The Transition from Education to Work: The Job-Hunting Experiences of University Graduates in Shanghai, China

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Abstract

Many development planners, economists and scholars view education as an engine for the development and modernisation of a country and as the key to social mobility for the disadvantaged. Other scholars see education as a force for social reproduction, that is, the reproduction of social inequality. By studying the transition experiences of university graduates in China, as they move from the university to the world of work, this research provides empirical data on the articulation of higher education, young people's transition to work and social mobility in the Chinese context.

The main primary data are university graduates' personal transition experiences and job-hunting stories. Fieldwork was conducted in Shanghai, China during the period January to July, 2011. I used semi-structured interviews and participant observation as my main field research methods, and complemented the fieldwork data with information from a critical reading of the secondary literature on the sociology of education, youth transitions and tertiary education in China. In the thesis I record the ambitions and dreams of young graduates about their future and I examine their struggles and dilemmas in their transition from university to work. I investigate social factors such as class background, the Chinese household registration (*hukou*) system, gender, network connections (*guanxi*) and government policies that affect graduates' transition experiences.

My research found that while China will no doubt benefit from its policy of rapidly producing many tertiary-educated graduates, at the level of the individual,

educational mobility and academic achievement do not necessarily lead to desired employment and social outcomes. As the French sociologist, Bourdieu, has argued, education reflects socio-economic background. The individual's education-to-work trajectory is the consequence of their total "capital", in Bourdieu's sense of capital that includes social, economic and cultural capital. While graduates gain cultural capital through their higher education, my research shows that the social factors mentioned above act to mediate the effect of higher education (or cultural capital) on graduates' upward social mobility. Education mobility thus maintains the privilege of those who are already privileged; as a strategy for social mobility, it is very limited in its efficacy and often functions to preserve social difference.

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Source: http://www.chinatourmap.com/china-travel-maps/china-province-map.html

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study is about the transition from youth to adulthood for university graduates in China and the associated transitions from university to work and from single status to marriage. In China, the university–to–work transition is a determining shift in young people's life trajectories. It is the first step for young Chinese graduates entering the job market and becoming economically (and socially) independent, and it is also the beginning of their preparation for later life stages such as marriage and having a family. By studying the transition struggles and challenges of university graduates from their own perspective, this thesis examines how education provides young people with increased cultural capital and how this enhanced cultural capital leads them to expect upward social mobility. At the same time, I argue that their social background, gender, and social networks (*guanxi* connections in the Chinese context) greatly affect their transition from university to work, limiting their social mobility, and thus contributing to social reproduction. In this chapter, I will discuss the idea of education as a pathway to social mobility; then I will introduce the changes in the economy and labour market, and the expansion of higher education in China and its incidental consequences such as credential devaluation, which all contribute to the uncertainty of graduates' employability. I will also look at new trends in young people's transition to adulthood by giving a brief introduction to marriage trends in contemporary China.

Education as a Pathway to Advancement

"To be a scholar is to be [at] the top of society" (*Wanban jie xiapin, weiyou dushu gao*)

—Wangzhu, <*Shentong shi*>, Song dynasty

Educational development is believed to be closely related to the socio-economic development of a nation and has been given great importance in the development strategies of many countries. Education has been regarded as a source of and catalyst for economic growth and development (Watson 1988; Wiseman and Collins 2012, p. 19). Moreover, some studies have perceived education as the primary engine for the development of the quality of human resources and the provider of opportunity, claiming that education recognises and rewards the meritorious, regardless of their social background (Conant 1938; McNamee 2009). In political terms, education, especially secondary and tertiary level education, is believed to bring new attitudes and values which promote nation-building as well as curing many social and political ills (Watson 1988).

Education is one of the three components of the Human Development Index (HDI) which measures a country's performance in standard of living, health and education (Decancq, Decoster and Schokkaert 2009).[1] Political speeches have claimed education as a prerequisite to advancement and the best anti-poverty programme (Obama 2009; Obama 2010). Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping also emphasised the importance of education in economic development, stating that "[T]he rapid development of the economy must rely on science and education...science and technology is the primary mode of production" (Deng 1994, p. 89). There is a

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[1] "The education component of the HDI is measured by mean years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age". (United Nations Development Programme, 2005)

consensus on the important role of education in Asian economic development (Sood, Sharma and Kohli 2011).

Such discourses of education as the pathway to development are also found in educational policies and development discourses, especially those of donor agencies such as the World Bank. Being the world's most influential organisation in education policy and the largest external investor for education in developing countries, the World Bank sees education as a precursor to modernisation, and has been extremely influential in supporting the expansion of formal education systems around the world (Jones 2012). Since 1962, the World Bank has invested US$69 billion globally in education and has made substantial contributions to educational development, especially in improving enrolment rates and gender enrolment equality (Wiseman and Collins 2012, p. 20). In its Education Strategy 2020, the World Bank emphasised that education is fundamental to economic development and growth and "focused on supporting economic development in countries worldwide through systematic and targeted educational reform" (Wiseman and Collins 2012, p. 3).

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established by the United Nations are a well-known measure and target of development. The MDGs goals on achieving universal primary education and gender equality in education show the crucial role education and gender equality play in fighting against poverty and building a country's human resource capacity (United Nations 2000).

Equal achievement for both genders has been found to contribute to economic and social progress (Schultz 2002). Female education is believed to be one of the best

developmental investments, with many beneficial outcomes such as increasing female labour-force participation rates, later marriage and lower birth rates, which help slow population growth and overcome poverty.

Background: Chinese Economic Reform and the Expansion of Higher Education

Education has always been highly valued in traditional Chinese society: to respect the teacher and value education are seen as traditional Chinese virtues. For the ordinary people in society, education is believed to be a ladder that enables people to "move up", to realise upward social mobility (Bian 2002; Wang and Lowe 2011). From the famous teaching that "instruction knows no social distinction (*you jiao wu lei*)" by Confucius in the Spring and Autumn period (771-476 BC), through the encouragement of education by the Emperor of the Song Dynasty – "Books hold a thousand measures of grain…in books are found houses of gold and beautiful women like jade… the young man who wishes to be somebody, he will devote his time to the Classics" (Zhao circa 1162) – to Deng Xiaoping's famous aforementioned speech on the importance of education in socio-economic development in 1992, Chinese people and Chinese society have always had a high regard for education, especially higher education.

The Chinese economic reform and transformation since 1978 have brought great economic achievements and resulted in changes in all aspects of social lives (Meng, Shen and Xue 2013). However, the economic achievements have not been spread equally across the country or across social strata. There is a wide disparity between the east coastal regions and the western inland regions. Coastal cities such as

Shanghai are among the ones with the most rapid growth, and these cities also have the richest educational resources (Meng, Shen and Xue 2013; Wang and Lowe 2011). The market-oriented economic reform has created an increasing number of new jobs requiring high skills and technology. For individuals, it is generally believed that investment in education would increase one's competitiveness in securing a good job. From the early 1980s, China embarked on a major economic shift, changing from a planned economy to a market economy (Wang 2008). Prior to that, tertiary education was the privilege of very small elite, and it was virtually cost-free for them. Their jobs were guaranteed and assigned to them by the government through a centralised placement system (*fenpei*) (Li and Zhang 2010).

After the economic reform, the number of university student enrolments increased modestly from 0.86 to 1.08 million from 1978 to 1998 (Ministry of Education 1998). However, the tertiary education enrolment rate by then was only four per cent of the 18-22 year age group,[2] much lower than the levels of other countries with similar economic development achievement: for example, the tertiary education enrolment rate was 31 per cent in the Philippines, 37 per cent in Thailand and eight per cent in India. In 1998, with the aim to shift higher education from being the preserve of the elite to allow it to be open to the masses, the Chinese Politburo Standing Committee set a national goal: to have 15 per cent of the age group (18-22 years) enrolled in higher education by 2010 (Ministry of Education 1998).

Besides being a strategy to stimulate the Chinese economy after the Asian financial crisis in 1997, the expansion of the higher education sector also aims to improve the

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[2] In 1997, there were 7.1 million new job-seekers in the market, among which 82,900 were university graduates.

quality (*suzhi*) of human resources, which is regarded as critical for the development of contemporary China (Liu 2009; Jacka 2009). The Chinese term *suzhi* refers to "a combination of material and ethical substances that it is claimed can be known, calculated, and, in most cases, improved, …[*Suzhi*] functions as a measure of human value which constructs a hierarchy of worthiness and utility" (Sigley 2009, p. 539). *Suzhi jiaoyu*, or "education for quality", has been promoted by the Chinese government since 2000, with the intention to educate the next generation to be able "both to inherit and contribute to China's efforts to modernise and become economically and politically powerful on the global stage" (Woronov 2009, p. 569).

China has seen the dramatic expansion of higher education over the past 15years (Li and Zhang 2010). It reached the goal of 15 per cent of the 18-22 age group enrolled in higher education in 2002, eight years earlier than predicted. In the first six years, the number of new students rose from 1.08 million in 1998 to 5.4 million in 2006 (Bai 2006). In 2004, enrolments (first year undergraduate students) in higher education institutions reached 4.47 million, 19 per cent of the 18-22 age group in China (Bureau of Statistics of China 2005). In 2006, the number of enrolled students in institutions of higher education was 23 million, meaning that China ranked number one in the world in absolute terms (Xinhua Net 2009). In 2013, the number of university graduates reached 6.99 million (Bai 2013).

