achievements as the route to success in life, the conversion of cultural capital into other forms of capital is not as linear as imagined by the Mainland Chinese students in this study. Rather, the analysis on the Mainland Chinese students' post-study trajectory in Chapter 5 has shown how the value of cultural capital is socially and spatially differentiated. For the returnees in Beijing, the value of elite credentials hinges on social recognition, thus bringing attention to the importance of social capital in facilitating the exchange of cultural capital into economic capital. For the stayers in Singapore, however, the value of elite credentials is undermined by the politics of citizenship. In this sense, the conversion of cultural capital is essentially a social process that must be examined in relation to broader economic, political and socioeconomic processes.

Although existing research on network analysis often constructs social relationships as a form of social capital that could be converted into instrumental benefits (e.g. Bian 2006; Granovetter 1973; Portes 1998), this thesis has brought attention to the importance of social networks in enabling a

certain type of lifestyle. Building on the conception of social capital as a means to facilitate the Mainland Chinese students' settlement process in Singapore, membership in a co-national network also plays a pivotal role in replicating a 'China lifestyle' in the host country through the extension of cultural ties and practices enabled by the interactions with fellow members in the co-national network. Rendering help to the members in the co-national network is therefore more than a means to the accumulation of social capital, but a necessity in sustaining one's membership in the co-national network, of which the latter creates the possibility of living a 'China life' in Singapore. As such, while the instrumental use of social capital remains important in the examination of migrants' pathway, this thesis contributes to the existing studies on network analysis by bringing attention to the significance of social relations as one that is intrinsically linked to the creation of a certain lifestyle.

By investigating the phenomenon of international student mobility as a particular life-stage, this thesis also attempted to move beyond the conventional understanding of educational outcome as a mere evaluation of cultural capital or an attraction to the economic potential of the respective cities. At the end of the educational trajectory, the exit from school denotes a transition into adulthood roles for this group of Mainland Chinese students who are or would be confronted with the filial obligations to the parents and a gendered expectation on marriage that are at times in conflict with their own aspirations. As a product of the fetishization of the single child, the bind of the parent-child relationship demands the Mainland Chinese students to negotiate with the roles and responsibilities of a precious child and a filial child in the

navigation of their pathway in life. Most notably, gender appears to be a significant factor in differentiating and influencing the Chinese youths' pathway in life. Although the males are also confronted with the filial obligations to the parents, the pressure is much more pervasive for the female students due to the conflation of filial duty and a gendered norm for marriage. In this sense, the post-study trajectory cannot be understood as a mere entrance into adult occupational roles. Rather, it demands the Mainland Chinese students to respond to the new sense of filial obligations, gendered expectations and adulthood responsibilities as they come of age after study.

Although I had initially expected the postgraduates to be at a different point of maturity than the undergraduates, the accounts from the Mainland Chinese students in this study suggest otherwise. Interestingly, the university allows for an age moratorium that keeps the future at bay while giving allowance for fun and the discovery of the self to both the undergraduates and postgraduates. Yet the danger of living in the extended present is when the over-emphasis on fun derails the learning experience, thus obstructing the young people's ability to anticipate and prepare for the impending transition to adulthood. In other words, studenthood is an ageless role and the Chinese youths only encounter the reality of becoming an adult after they exit from the university. Therefore, there appears to be little behavioral variations between the undergraduates and postgraduates in this study except for the greater scrutiny for the postgraduate female students to enter into a married life due to the enforcement of a strong cultural and gendered norm for marriage in the Chinese society.

Anchored in a particular slice of the Mainland Chinese students' pathway that spans across a period between 5 to 8 years (that begins immediately before the student migration trajectory and ends immediately after the educational trajectory), this thesis attempted to capture the social processes and relationships that are the most critical in shaping the young people's pathway. Therefore, this thesis moved beyond the analysis of international student mobility as a form of commitment to education in preparation for the future transition to work. Through an examination of the Mainland Chinese students' biographical accounts that occurred in the most malleable stage of the life course, this thesis attempted to recover the youthful aspirations, the familial aspirations and the broader social cultural processes that not only shape the experiences embedded in the student migration trajectory, but also the young people's pathway as they navigate their life alongside the transition to adulthood.