The expansion of higher education in China not only brought great pressure to the universities, with tight teaching resources and infrastructure (Guang, Wu and Lin 2012), but also revealed problems with the unbalanced allocation of education resources among different regions, causing educational inequality, especially

between Eastern and Western China (Zhang 2009; Liu 2012). In the face of a serious economic crisis in 2008, graduate unemployment has become a social issue in China that cannot be neglected (Sun 2008).

To help ease the graduate unemployment problem and, at the same time, to take steps to balance the development between Eastern and Western, and urban and rural, China, the Chinese government has initiated many measures and actions to send graduates to rural and outlying areas to look for and take up jobs. These programmes include the "Free Teacher Training Policy" (or Special Rural Teaching Positions, discussed in Chapter 8), "County Official Positions for University Graduates",[3] "Three Supports, One Assistance (*San Zhi Yi Fu*)"[4] and "Go West Plan (*Xibu Jihua*)"[5] (Guo 2013). All these projects did manage to allocate many graduates to positions in rural and inland China. For example, the "San Zhi Yi Fu" plan aimed to send 20,000 graduates each year after 2006; by 2013 it had managed to send 88,000 (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China 2013). The "County Graduate Official" plan hoped to send 100,000 graduate

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[3] In 2009, the Chinese central government released its "Graduate Rural Officials" policy, which aims to strengthen leadership in local government by putting in "educated blood". This policy encourages university graduates to work in county-level government. Such graduate county officials are not civil servants: they are more like volunteers, with a small government honorarium. The annual subsidy is 5 000, 10 000, and 15 000 Chinese *yuan* for graduate county officials working in East, Middle, and West China, respectively (Huatu Education 2009).

[4] The "Three Supports, One Assistance (*San Zhi Yi Fu*)" policy was released after the 16th Plenary Session of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2005, with the aim of supporting the construction of the "New Socialist countryside". The "Three Supports" programme supports the development of education, agriculture and medical care in the countryside. The "One Assistance" programme refers to assistance to help the countryside with poverty alleviation. University graduates are participants in this policy: they are sent to the countryside to assist with poverty alleviation. The annual honorarium for "*San Zhi Yi Fu*" graduates is 2 000, 15 000 and 8 000 *yuan* for working in East, Middle and West China, respectively (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China 2013).

[5] The "Go West Plan (*Xibu Jihua*)" plan, an abbreviation of "University Graduates Volunteering to Serve in West China Plan" (*Daxuesheng zhiyuan fuwu xibu jihua*), was released in 2003 by the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League and the Ministry of Education. With the slogan "Go to the west, go to the grassroots level, and go to where graduates are most needed by our motherland", this plan requires participants to work at the township level in west China for one to three years, to support local development in education, the judicial system, poverty alleviation, etc. (Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China 2003).

officials in five years after 2009, and by 2013 it had recruited 78,000 rural officials. The "Go West" plan aimed to send 7,000 volunteers every year, and by 2013 it had sent 40,000 volunteers (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China 2013). The Free Teacher Training Project has recruited 10,000 students each year since 2007 (Ministry of Education 2007). However, the numbers sent by these plans are still quite small (57,000 graduates) compared with the overall number of graduates (seven million) each year (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China 2013).

In contrast to the scale of the problem, there is a relatively meager understanding of how the massive expansion of higher education over the last12 years has affected graduates' job-hunting experiences. We do not know how this problem is affecting Chinese society with reference to equity and social participation. This research project hopes to fill some of these serious gaps in our knowledge of China's system of higher education and the employment market by looking at factors that affect graduates' job-hunting experiences.

Background: Higher Education and Employability in China

The socio-economic transformation and development in China in the past 30 years or so is well known. The Chinese job market structure has also undergone profound transformation, transitioning from a lifelong job allocation system to a market-oriented system (Wang and Lowe 2011). The economic transformation has enabled young people to have more choices in the job market, while at the same time job security has decreased. Young people in China are now more self-responsible for

the risks and for their own employability (Wang and Lowe 2011). This shift is one of the hallmarks of neoliberalism that has occurred all over the world.

In the late 1990s, workers in the state owned enterprises (SOE) experienced a mass lay-off in China. The previous lifetime job allocations were replaced by market-based employment. University graduates, once the elite group in the Chinese labour market, are now facing the risk of unemployment for the first time. The employment situation of university graduates has been reported to have deteriorated and their social status is shifting from knowledge workers to a marginalised group (Wang and Lowe 2011; Lian 2009).

Graduate unemployment is nothing new worldwide. Similar decisions about the expansion of higher education can be found in many developing countries such as Thailand and the Philippines (Watson 1988). In these countries tertiary education was expanded for political reasons of providing future political leaders, helping to enforce a particular political philosophy, as well as helping to bring about political and ethnic cohesion (Watson 1988). Other functions, such as the provision of trained manpower, and the stimulation of economic growth have also been expected of universities. However, in those countries where the economic system has not expanded as rapidly as in China, and there are financial limitations, university expansion has led to a distortion in educational provision because they do not have enough resources to balance the costs in all levels of education (Watson 1988). The expansion in higher education would "raise students' academic expectations while at the same time lower academic standards, and increase graduate unemployment" (Watson 1988, p. 145). In a study of youth in Indonesia, Nilan et al. have found that

"[t]here is a risk of not only unemployment but underemployment for well-educated youth" (Nilan et al. 2011, p. 711). There is also a general awareness among Chinese young people of increasing insecurity in one's employment (Wang and Lowe 2011).

As many scholars have found (Bai 2006; Lian 2009; Yuan 2000; Niu 2002), China's recent sharp increase in graduate unemployment is due to several factors: mainly the rapid economic development and reform, educational policy-making, as well as the transformation of higher education (Bai 2006). In a knowledge-driven economy, one's employability not only depends on one's accumulation of necessary knowledge and skills to meet the job requirements, but also on one's relative advantage within a hierarchy of competitors, as well as how one manipulates the resources available to secure the relative advantage so as to get the job (Brown, Hesketh and Wiliams 2004; Wang and Lowe 2011). Moreover, the knowledge taught at universities does not always match the jobs available in the market, and the class hierarchy differentiates each individual's access to job opportunities. Thus, "being employable does not equate to being employed" (Wang and Lowe 2011, p. 124).

In 2006, the number of Chinese university graduates reached 4.13 million, a 22 per cent increase compared with 2005, but the market demand for university graduates in 2006 was only about 1.67 million, 22 per cent less than it was in 2005, which means that 60 per cent of university graduates were faced with an employment gap (New Century Weekly 2009). As part of the expansion of higher education in China, most universities established new majors. However, many of those majors were not based on market demand, which inevitably resulted in "mismatches between the

curriculum of higher education and market demands, and between graduates' aspirations and employability" (Bai 2006, p. 139).

Given the fact of the large number of graduates and the reality of not enough jobs, some scholars argued that the only way to solve the graduate unemployment problem was to lower graduates' job expectations (Niu 2002). However, most graduates were not willing to do so since they had great hopes for a high return from their investment in higher education. Most of the graduates preferred to look for jobs in developed areas and coastal cities where the salary was higher (Li 2002). In those areas, graduates were frequently found over-qualified for the jobs for which they applied, the employment level declined and the competition grew fiercer. The phenomenon that "a college/university degree could no longer guarantee a job to their satisfaction", bred a new outbreak of claims that "tertiary education is useless (*dushu wuyong lun*)" (Bai 2006, p. 137).

Pursuing a postgraduate degree is a countermove with which to face the gloomy graduate job market. From 1993 to 2007, the national graduate enrolment increased from 42,200 to 589,000 – an almost 14-fold increase (Qianlong News Net 2009). In 2013 1.76 million graduates applied for the national postgraduate entrance exam and 589,000 were recruited (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2013), with an admission rate of 33 per cent.

However, the employment outcomes, shown in the most recent data of 2013, seem to have betrayed graduates' expectations. The year 2013 was reported to have been the most difficult year for obtaining employment, with a falling demand for graduates

from all higher educational levels (Deng and Liu 2013). At the time of graduation, the per centage of graduates who have signed an employment contract (contract signing rate) varies among graduates of different educational levels. The contract signing rate among vocational college graduates was 32 per cent, 13 per cent lower than that of 2012; the contract signing rate among undergraduate course graduates was 35 per cent, 12 per cent lower than that of 2012; and for graduates with a Master's degree, their contract signing rate among the same cohort was the lowest: only 26 per cent having signed an employment contract, 11 per cent lower than the situation of graduates in 2012 (Deng and Liu 2013). In 2013, it was announced by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security that the annual average number of tertiary education graduates would persist at around seven million each year for the next five years, accounting for half the population of new labour in the market, and that this per centage would continue to rise (Zhao 2013). If we include graduates from secondary vocational schools, graduates who fail to enter higher education and demobilised soldiers, the number of young people looking for work would reach 16 million each year (Zhao 2013). The annual number of new jobs available in the market is between eight and ten million. For example, in 2014 the government goal is to create ten million new jobs, but this figure is still much lower than the number of new members of the labour force released into the market every year (Deng, Cao and Hu 2014).

It is quite obvious that, besides advancement, educational expansion has also produced some unintended negative consequences such as massive graduate unemployment. In this thesis, I respond to the claim that education is a pathway to

advancement by exploring graduates' transition experiences. Facing such gloomy prospects, the graduate labour market has become more competitive than ever before. Graduate employment is a multi-factored process: having the right skills and knowledge is the basis, but other factors such as one's social-economic and regional background, *hukou* status,[6] *guanxi* networks,[7] as well as gender all contribute to the outcomes of an individual's job-hunting.

Prior research that has examined the articulation of education in China with topics such as social class, gender and development, poverty and government policy has provided an essential empirical and sociological foundation for this thesis. I will be drawing upon the findings of this research throughout this thesis.

In Knight, Shi and Deng's study of education and poverty (2009), even though education was found helpful in raising household income for rural families through accessing well-paid, non-farming jobs, the returns on schooling were lower for low-income households. Insofar as lower-income households face lower returns to education, a poverty trap was created and maintained for those from low-income backgrounds (Knight, Shi and Deng 2009). Economic background is of particular importance in one's employability, but factors such as social networks, urban *hukou* status and the father's education have positive impacts on a graduate's educational and employment outcomes (Knight, Shi and Deng 2009).

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[6] *Hukou* is the Chinese name for Chinese Household Registration System. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

[7] *Guanxi* (pronounced "gwan-shee") can be loosely translated as "connections" (Gold 2002).

Social networks (*guanxi*) have long been known to be an important social tool in doing business and conducting negotiations in both Western and Chinese contexts (Simmons and Munch 1996; Gomez 1998; Lovett, Simmons and Kali 1999). *Guanxi* plays a pivotal role in Chinese society and exists in every aspect of Chinese people's lives (Yang 1994; Fan 2002). *Guanxi* networks, especially strong *guanxi* ties such as kinship relationships (Hwang 1987), have been found to be very helpful for job seekers in the Chinese labour market, with advantageous employment outcomes (Yang 1994; Bian 1994). In the planned-economy system, when the *hukou* system restriction was tight and urban jobs were allocated, *guanxi* played a very important role in employment opportunities and in enabling *hukou* change and geographical mobility (Yang 1994). In the era after the 1980s, when the employment system is more market-oriented, *guanxi* connections, instead of becoming less important, as one might expect, remains a factor of strong impact in shaping employment outcomes (Bian and Huang 2009). Previous studies of *guanxi* networks and employment outcomes have been mainly quantitative studies based on survey data and have mainly focused on job changers rather than first-time job seekers (Bian and Huang 2009; Zhang and Li 2003; Rose 2015). In Chapter 7 of this study I discuss how *guanxi* networks shape graduates' employability, using a qualitative approach to their transition experiences.

Lian Si (2009) studied the living conditions of unemployed and underemployed low-income college graduates in the rural-urban fringe of Beijing, and described their living situation as that of an "Ant Tribe". Lian coined the term "Ant Tribe" to describe the unemployed and low-income college graduates who live in China's rural-urban fringe. The Ant Tribe is made up of college graduates aged between 22

and 29 years. The term became hugely popular when Lian published his pioneering research focusing on low-income college graduates and social (in)stability (Lian 2009). Lian estimated that there are upwards of three million graduates in China who are without jobs, not including those doing work for which they are overqualified. Un(der)employed graduates are distributed in industries such as insurance promotion, electronic-appliance sales, advertising and the restaurant business, usually without contracts or social security benefits, with a salary of 2,000 *yuan* (about AU$333) or less.[8] The un(der)employed graduates' anger and grievances over their unstable living/working conditions might trigger larger scale social instability.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, investment in girls' education has been claimed to be a wise government policy, given the potential widespread beneficial outcomes from girls getting an education. These can include later marriage, lower birth rates, and increasing female labour-force participation rates, which maximise social output (Schultz 2002). Modernisation theory claims that gender inequality will reduce as an economy grows; however, an alternative perspective, the "women in development" (WID) framework, argues that initial economic development may widen gender gaps (Hannum 2005). Hannum studied the market transition and gender disparity in education in rural China: her findings echoed modernisation theory in that girls' educational opportunities were more responsive than boys' to better household economic situations, while at the same time, the rapid development of the economy

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[8] In Shanghai, for example, new university graduates are settling for a monthly salary of 1,200 Chinese *yuan* (about AU$200), slightly more than double Shanghai's minimum wage, while at the same time they have to face significant overheads (superannuation, unemployment insurance, health insurance, etc.). If we take into account the cost of living in Shanghai (including accommodation, transport and communication), it appears that the salary of these graduates is barely enough to cover basic needs.

may have temporarily slowed down the progress toward educational gender equality (Hannum 2005).

Li and Zhang studied employment opportunities for Chinese college graduates after the higher education reform. They found that college GPA (Grade Point Average) is an important determinant of graduates' placement outcome (Li and Zhang 2010). The employability of female graduates has been found to be in proportion with their GPA: better performance in college GPA led to a great employability improvement in the graduate market (Li and Zhang 2010). However, gender discrimination still exists: male graduates with similar qualifications are at an absolute advantage in the job market compared with their female peers (Li and Zhang 2010). Other aspects, such as how traditional gender ideology works in shaping young graduates' expectations with regard to employment or further education choices, as well as the conflicts between marriage and further education among female graduates, are less studied, and I will explore these in Chapter 6of this thesis.

Educational institutions do not exist in a political vacuum: they are structurally limited by the power of the state, and thus, state intervention greatly affects the role of education in socio-economic reproduction. Limin Bai (Bai 2006) studied the historical and socio-economic conditions for China's higher education expansion, its impact on society, and on graduate unemployment in particular, and questioned the feasibility of China's large scale higher education expansion. Futao Huang (Huang 2005) also acknowledged the problems caused by the rapid expansion, such as insufficient educational funding, lack of infrastructure and equipment across universities, as well as the problem of graduate unemployment. However, how

governmental policies shape the transition experiences of graduates was not discussed in much detail in either study. In Chapter 8 of my thesis, I look at this issue by examining the education-to-work transition of a special group of graduates who joined the free teacher-training education programme. In contemporary China, there are significant differences in how graduates from different socio-economic groups experience the study–work transition, and thus in their access to privileged jobs and positions. Besides education, one's class background, gender, and network connections all matter; and government policies are also set in favour of the dominant group. My main argument is that even though higher education has a positive role in helping students gain cultural capital in order to realise upward social mobility, social factors still greatly affect their education-to-work transitions in a way that reproduces social inequalities. Current government policies highlight the inherent contradiction between meritocracy and class reproduction. It is a contradiction that reflects both the idealisation of education as a pathway to upward social mobility which is inherent in contemporary understandings of the role of education in socio-economic development, and the neglect of the findings of the sociology of education: that education tends to reproduce existing social inequalities.

Marriage Trends in China

Love and Marriage in Contemporary China

Tremendous social and economic changes have taken place in China in the last 50 years, and these have had a great impact on Chinese people's lives. Chinese marriage has also undergone a process of reform, not only in terms of mate selection criteria

but also in the decision-making process, due to dramatic social, economic and political transformations (Xia and Zhou 2003, p. 233).

For a thousand years before the twentieth century, Chinese marriages were prearranged by parents, with the help of a match-maker (Xia and Zhou 2003). The match-maker considered factors such as family reputation and social status, with a basic rule called *men dang hu dui*, which means to match families of similar social and economic status (Xia and Zhou 2003). The Chinese patrilineal kinship system determined that the foremost function of marriage was to carry on the family line by having a son (Xia and Zhou 2003). The husband-wife relationship was not the centre of the marriage, and could never exceed the parent-son relationship.

After 1949, with the establishment of the Chinese Marriage Law, marriage became a legal status; bigamy, concubinage, prostitution and arranged marriages were outlawed; "the government promoted love and mutual companionship as major criteria in mate selection" (Xia and Zhou 2003, p. 235).

Courtship and marriage practice from the 1950s to the 1970s was marked by less parental control but more affected by the political and social environment (Xia and Zhou 2003). Arranged marriage still existed; however, parents had to take their children's opinion into consideration. In the 1950s, people were allocated into work units in the cities or into communes in rural areas. Couples needed to obtain approval from their work unit or commune to get married, and the approval or rejection of the marriage was based on one's class background (Xia and Zhou 2003). The standard for spouse choice was mainly a person's Communist passion and class

background rather than appearance, education or personality. In the 1950s, for Chinese women, men who are members of Party cadres were the most desirable partners for their "political standing, good incomes and upright personalities" (Xia and Zhou 2003, p. 236). Male workers and technicians in SOEs were among women's favourites in the 1960s, as they had secure jobs and good welfare benefits, and workers were considered the leading class in society (Xia and Zhou 2003). In the 1970s, young women preferred military officers and soldiers, because they could thereby obtain an urban *hukou* and move to the cities (Xia and Zhou 2003). People in the 1950s and 1960s lived in a whirl of political movements; they spent most of their time "building socialism" (Schneider 2014), with little room left for normal family life. Romantic feelings or attraction for another person was considered wrong and was strongly suppressed.

After 1970, a policy of "later, longer, fewer"[9] was initiated (Coale 1989). The minimum marriage age was postponed to 25 years for women and 28 for men in the cities, and 23 for women and 25 for men in the rural areas (Coale 1989; Schneider 2014). The One Child Policy was implemented from 1979. This Policy, together with strong son preference and resultant sex-selective abortions, have resulted in an imbalance in the Chinese demographic structure with a significant surplus of males in the marriage market (Liu, Li and Feldman 2013; Fincher 2014).