6.2 Implications on Singapore's Higher Education Industry

As one of the major hosts of the student migrants from China, Singapore's internationalization of higher education is constructed as a tool to realize its ambition to tap into the international student market and more importantly, for its search for human capital. Instead of a dream destination, the Mainland Chinese students' accounts point to a construction of Singapore as a second choice or a 'realistic choice' (Lim 2011:56) of study destination in consideration to the ease of entry, which is partly facilitated by the institutional bridges, the extension of scholarships, and its city attributes as a Chinese-dominated society and the image of a safe environment. In this sense,

the appeal of Singapore as a study destination cannot be attributed to the 'pull' of its higher education institutions alone, but also encompasses the imagination of a certain lifestyle in Singapore that the student migrants are attracted to.

Although the Service Obligation Scheme is useful in converting the student migrants into human capital for Singapore's economy, the paradox of the scheme lies in the politicization of nationality in creating an ambiguous message on the reception of 'foreign talents' in the context of Singapore's labor market today. Elsewhere, Lim's (2011) study on the Mainland Chinese settled student migrants in Singapore has noted the politicization of nationality in distinguishing the ethnic identities between the Mainland Chinese and the Singaporean Chinese. While important, the significance of the politicization of nationality goes beyond the cultural divide. Instead, the tightening of immigration and employment policies based on the politicization of nationality has potential serious implications on an economy that is highly dependent on foreign talents. Therefore, an important issue to consider is how to reconcile the politics of citizenship rights and the economic logic of foreign talents in addressing the Singapore state's human capital management.

6.3 Recommendation for Future Research

Through the analysis on the significance of co-national networks, this thesis has brought attention to the use of social networks in enabling a "China lifestyle" in the host country. However, the significance of co-national networks should not only be confined to those that are developed in the host

country. Instead, there is room for the exploration on how the maintenance of transnational ties with the family members and peers at the home country influence the student migrants' settlement in the host country. Despite the lack of data that documents the operation of transnational connections in this thesis, living a "China life" can arguably be sustained and reinforced by the transnational ties that continue to feed the student migrants with images and information of their home country via the use of social media platforms. In this sense, future study should seek to address how the maintenance of transnational connections with home via the use of social media can potentially reinforce the 'China life' in the host country.

As Singapore is commonly constructed as the second choice for many of the Mainland Chinese students in this study, the move to Singapore may also be a stepping-stone for the Mainland Chinese students for the purpose of accumulating the necessary capital such as academic credentials and cosmopolitan traits like English competency, as they pave their way to their ideal destination in U.S and UK after study. In this sense, for those who chose to stay in Singapore after study, the stay may also be temporary or transitional. Although the scope of this thesis is confined to the comparison between the home country and the host country, future study should also include the analysis on the impact of studying abroad on the student migrants' move to a third country in the analysis of the student migrants' post-study trajectory.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Classification of the Mainland Chinese Students in this Study