The large-scale social and economic reforms since 1978 have brought about great changes in people's everyday lives. The revised Marriage Law in 1980 states that marriage should be based on mutual affection (Standing Committee of the National

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[9] "Later, longer, fewer" means later marriage, longer inter-birth intervals, and fewer children.

People's Congress 1980). Marriage has come to be seen as a personal matter. Divorce has become more acceptable, and "sex, premarital cohabitation and trial marriage became less a taboo" (Xia and Zhou 2003, p. 237).

Mate selection criteria have changed since the reform. Young people are more likely to choose a spouse "based upon age, appearance, income and educational level, rather than by parental socioeconomic status" (Han 2010, p. 737; Xia and Zhou 2003). While hypergamy[10] remains the convention, young men compete in the marriage market based on their socio-economic status (SES), and young women typically compete on the basis of their appearance and age (Liu, Li and Feldman 2013).

Courtship and match-making have been changing significantly. More and more couples meet at school, at work or through mutual friends. Internet dating started in the late 1990s when using computers became popular among young people (Xia and Zhou 2003). Commercial match-making agencies, match-making websites and television dating shows are becoming increasingly popular as a new route for meeting a perspective partner. A very famous Chinese dating show called "*If You Are the One*" has gained millions of viewers in China as well as other parts of the world.

Even though many young people meet their first loves in high school, attitudes towards teenage love remain unchanged. Up to the present day, teenage dating is still widely prohibited by all but the most liberal parents, and most Chinese people

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[10] Hypergamy refers to marriages where the wife has a lower socioeconomic background than her husband.

believe that dating at such a young age is an emotionally harmful practice that will distract young students from their studies (Schneider 2014, p. 7). On the other hand, young people at universities have the freedom to start a relationship. Though the authorities in universities generally discourage dating, and there are conduct codes prohibiting intimate behaviours such as kissing on campus, young people now enjoy more freedom to express their affection to their loved ones than ever before. More and more people approve of premarital sex, and cohabitation is becoming more popular among college lovers (Xia and Zhou 2003). Extramarital pregnancy is prohibited in China: according to Chinese law, the only legitimate way to have a child is through marriage, as it is the precondition for gaining a *hukou* (Ji and Yeung 2014). If college students fall pregnant, the couple may face expulsion from college. It was not until 2005 that the Ministry of Education allowed college students to get married while still studying (Yu 2015).

The new phenomenon of "naked marriage" has become very popular in recent years, especially among young people born after the 1980s who have received tertiary education. The term "naked marriage" refers to "a couple get hitched without any major assets and who spend very little on their wedding ceremony" (Xinhua News Agency 2011, p. 2). The practice of "naked marriage" is in sharp contrast to established Chinese marriage customs, which generally require the groom's family to prepare a new house and grand wedding ceremony as well as betrothal gifts to the bride's family (Xinhua News Agency 2011). "Naked marriage" represents a counter-action or push-back by young people against high housing prices and the huge expense of a grand wedding ceremony.

After decades of legal and socio-economic changes, perhaps surprisingly, marriage in China today remains near universal "compared with Western industrialised countries or its East Asian and Southeast Asian neighbours" (Ji and Yeung 2014, p. 1665; Jones and Gubhaju 2009). This is in contrast to the trend of a decline in the incidence of marriage in western countries and in other Southeast and East Asian countries in association with an increase in women's educational level (Jones and Gubhaju 2009). The strong family values and the responsibility to carry on the family line mean that young adults in China experience tremendous social and family pressure to get married at the right age, that is before their late twenties (Schneider 2014; Xia and Zhou 2003). Jones and Gubhaju (2009) found that the vast majority of Chinese women get married during their twenties, in contrast to some other countries in the region where 30 per cent or more women remained single at age 30 (Jones and Gubhaju 2009, p. 240). Nationwide, "by age 30 to 34 years, only two per cent of women and ten per cent of men remain single", and by age 35 to 39, almost all women are married and only 5 per cent men remain single (Ji and Yeung 2014, p. 1670).

Education, Gender and Marital Roles

Education and gender are the two key factors which affect family formation (Jones and Gubhaju 2009; Ji and Yeung 2014). The massive educational expansion associated with Chinese economic reform has resulted in increased years of schooling for both men and women in China, regardless of rural or urban residence (Han 2010). Since the 1980s, people tend to marry a partner with similar educational achievement (Han 2010).

Ji and Yeung (2014) found that in China, college education does delay marriage for both men and women, with a stronger effect for women, but they usually catch up in their late twenties rather than forgoing marriage (Ji and Yeung 2014). The continuing universality of marriage in China is going against the trend elsewhere in East Asia. Education has a distinct effect on entry into marriage for women and men. For men, having no education is an absolute disadvantage in the marriage market and they face an even worse situation given the skewed sex ratio[11]. For women, having no education actually accelerates their entry into marriage. While educated women may have more economic independence, which might allow them more time to choose an ideal mate, they also face the pressure of being derogated as "leftovers" if they remain single for too long.

Hypergamy is "marrying up", which means to marry someone with higher status, but hypergamy is usually strongly gendered (Jiang, Feldman and Li 2014): women must marry up, men may marry "down". The result tends to be that gendered groups at the extreme ends of a continuum are "stranded": women with high education cannot find suitable partners, and men with low or no education cannot find suitable partners. Due to the "gender double standard of ageing" (Ji and Yeung 2014, p. 1666), men over thirty are still considered to be in their golden years, while women in their thirties are like unwanted "wilted and rotten" flowers (Fincher 2014, p. 22). The term "*shengnü*" or leftover women, is widely used to refer to single women who are older than twenty-seven (sometimes even twenty-five) and who are becoming unwanted in the marriage market (Fincher 2014), though most of them are highly educated

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[11] The Chinese sex ratio peaked at over 120 in 2011(Loh and Remick, 2015). I will discuss more about it in Chapter 6.

professional females with higher SES (Ji and Yeung 2014). Men enjoy a privileged position in spite of the unfavourable sex ratio, and they can always marry a woman much younger than themselves. The pressure is always on the women, to marry the actually "leftover" men (Fincher 2014).

Traditionally the husband is the bread-winner of the family, and the wife is the home-maker (Zuo and Bian 2001). Since the beginning of the 1950s, women have been encouraged to participate in economic activities, with equal pay (Xia and Zhou 2003). Even though the increased participation of women in the workforce has led to economic independence for women, studies have shown that women's increasing economic activity has not been accompanied by men taking an increased share of domestic roles (Tsuya and Bumpass 2004). The traditional gender division of household labour has not been challenged: women still shoulder most of the housework (Zuo and Bian 2001). Furthermore, the social standard of a successful woman remains focused on "having a harmonious marital and family life instead of a successful career" (Liu, Li and Feldman 2013, p. 917).

With the expansion of higher education, more and more women are now competing with men in the job market. Yet the ideal family structure remains "a career successful husband and a family-oriented working wife" (Zuo and Bian 2001, p. 1128). It is the husband's responsibility to provide greater economic resources, while women are expected to put family needs above their career. If a man failed to fulfil the role of bread-winner and put much effort into housework, he would be regarded as not ambitious and as having no aspiration (Zuo and Bian 2001). A tertiary educated wife with a successful career is often regarded as career-oriented (*nü qiang*

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ren in Chinese, which literally means "strong woman"), and her high career achievement is an indication of breaching the gender boundary in practice and as a violation of traditional gender values (Zuo and Bian 2001). Women's over-engagement in their careers is seen as contradicting their domestic role and as self-indulgent; their economic contribution to the family is discounted (Zuo and Bian 2001, p. 1131).

The different social expectations of men and women have resulted in distinctly gendered job-hunting experiences. The participants in my research show how these gendered expectations directly affect their transition strategies such as further education/career plans and future spouse selection. All these elements combine to show that gender is a factor that undeniably affects graduates' transition to adulthood in China and I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter Six.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is an analysis of the main themes that emerged in my research data of graduates' education-to-work experiences in Shanghai. The chapters in my thesis describe how social differences (such as class, *hukou*, gender, and *guanxi* connections), government policies, education and mobility interact in graduates' transition experiences.

Chapter 2 is mainly about my research methodology. In this chapter, I relate my own experience of job hunting to introduce this research and my fieldwork. I introduce my research design, my fieldwork as well as the methodology I adopted in collecting

my data. I also discuss how my gender, language proficiency as well as my social standing in the field affected my fieldwork and analysis.

In Chapter 3, I provide an overview of the literature on education and social reproduction as well as the literature on youth transition studies. A review of previous studies on youth transition has shown the need to treat young people as a group of their own to study their education-to-work as well as youth-to-adulthood transition. I elaborate Bourdieu's notion of different types of capital and how education as cultural capital works synthetically with one's economic and social capital in social reproduction.

Chapter 4 is a chapter about the articulation of higher education with social class and upward class mobility. In this chapter, I first talk about different understandings of social class and theories about social reproduction and mobility in the West; and then I briefly introduce Chinese concepts of social class. I then discuss higher education and upward social mobility and the higher education expansion in China. Finally I use my research data to explain how class affects graduates' education to work transition.

Chapter 5 is an examination of how the Chinese *hukou* system creates inequality in the social mobility of graduates using my ethnographic data. First of all, I give a brief introduction to the Chinese household registration system as well as the resident card system in Shanghai. Then I demonstrate the importance of having a local *hukou* in contributing to a smoother transition by comparing the different job hunting experiences of local and outsider graduates in Shanghai. I argue in this

chapter that the existing urban-rural *hukou* difference puts the outsider graduates in a disadvantaged position and holds back equality of educational mobility.

Chapter 6 is a discussion of the gender effect on graduate employment prospects, based on my fieldwork. I use this chapter to highlight how traditional gender discourses perpetuate gender inequality in university graduates' job-hunting experiences. I first look at different theories about education and women's empowerment and education and the reproduction of social inequality. Then I survey the history of gender discourses in the Chinese context. Next, I analyse how the traditional gender ideology is reproduced among young graduates today by looking at their perception of gender roles in the family, in further education and at work.

Chapter 7 is a discussion of education, social capital (or *guanxi,* in the China context) and mobility based on my participants' experiences. I demonstrate graduates' awareness of the importance of owning social capital to enhance their employment opportunities. I discuss the different forms of *guanxi* graduates adopted in their job-hunting experiences, as well as the strategies outsider students utilised to overcome their *guanxi* deficit.

Chapter 8 is a case study of the transition experiences of teacher-training graduates who have been sponsored by the Chinese government. Through the personal stories of those graduates, I analyse their reasons for applying for the free teacher training programme; the main problems they faced in their job-hunting experiences; and their struggles as they negotiated their way between the obligation of having to return to their hometown to work as a school teacher and their eagerness for the freedom to be

able to choose a job of their own. This chapter shows that government interventions such as educational policies have a great impact on the life trajectories of Chinese youth and also make transition experiences more complex and surprisingly unpredictable.

Chapter 9, the Conclusion, draws together the themes discussed in the previous five chapters. In it, I discuss why education has a limited effect on social mobility, and summarise my findings on how class, gender, *huhou*, *guanxi* networks and government policies contribute to the complexity of the education-to-work transitions of Chinese youth. I also identify ways to extend this research and describe plans for future studies.

Chapter 2 Research Methodology and Fieldwork

This thesis is an analysis of the struggles and challenges in the education-to-work transition experiences of university graduates in contemporary China. It is also a transition study of my generation, including myself. The education-to-work transition of the 1980s generation (80 *Hou*) is unique compared with that of previous generations in many respects. Born during the 1980s, this generation never experienced the political turmoil, such as the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), after the establishment of New China, yet they have witnessed and experienced dramatic socio-economic changes accompanied by the Reform and Opening Up (since 1973), followed by the demolition of the job distribution system and the expansion of higher education. At the level of the individual, most of the graduates are the first in their family to have completed higher education; most of the parents of this generation never went to university and most experienced an interruption and premature end to their school education due to the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, in contrast to the rapid economic development in recent years, the outdated bureaucratic systems and policies (such as the Chinese *hukou* system) that are left over from the Mao era have caused much conflict with graduates' need for more freedom and autonomy in their job-seeking. In contrast to the job allocation system of the 1970s generation, nowadays young graduates need to utilise all types of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) in their job-seeking processes to secure a good job (Bourdieu 2008). Thus they face new challenges and dilemmas that are unique to this generation and which also constitute a new phenomenon in Chinese history. The study of young graduates' transition experiences is of great

importance as it will bring new knowledge and understanding of contemporary youth in this non-western society that is now an amalgam of socialism and capitalism.

It is argued that "strong objectivity can only be achieved through strong reflexivity" (Wickramasinghe 2010, p. 57). As a member of the 1980s generation, I therefore reflect on my own transition experience as it has affected the research focus, access to data and my interpretive lens. The telling of my own story situates me as a researcher in the field and also introduces some of the recurring themes in the data.

I start this chapter by describing my own transition experiences. I will then describe my research design, the field site, my participants and my main research methods. Finally, I will discuss the way in which my physical and social locations in the field affected my fieldwork and my analysis.

My Transition Story

When I finished my bachelor's degree in 2005, I did not look for a job but planned to prepare for the postgraduate examination to study at East China Normal University (ECNU) in Shanghai. I did not pass the examination the first time because of a serious back injury in the last year of university. I had had to lie in bed for more than three months, and I could not sit for the long hours of examinations. So after graduated in July 2005, I decided to prepare for the examination again, and this was scheduled for December. Upon graduation, all graduates' personnel files[12] and *hukou*

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[12] A personnel file is used to record a person's background and performance, e.g. their educational and work history, assessment results, political opinions, as well as an ideological and moral evaluation and investigation materials, etc. It is an official document and is usually kept by the human resources administration in the archives of the person's employer, but it is not disclosed to the person him/herself.

need to be sent from the university where they studied to their employment unit if they are employed or to the education bureau of their hometown if they have not found a job upon graduation. In my case, my files and *hukou* were sent to the education bureau of my hometown, and I was registered as a fresh unemployed graduate.

My hometown is a famous industrial city four hours north of Shanghai. The year 2005 was the last year when teacher-training students could be allocated to school teaching positions if they had not found a job by themselves. I was one of them. It was also the first year to have bachelor graduates majoring in Geography in China, so Geography graduates were quickly parceled out to all the schools through job fairs. I was the only Geography major graduate on the allocation list in my hometown. The allocation did not take place until January 2006, when I had finished the examination for postgraduate study at ECNU and was waiting for the results. I was allocated to a high school to teach Year 10 Geography, and my workload was only five periods per week: I had one period on Monday, four repeat periods on Tuesday, and the rest of the week I usually just prepared for my one lesson to be delivered the following week. The school was only 20 minutes by bus from my home, and I felt I had too much free time and nothing much to do. I concluded that a teaching job was not very exciting and challenging for a 23-year-old, or at least was not suitable for me.

After finding out that I had been accepted by ECNU, my parents were very pleased, but at the same time also worried that my quitting the job after such a short period of service would give me a bad reputation. They feared that it would not only affect my

employment prospects later on, but also might make my enrolment very complicated, as the local Education Bureau might not give permission for the transfer of my personnel files to ECNU. My parents, who both worked in a big local mining company as mechanical engineers, went to talk to my aunt (my father's younger sister) for advice. My aunt was the principal of a local primary school and had connections with the Education Bureau. In the end, they managed to have my personnel files transferred to ECNU and at the same time keep my position at the school. I was formally 'on leave', by virtue of paying a deposit to the local Education Bureau to have my salary card left at the high school to compensate for the inconvenience I had caused. My parents had always supported me in pursuit of my dreams, and they also tried their best (using *guanxi* networks) to make sure that I would have a backup option in case the job market was tight after my three years of postgraduate study.

Thus, I experienced some setbacks in my transition from university, not only in terms of the transition from study to work but also from undergraduate study to postgraduate study. I suffered a lot emotionally and psychologically from my failure to pass the postgraduate entry examination, but overall it was relatively smooth, in that I did get a job almost without effort and I was able to study at ECNU after another year's preparation (plus my parents' support). I did not experience the dilemmas or challenges posed by *hukou* and gender discrimination that my classmates and I experienced later after three years of postgraduate study. I explore these themes in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. But my experiences did make me realise the importance of economic and social capital, such as family support and family connections in graduates' transition (Bourdieu 2008).

When I graduated with a Master's degree from ECNU, in 2009, teaching at a high school in Shanghai seemed a very desirable job. Since ECNU is one of the most famous and best teacher training universities in China, every year the on-campus graduate job fair attracts all the high schools from Shanghai and the famous high schools from other parts of China to come to recruit new teachers. The selection criteria for Shanghai high schools are very stringent, making the task almost impossible before I began: a Shanghai *hukou* is an essential prerequisite, and some schools (both Shanghai local schools and schools in other provinces) even posted that they only recruited male graduates or stated that male candidates have priority in recruitment. Moreover, I found that at these job fairs graduates with a bachelor's degree were more popular than postgraduates. The reason was not only the lower salary for graduates with a Bachelor's degree, but also that undergraduates at ECNU have usually undertaken teaching practicums while postgraduates have mainly been engaged in research projects. The schools attribute great importance to the teaching practicum. Another consideration is graduates' gender and age at graduation. In 2011, the average age at first marriage in Shanghai was 29.26 for men and 27.15 for women (Gao and Wu 2012). Bachelor degree students are usually 22 or 23 years of age upon graduation, while postgraduates are usually around 26 or 27 years of age. Employers expect that female postgraduates will get married and start a family within a couple of years. Female postgraduates are thus in an especially disadvantaged position in the job market. These realisations made me very angry and frustrated. They also inspired me to want to know more about other graduates' transition stories and how they deal with the challenges and dilemmas in this transition.

In order to get a Shanghai local *hukou*, graduates need to reach a cut-off point based on selection criteria such as age, graduation university, degree, major, GPA, English level and prizes received, as well as the reputation and scale of their employer companies (Shanghai Student Affairs Centre Shanghai Student Affairs Centre). The selection criteria have nothing to do with location or geography: they show a high level of social engineering about the 'quality' of the Shanghai population. It is very much like the procedure for applying for a permanent residency in Australia, which has a skilled occupation list; candidates need to reach the cut-off point to be granted a permanent resident visa (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2015). In 2011, my major in human geography was not on the Shanghai skilled occupation list, and most of the graduates of my major could not reach the cut-off point to apply for a Shanghai local *hukou*, which in turn restricted their job prospects.

My classmates obtained different types of jobs in different regions of China. During the last semester of my Master's degree, everyone was busy looking for a job. My classmates spent most of their time job hunting: they scanned the internet to search for job information; they prepared themselves for the civil service examinations; and they travelled all over China to attend all kinds of job fairs, interviews and examinations in order to get a decent job. I did the same thing: I searched on the internet, I went to job fairs, I went to a number of job interviews, but at the same time, I felt at a loss about my future: my studying for a Master's degree seemed a backwards step rather than progress.