TYPES OF STUDENTS	DESCRIPTION	SERVICE OBLIGATION?
MOE Scholarships for the Mainland Chinese Students: SM Scholarship	Candidates are usually selected by the Chinese partner educational institutions with Singapore's MOE. Selected candidates are required to sit for a standardized entrance examination and oral interview. Shortlisted Scholars would then withdraw from their current study in preparation to move to Singapore. Orientation programs and bridging courses will be conducted in preparation for the SM Scholars transition to Singapore. In return to the sponsored education, the SM Scholars are bound to a service obligation of 6 years in a Singapore-based company after study.	
1. SM1 Scholarship	SM1 caters for the outstanding junior high school graduates	N. A.
2. SM2 Scholarship	SM2 caters for the outstanding high school students who are in the second year	6 years
3. SM3 Scholarship	SM3 caters for the outstanding freshman in China's prestigious universities	6 years
4.'SM2.5' Scholarship	Although not listed as an official SM Scholarship, there is another category of MOE scholarship offered to outstanding Mainland Chinese students that are commonly referred as SM2.5 Scholarship. Unlike SM1, SM2, and SM3, applicants for SM2.5 Scholarship do not need to sit for an entrance examination. Instead, applicants can apply for Singapore's universities directly with their *gaokao* results.	3 years
Self-Funding Students:		
1. Full Fee Paying Students	Students who pay the full costs of their course.	N. A.

2. MOE Tuition Grant Scheme	The Tuition Grant Scheme is offered to all international students who are enrolled in Singapore's public tertiary institutions in exchange for 3 years of service obligation in a Singapore-registered company upon graduation.	3 years
3. NTU-Wuhan Joint Education Program	Under the NTU-Wuhan Joint Education Program, the Mainland Chinese students from Wuhan University would spend the fourth year doing their final year project at NTU's School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Subsequently, they will transit to a Master Program (MSc or MEng) at NTU's School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering.	N. A.
Research Scholars	Offered to postgraduate students who are enrolled in the research program at NTU/NUS.	N. A.

Appendix 2 – Informants' Biography

Current Students in NUS/NTU (At the Point of Interview)						
Name	**Age**	**(M /F)**	**Single-Child?**	**Province/ City of Origin**	**Type of Financing**	**Course/University**
Junhao	23	M	No	Zhejiang	Self-funding and the Tuition Grant Scheme (TGS)	Masters in Applied Economics, NUS
Chengbin	28	M	Yes	Shandong	SM2 (Ba) Research Scholarship (PhD)	Bachelor in Life Sciences (2010), PhD in Pharmacology, NUS
Weihao	24	M	Yes	Suzhou	SM2 (Ba) Research Scholarship (PhD)	Bachelor in Computer Science (2013), PhD in Computer Science, NUS
Ruiyang	24	M	Yes	Jiangsu	SM2 (Ba), Self-funding (Master)	Bachelor in Civil Engineering (2013), Master in Civil Engineering, NTU
Qinghan	23	M	Yes	Changzhou, Jiangsu	Self-funding (MA), Research Scholarship (PhD)	Master in Aerospace Engineering (2013), PhD in Aerospace Engineering, NTU
Junliang	24	M	Yes	Taian, Shandong	SM2 (BA), Research Scholarship (PhD)	Bachelor in Engineering Science (2013), PhD in Engineering Science, NUS

Yutong	22	F	Yes	Jiangsu	Research Scholarship	Masters in Sociology, NTU
Meihui	22	F	No	Anhui	Self-funding and TGS	Masters in Electrical and Electronic Engineering, NTU
Junyang	32	M	Yes	Wuhan	SM (BA), Research Scholarship (PhD)	Bachelor in Life Sciences (2010), PhD in Pharmacology, NUS
Linli	25	F	Yes	Chengdu	Self-funding and TGS (BA), Research Scholarship (PhD)	Bachelor in Industrial and system engineering (2013), PhD in Integrating Sciences and engineering, NUS
Denghui	22	M	No	Guangdong	Self-funding and TGS (BA)	Double Degree in Industrial and System Engineering and Economic, NUS
Zhirong	22	M	Yes	Liaoning	SM2	Bachelor in Mathematics and Economics, NTU

Graduates in Singapore						
Name	**Age**	**(M /F)**	**Single-Child?**	**Province/ City of Origin**	**Type of Financing**	**Course/University**
Qinhao	24	M	Yes	Xiamen, Fujian	Self-funding and TGS	Masters in Statistics (2013), NUS
Ruiting	24	F	Yes	Jiangsu	Self-funding and TGS	Bachelor in History, NUS
Zhiqiang	25	M	Yes	Guangzhou, Guangdong	Self-funding and TGS	Bachelor in Applied Mathematics

						(2014), NUS
Meiting	31	F	No	Guangdong	SM3	Bachelor in Biology (2007), NTU
Jiehui	23	M	No	Yinchun, Jiangxi	SM2	Bachelor in electrical Engineering (2013), NUS
Liqin	27	M	Yes	Wuhan	Self-financing	NTU-Wuhan Joint Program (2010), NTU
Huixian	27	F	Yes	Hebei	Self-funding and TGS	Master in Financial Engineering (2012), NTU
Zhihao	28	M	Yes	Wuhan	Self-funding	NTU-Wuhan Joint Program (2010), NTU
Jiajie	32	M	Yes	Liaoning	SM2	Bachelor in Electrical Engineering (2006), NUS
Lihong	25	M	Yes	Tianjing	Self-funding and TGS	Master in Mechanical Engineering (2013), NTU
Jiajun	26	M	Yes	Jiangsu	SM2	Bachelor in Electrical and Electronic Engineering (2012), NTU
Dongliang	25	M	Yes	Jiangxi	SM3	Bachelor in Mechanical Engineering (2010), NUS

Graduates in Beijing						
Name	**Age**	**(M/F)**	**Single-Child?**	**Province/ City of Origin**	**Type of Financing**	**Course/University**
Bolin	33	M	Yes	Shandong	Research Scholar	Masters in Sociology (2010), NUS

Zhangjie	33	M	Yes	Hebei	SM3	Bachelor in Computer Science (2007), NUS
Zhicai	34	M	Yes	Shanxi	Research Scholar	Joint Masters (NUS and TUM[68]) of Science in Industrial Chemistry (2005), NUS
Ziyi	22	F	Yes	Harbin	SM2.5	Bachelor in Business Administration (2013), NUS
Shuhui	35	M	Yes	Chengdu	Scholarship by a private organization	Master in Computer Science (2003), NUS
Jialing	28	F	Yes	Wuhan	Self-funding	NTU-Wuhan Joint Program (2010), NTU
Ziting	31	F	Yes	Guangzhou, Guangdong	Self-funding	Masters in Public Administration (2010), NUS
Zetao	39	M	Yes	Yunnan	Self-funding	NUS-PKU[69] Double Degree MBA (2005), NUS
Weiqi	22	F	Yes	Hebei	Self-funding and TGS	Bachelor in Business Administration (2013), NUS

[68] Refers to Technische Universität München. Zhicai spent 1 year in Singapore and another in Munich.
[69] Refers to Peking University. Zetao spent 1 year in Singapore and another in Beijing.

Appendix 3 – Interview Guide

1. Individual Background
    - Could you tell me about the place you grew up (what kind of city/town is it, your family)?
    - What kind of education did you have before going to Singapore? (school, tertiary, language)
    - Did you travel or live abroad when you were growing up? Did your parents, siblings or friends?

2. Family Background
    - Tell me about your parents: where they grew up, their education and jobs?
    - Do your parents have particular expectations of your and your siblings? What do they value more?
    - Tell me about your siblings: how many, what are their age, what are they doing now?

3. Current Activities
    - Could you tell me what you are doing with your life right now (job, study, family)?
    - Why are you living and working in Singapore/Beijing? Was this your first choice?
    - What were the other choices you considered when you graduated?
    - How was your job search like?

4. Current perspectives on education
    - Could you tell me how was/is your time during your study at Singapore?
    - What is your opinion of the degree program you completed at NTU/NUS? Do you feel that your study experience matched the expectations before you enrolled? Why or why not?

5. Value of overseas education
    - How has your degree at NTU/NUS contributed to your current activities?
    - Was the experience/degree valuable?
    - How would you evaluate the experience?