Hukou was just one of many factors that affected our job-hunting. Among my whole class of 28 students, only 11 (nine non-locals and two locals) managed to find a job in Shanghai. Of the two locals in my class, one found a job in a bank, and the other, a woman (one of my roommates), managed to get a teaching job at a school in a very remote suburb of Shanghai—two hours away from the nearest metro station at the edge of the urban commuting ring. Most of my other classmates found jobs in real estate or tourism consulting companies. Two were lucky to get a position in government institutions through their supervisors' recommendation or through already-existing cooperation programmes between their supervisors and a government department. Because they did not have a local *hukou*, they could not enjoy local welfare such as medical care and were required to apply for a temporary residence permit. Of my five roommates, one, as mentioned before, became a high school geography teacher in Shanghai; one went back to her hometown in Fujian province and joined a real estate consulting company a few months after graduation; a third followed her boyfriend to Shenzhen (a coastal city in southern China, near Hong Kong) and found a job some time later in an urban planning institution; another, originally from Shandong province north of Shanghai, went to a small city in Zhejiang Province and worked as a village officer; the last one went back to her hometown in Qingdao, Shandong province, took the civil servant examination and became a civil servant; and I went to Australia to study for a PhD.

By witnessing the job-hunting experiences of my classmates and having experienced it myself, I became very interested in graduates' job-hunting experiences and how they felt about this transition from education to work. Some graduates found a job easily, but most suffered from tough job-hunting experiences. Many factors affected

their education-to-work transition, such as their socioeconomic background, gender, *hukou*, social networks, and so forth, making the transition very chaotic and frustrating to all the graduates in some sense. My own transition experience is an example of how owning/lacking certain types of capital facilitates/complicates graduates' transition, but also how people may have different experiences that are important in understanding young people's university-to-work transition. I wished to understand this education-to-work transition more deeply by doing research on these young people's transition experiences.

Positioning the Researcher

Experience as a source of knowledge has been criticised in many ways, not only because one person's experiences may not be comprehensible by another, but also due to the fact that a small sample of individual stories are not generalisable and that the individual may be idiosyncratic and one cannot extrapolate from one person's experience. Further, the interpretation of experience is mediated by the language, theoretical approach, objectives as well as ontology of the researcher (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002, p. 124; Csordas 1994), which makes the knowledge based on people's experience a discursive construct (Scott 1992). However, despite the many criticisms of taking experience as the basis of knowledge, personal experience is of vital importance in "understanding similarities and diversity in gendered lives, and [in] investigation of inequalities, injustices and institutionali[s]ed power" (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002, pp. 123-124). Experience does provide knowledge that would otherwise not exist and "information on the realities of people's lives that is otherwise unavailable" (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002, p.

127). Experience is a "critical connection between knowledge and reality" (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002, p. 123), and people's accounts of their experiences are of value as a source of knowledge and theory (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002, p. 127; Nelson and Nelson 1994). Repeated statements and themes in interviews strengthen claims to representativeness of personal data.

My own education and transition experiences in Shanghai enabled me to empathise with the graduates on the struggles and difficulties they faced in their job hunting. My status as a non-local yet having completed some of my education in Shanghai facilitated my access to both non-local and local graduates. As Narayan (1993) has identified, "factors such as education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race or sheer duration of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status" (Narayan 1993, p. 672). Thus my insider/outsider status in the field was situational in that it changed when relating to different themes as well as to different interviewees. To the non-local graduates, I was an insider who understood their difficult situation of having no family in Shanghai, not knowing or being used to the local dialect and food, and their experience of discrimination. Discrimination against non-locals was diverse, ranging from daily encounters such as being called "*Waidi ren*" (non-local) or "*Xianghunin*" (Shanghai dialect, people from the countryside, i.e. uncivilised) to *hukou*-related unequal treatment such as in job recruitment and welfare entitlements. I also had something in common with local graduates. I had my education in Shanghai; my family has a house in one of the Shanghai suburbs, so I never had to rent a place; my *Shanghaihua* (Shanghai dialect) is not good, but I do understand what they say. To them, I was not like those outsider job-seekers who come to work in Shanghai, but

know nothing about the local life and culture. My family background also contributed to my insider/outsider status. For example, during an interview with a graduate from rural China, he talked about how his rural background provided little social and economic capital in his job-hunting, and in the end he said to me: "I am sure your parents are not farmers", indicating that I was an outsider to the typical kind of experience he encountered as someone of rural and farming background. As "we all live in several communities simultaneously" (Narayan 1993, p. 676), in some contexts I was drawn closer to the participant, while in others we were thrust apart. I was seen as an insider as I connected my experiences with those of other female interviewees of their gender-related setbacks in the job market. In the same vein, I was regarded as an outsider by many male interviewees as I was of the other gender, who shared nothing of their struggles and the pressure of social expectations for men.

Fieldwork

Research Site and Participants

I chose to conduct my fieldwork in Shanghai for various reasons. Shanghai is the most populous city in China, with a population of 24.15 million in 2013 (Statistics 2015). It has undergone rapid expansion and economic transformation. The main industries in Shanghai have been electronics, car manufacturing and steelmaking; in recent years, fine chemicals and biopharmaceuticals have been developing significantly; knowledge-based Research and Development-centred industries represent 40 per cent of the GDP in Shanghai (Anonymous 2014). There are "68

universities, 58 research institutes, 328 hospitals, and 400 joint venture or foreign-owned research centres" (Anonymous 2014, p. 1).

The knowledge-based economy has offered new types of jobs in the labour market, which not only attract Shanghai residents, but also people from other parts of the country and even from overseas seeking employment (Wang and Lowe 2011). Shanghai is not only one of the mega-cities of China, but also a 'Mecca' for young people from all over the country. They flock to Shanghai in search of education and work. Shanghai gave me the opportunity to interact with and interview a range of young graduates from all over China.

Prior to my fieldwork in Shanghai, I had previously lived there for four years whist studying at ECNU for my Master's degree and after graduation. I had friends and contacts in Shanghai, whom I used as media in my initial search for participants. I was familiar with the geographical locations of universities as well as the local culture, and I understood the local dialect.

Data were drawn mainly from six months of fieldwork conducted in 2011. The two main aspects of my methodology were semi-structured interviews with 62 university graduates, and participant observation of graduates' daily lives, job-hunting activities and their workplace conditions. My focus is upon the experience of those individuals undergoing the transition. A focus on experience demands a qualitative approach, and the best ways to get at other people's experiences in a particular context are through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. In that sense my approach is broadly ethnographic in orientation. Through interaction with

participants in the interview context and at such events as job fairs I was also able to harness the reflexive aspects of my research, as I am a member of the same cohort with parallel experiences. Analysis of interview transcripts allowed me to highlight how my respondents were experiencing the transition, through their turns of phrase, choice of things to talk about and how they explained their feelings regarding what they were undergoing in this transition. Compared with a questionnaire, an interview is the best way to elicit information about feelings, hopes and dreams and experiences; a survey format is not good at eliciting feelings, particularly if respondents are pressed for time, and does not allow probing or follow-up.

According to Bernard (2000), semi-structured interviews are the best type of interviews if "you won't get more than one chance to interview someone" (Bernard 2000, p. 191). My fieldwork was conducted when all the graduates were busy looking for a job and many of them were going to different parts of China for work after graduation, which meant I might not have been able to interview many of them face to face for a second time. Given the situation, I found semi-structured interviews the most efficient and time-saving way to obtain information from my participants while at the same time not taking up too much of my participants' time. Secondly, the semi-structured interview format allowed me to control, to some extent, the information I could get from an interview. Having an interview guide meant that I had a checklist of questions to ask, so that I would have comparable qualitative data (Bernard 2000). The open-ended format also allowed me to have flexibility to expand conversations with my participants on the spot, probing if they were vague or following up if they mentioned something interesting. Simultaneously, I carried out participant observation on campus, having meals and

chatting with graduates, and off campus visiting my participants' living and working place, accompanying them to job fairs, or just hanging out at their living place, making meals together or going out shopping. Participant observation is effective in enhancing the quality of both "the data obtained during fieldwork" and "the interpretation of data"

I obtained human research ethical approval from The University of Western Australia (Reference Number: RA/4/1/4491, see Appendix One) and conducted my fieldwork in Shanghai from January to July in 2011. I investigated the job-hunting experiences of three different cohorts of graduates: the first one was graduates with a Shanghai *hukou*; the second group consisted of graduates who had studied in universities in Shanghai but were without a Shanghai *hukou*; while the third group comprised graduates who came from other provinces, did not have a Shanghai *hukou* but wanted to find a job in Shanghai. I aimed to illuminate the effect of higher education on social upward mobility by looking at the transition experiences of graduates of different socio-economic backgrounds (such as class and *hukou* origin), gender identity and network connections. I interviewed graduates of many different majors, including sciences, social sciences, engineering, medicine, economics and education.

I started looking for my first two groups of interviewees in the different universities in Shanghai. I used the snowballing method to reach my interviewees. In the beginning I visited my postgraduate coordinator at ECNU. He introduced me to a few graduates, as well as to some student coordinators in other schools of that university in order to help me establish my first few interviews. These constituted

my first experiences of fieldwork. I also contacted a few alumni, who then worked as student coordinators[13] in other Shanghai universities, to distribute my survey, and I asked them to introduce me to their students for interviews. In addition, I used my friends and former classmates in Shanghai as channels to find interviewees who happened to be their friends, colleagues, or roommates.

As the fieldwork progressed, my interviewees also became my intermediaries in looking for the third group of graduates – that is, those who had graduated from other provinces, but were working or looking for a job in Shanghai. In order to access those graduates, I usually asked my interviewees if they could introduce me to someone they knew (sometimes a friend from the same town, or a classmate who had come to Shanghai with them, or even their roommates) for an interview, as it was quite difficult for me to find graduates in the third cohort. Most of my interviewees were quite happy to help. I did meet some graduates who went to Shanghai to look for a job at a few job fairs, but they were usually very reluctant to talk to a stranger. Besides using connections, I also visited all the universities in Shanghai, spent a lot of time on campus meeting students, and also went to quite a few job fairs to meet graduates as well as to talk to some employers and to gain some understanding of what was happening in the job market.

For making contact with potential interviewees, I used several channels: face-to-face conversation, telephone, or the Chinese online chat tool called QQ (similar to MSN or Skype). In the end, I was able to interview 62 graduates in total: 15 Shanghai local graduates, ten non-local graduates who had graduated from universities outside of

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12. Student coordinators are mainly in charge of the daily administration of a class of students.

Shanghai, and 47 non-local graduates from Shanghai universities. My interviews were mainly conducted one-on-one; one group interview involved three interviewees and two interviews involved two interviewees each. The interviews were usually 30 minutes to one hour long. Before every interview, I asked the interviewee for permission to audio-record the interview and I also asked permission to take notes during the interview. Most of the interviewees were very supportive and permitted me to record their interviews. I took notes during the interviews of those who did not give me the permission to record.

Semi-structured Interviews

My main data-collecting methodology was semi-structured interviews. During my fieldwork, I always assured my interviewees that the information given in the interview would only be used for writing my thesis and future publications. I guaranteed interviewees that all the interviews would be anonymous and would be kept confidential (See Appendix Two for interview questions). I usually began my interviews by telling the participants that I was researching university graduates' education-to-work experiences. I then asked them to tell me about their growing-up stories, including their year and place of birth, education, how many siblings and what order, as well as the occupations of their parents. I asked them to talk about their "dream jobs" when they were at school, their university experiences, and finally I asked them to tell me about their job hunting "stories". This usually prompted them to narrate their job-hunting experiences with minimal questions from me. The objective was to let the interviewees tell the incidents, challenges or dilemmas that they experienced and those they felt it was important for me to know. I also asked them about their future plans regarding relationships and marriage.

The location of interviews was chosen for the convenience of the interviewees: most of the interviews with graduates were conducted on campus, either in an empty classroom or in the canteen, or in some café near the campus. For interviews with those who had already started working, I met them at their preferred place, sometimes in one of the meeting rooms in the company, a café near their workplace or at another location chosen by them. I also interviewed a few respondents at their rental apartment or a dormitory provided by their company, where I obtained a glimpse of their living conditions. There were a few participants who studied in Shanghai then worked in another province: I interviewed them through QQ.

I sought a diverse set of interviewees in terms of class origins, *hukou*, educational background and gender, which highlighted the big research gap that this thesis attempts to fill. To understand the dilemmas and challenges young graduates faced in their job hunting, and to reveal how their experiences affected their professional goals, their relationships, marriage prospects and family lives, and also their attitudes and aspirations for the future, I privilege the perspective of the graduates' own transition experiences, and explore the challenges and struggles they are facing, to understand what this experience means to them.

The recurring themes and patterns from such a diverse group are evidence that my findings are solid. These findings offer scholars of China new perspectives on youth transition and social mobility, as well as adding to studies of education and social mobility. I anticipate that this thesis will also be able to contribute, in some small way, to policy formulation on tertiary education and graduates' transition to work

and higher study, especially regarding the education of socially-disadvantaged groups.

Participant Observation

Besides interviews, I also did some participant observation, visited some of the interviewees' living quarters and, with their permission, shadowed them for a day, which gave me insight into their daily lives. Before graduation, students usually live on campus in dormitories of six or four people with bunk beds. Some have a desk instead of the lower bed. In the last semester, students usually have few lectures and concentrate mainly on job hunting and their final thesis; some students travel to different cities for job interviews and internships. Non-local graduates usually live in rental apartments or room with friends, colleagues or just random people who work nearby after graduation; local graduates usually live at home. I visited a few non-local graduates' living places on the weekends; most of them lived in very old apartment buildings with basic furniture in the room. It was common to find two or three people sharing one bedroom or even sharing a bed, in order to save rent. Most of them cooked their three meals at 'home' and brought lunch to work; their main expenses were transportation, telephone bills and the rent.

In most cases, I only knew one of them and was introduced to his/her other roommates, who sometimes later became my interviewees. I remember visiting a male graduate's apartment near *Xujia hui*, one of the busiest areas in Shanghai. It was a two bedroom apartment, and he lived with four other roommates. He shared the big bedroom with his two friends, who all went to university in Shanghai, and rented out the smaller bedroom to two girls who came to Shanghai to find work after

graduation. All his roommates were very hospitable, and insisted I stay for lunch. So I accompanied them to the market to buy vegetables and meat, some ready-to-eat cold dishes, and then we went back home to cook together. The atmosphere was really relaxed, and conversations in the kitchen jumped from cooking hometown-style dishes to the basketball game on TV the night before to work-related gossip. During lunch, one of the girls said she decided to quit her job and leave Shanghai due to her parents' constant harassing, because she was their only daughter and they wanted her to work and live near home. This triggered a huge table discussion on living in Shanghai and future plans. One young man complained about his current low salary and few promotion opportunities, and said he had decided to study for a Master's degree. Another young man said he would never consider another degree again, as it took him three years to pass the CEE (College Entrance Examination) in order to study in Shanghai, when "most of my high school classmates were going to graduate from university!" So he planned to gain some work experience and new technology skills in the big city (Shanghai) and find a job with a higher position in his province. The other young man, who was an artist, said he would consider going to Beijing after a few years as the atmosphere is better there and there are more opportunities. The other girl was concerned that after her roommate went back home, she would need to find another roommate or move to another place… I found such conversations very lively and real, which enabled me to immerse myself in and experience these young people's daily lives, and later helped me to reflect on the data I collected from my interviews.

Reliability of Data

Language Proficiency of Researcher

All research conducted in my fieldwork was done in Mandarin Chinese. It is important to consider the language of fieldwork because language shapes identity and experience, as well as betraying the embedded social viewpoints of researcher and researched (Tanu and Dales 2015). In Shanghai, Mandarin and *Shanghai hua* (local dialect) are the two main spoken languages. I am a native speaker of Mandarin with no accent: people usually cannot figure out from which province I come by listening to me. I can understand most Shanghai dialect, but my speaking is quite basic.

My positionality in relation to my informants shifted, based on my linguistic fluency in Mandarin Chinese and lack of fluency in Shanghai dialect. My standard Mandarin set me in a neutral position in accessing graduates from different parts of China. For non-locals, I was seen as a cultural broker; they were quite willing to share with me their transition struggles and the problems they faced (such as not owning a local *hukou*) as a non-local living in Shanghai. They poured out their frustration with the "language barrier" which fell between themselves and local colleagues. Even though Mandarin is the official language spoken in the working place, local Shanghai people tend to chat with each other in Shanghai dialect. The inability to speak the same dialect creates an invisible barrier between the locals and the non-locals. Non-locals regarded me as "an 'insider' who could understand their sense of cultural marginalisation" (Tanu and Dales 2015, p. 6).

As has been observed, "the distinction between language and dialect is political rather than linguistic" (Tanu and Dales 2015, p. 10; Doerr 2009). Usually the ability to speak a local dialect suggests one's regional affinity. One of my local participants, Qian, shared with me the significance of not being able to speak Shanghai dialect: it affected her integration into the local community. Her father is a Shanghai local and her mother is from another province; they were both teachers and met each other at a professional training Masters course in Beijing. After they got married, they lived separately due to their job allocations. According to the *hukou* system prior to revision, a child's *hukou* was registered under the mother's registration. She lived with her mother in her hometown until the age of five, when her mother transferred her job to Shanghai and the family finally reunited. She recalled that when she first moved to Shanghai, because they did not speak Shanghai dialect, the local people would always ask where they were from and why they were in Shanghai. "Even the street peddlers would ask me where we came from…we were just buying some snacks!" Qian is technically Shanghai local because her *hukou* was moved to be under her father's registration after the *hukou* system revision, but the inability to speak the local language marked her as an "outsider". Her childhood experience as an outsider had a great impact on her attitude towards non-locals as a grown-up. Now speaking fluent Shanghai dialect, she insists that she would speak only Mandarin in public in case there were non-locals present: "I wouldn't want my behaviour [i.e. speaking Shanghai dialect to non-locals] to make others [non-locals] feel hurt". Nowadays, Shanghai has become more open and tolerant of non-local residents compared with in the 1990s, and Mandarin is widely spoken by the young generation. In my case, all my interviews with the local graduates were conducted in Mandarin, and they were all fluent Mandarin speakers. During one interview, the

male participant switched to Shanghai dialect to answer a phone call, and then switched back to Mandarin to continue our interview. My inability to speak fluent Shanghai dialect may have marked me as different by the local graduates, and perhaps as lacking affinity with the local linguistic customs, and this may have been the reason that I had fewer local participants. Possibly, also, it may have affected the data I collected from the interviews with the local graduates, as they may not have wanted to share some of their transition stories with an 'outsider'.

Transcription of Data

Most interviews were audio recorded. There were a few exceptions where the interviewee felt uncomfortable to have the interview recorded, and I took notes during the interview and added to the written notes as soon as possible after the interview. There were also a few interviews I conducted using chatting software QQ, where I communicated with the interviewee through typing.

I have used pseudonyms for all the participants in order to protect anonymity. All interviews were conducted and then transcribed in Mandarin Chinese for analysis. I did not translate the interviews into English except for direct quotes in the thesis, so as to minimise meaning loss during translation. I use the term "participants" to refer to the graduates who participated in this research through explicit consent to participate in the interviews and surveys.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis "is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain the existence of those patterns" (Bernard 1988, p. 319). Because I had conducted all

the interviews by myself, I was familiar with the topics and themes as they emerged throughout my fieldwork. Given the fact that I had a manageable data set (62 interviews in total), in the analysis stage, I used a rather organic process of listening and re-listening to the audio recording, as well as reading and rereading my interview transcripts to elicit repeated patterns, and discern themes such as *hukou*, *guanxi* and gender. I was continually comparing my transcript data to my own experience, and referencing them to relevant literature. For each observation of patterned difference in response to a certain theme, I used selected quotes from my participants to make the point. In analysing my data, I also related my transcript interview data to my participant observation in order to better understand the context of my participant's (sometimes unusual or surprising) statements. For example, most of my interviewees mentioned the high cost of living in Shanghai, and I was quite used to and expected to hear such comments in the interviews. However, in an interview, a male participant from rural China claimed that the living cost was quite low in Shanghai. At the time of our interview, he had only been in Shanghai for two months, and was working in one of Shanghai's high-tech development zones with a monthly salary of 3000 *yuan* (about 600 Australian dollars). I visited him for participant observation. He lived at his university friend's dormitory, where the company his friend worked in provided for staff under probation, so he did not have to pay rent. The apartment could house six people and there were only two new members of staff, so his friend had invited him to stay. Every evening, they would go to the market to buy vegetables and then cook together. In the morning, he usually cooked noodles for breakfast and then took the free shuttle bus to work. Except for the big supermarket near where they lived, he had never visited any famous commercial places or shopping centres in Shanghai, neither had he eaten out.

Reflecting on my observation, I believed that his interview statement was just an unusual case and that he would change his opinion when he had stayed longer in Shanghai and become more exposed to the broader environment, and, more particularly, when he had to rent his own place.

As Gottlieb has pointed out, "the way in which information is collected affects the content of the data themselves...both the quality and the content of the 'data' that a researcher 'gathers' have as much to do with the researcher as they do with the informants or research participants" (Gottlieb 2006, p. 48). In my field work, I realised that the information I collected might have been affected by the power relations in the way I approached the interviewees. For example, my first interviewee was introduced to me by his university tutor, and the interview was conducted in a meeting room of the geography department at ECNU. Even though I had introduced my research programme and had reassured him about the purpose of the research, my interviewee was so nervous that his voice trembled when answering my questions. This incident made me realise that a comfortable environment was important for the interviewee so that he/she could be relaxed about sharing "more heterodox, complex, or even intimate thoughts with [me]" (Gottlieb 2006, p. 55). From then on, I always let the interviewee choose the interview location. Before the interview, I always gave a brief introduction about myself and my research, and tried my best to make them feel comfortable with the interview. Reciprocally, I was happy to answer interviewees' questions about my research and even to tell my personal stories. Some interviewees were very interested in studying overseas; I was happy to share with them my experiences studying overseas and gave them some information on how to apply to study at an overseas university.

As highlighted by Gottlieb, a one-shot short interview is far from optimal to get enough reliable data (Gottlieb 2006). After reading through my interview notes and listening to the interview recordings, I jotted down further questions and tried to organise follow-up interviews or talk with my participants further. Even though I only had one formal interview with most of my participants, I was able to catch up with them through telephone calls or QQ online chatting for further information. During my fieldwork, I maintained good rapport with most of my interviewees; I occasionally had meals or tea with some of them; I accompanied some of my participants to job fairs and interviews; I also visited a few participants' work places when they worked an extra shift on weekends or evenings; and we kept in touch through the aforementioned QQ even after I returned to Australia. I attribute these good relationships to my personality, background, and my physical appearance and status as a student, which enabled mutual intelligibility between my participants and me.

Hammersley (2006) has pointed out that a short-time fieldwork may lead to misunderstanding of the overall pattern of the matter, as changes may happen in a cyclical or longer-term pattern. Wolcott (1995) suggested an ideal fieldwork term should be two years. Jeffery and Troman (2004) suggested that the length of fieldwork is strategic, and that it depends on the contingent circumstances and the research purpose (Jeffrey and Troman 2004, p. 535). In this research, I spent six months in the field, which covered the period of the last semester of their course for university graduates and a month or so of time after their graduation. For most graduates, besides finishing their final thesis/project, most of their last semester at

university was occupied with all kinds of job-hunting activities. My stay in the field during this particular period enabled me to observe and interview graduates about their job-hunting experiences, and their feelings during their education-to-work transition. Ideally I would have stayed longer in the field to follow up my interviewees and observe their after-graduation lives. However, as many of my interviewees found jobs in different parts of China, this was not realistic. Luckily I was able to gain updated information about them through the above- mentioned modern communication tools. For example, I conducted telephone interviews with two of my participants five years after our initial interview to gain some knowledge about their after-graduation experiences as well as their current lives. I also compared their attitudes towards some of the questions I had asked in our first interviews. In the future, I would like to complement this study with longitudinal research by revisiting my participants at regular intervals.

The 'practice' of gender also influenced my interviews and the data I collected. Koivunen (2010) found that gendering practices played a significant part in interaction with participants, and that women were more willing to participate and much easier to interview than men. In my fieldwork, I found my interviewees generally easy to approach, but I did find some similar patterns of gender difference in the interviews. For example, female interviewees were more inclined to share their intimate relationship stories, their frustration and uncertainties about their romantic relationships compared with their male counterparts. In a couple of interviews with male participants, as much as I wanted the interviewees to lead the conversations, sometimes I found that the male interviewee was too talkative and did not restrict his answer to match my questions. In Koivunen's words, he was practising masculinity

over me (Koivunen 2010). For example, in one interview with a male participant, instead of answering my questions about his job-hunting experiences, he started to talk about his relationships, how he met his girlfriend, and after that how other girls chased him and even how someone he "met" online asked for a one-night-stand with him, but he insisted that he only loved his girlfriend and did not consider his acts of having one-night-stands with other girls as a betrayal of his relationship with his girlfriend. Even though I tried to lead him to my interview questions, he interrupted and affirmed to me that he really needed to share with me his relationship stories. In the end, he kept talking about the girls in his university life for more than two hours. His endeavour to give me the impression of himself as "Mr Popularity" was a way of practising masculinity by telling me stories "in his own way and on his own initiative" (Koivunen 2010, p. 695). In comparison, female participants usually were more focused on the education-to-work transition and their interviews were on average longer than interviews with males. Their stories also tended to show how the transition was gendered problematically for them, while Mr Popularity's story was not about transition or problems at all.

Conclusion

This thesis is an analysis of some of the major themes and patterns that emerged in young graduates' university-to-work transition experiences. In this chapter, I used my own transition story to introduce some of the themes that emerged in the data and to situate myself in the field. I introduced my research participants and the research methods I adopted in the fieldwork, and how the way I approached the participants affected my research and findings. In the next chapter, I will review the literature

that structured this thesis, including the social reproduction theory of Bourdieu as well as the youth transition theories in both Western and Asian contexts, and outline the key themes of young people's transition struggle before I unpack them in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 Framing the Transition from Education to Work in China

As discussed in Chapter 1, many development planners, economists and scholars view education as an engine for the development and modernisation of a country and as the key to social mobility for the disadvantaged (Jones 2012; Wiseman and Collins 2012). Other scholars see education as a force for social reproduction, that is, the reproduction of social hierarchies, including those based on class (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Collins 2009). In this chapter, I first introduce Bourdieu's theory of practice, which is used to show social and cultural reproduction, and definitions of key terms such as habitus and different forms of capital. I then review various youth transition theories in both Western and Asian contexts, which create a sociological framework for my study.

Sociologists such as Barel (1974) and Apple (1982) have for decades studied how education reproduces social inequality. The French anthropologists, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, argued that though the ideal goal of education might be to achieve an inclusive society, the actuality was to inculcate a culture which produces distinction, i.e. "education was experienced as a mechanism for consolidating social separation" (Kim, Lim and Park 2010, p. 29).

Bourdieu is a sociologist and anthropologist, and is regarded as one of the foremost social philosophers of the twentieth century (Grenfell 2008, p. 1). Beginning with ethnographies of Béarn and Algeria, he also offered extensive studies of education,

culture, art and language. His earliest empirical research was on the Kabyle peasants of Algeria and the urban (sub)proletarian experience of 'development' in Africa more generally (Nahar, Xenos and Abalos 2013), from which he sought to explain how social structures were reproduced through individuals' pursuit of their personal interests in situations structured by local and outside social forces (Bourdieu 1979). In their co-authored book *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Bourdieu and Passeron offered a closely argued theory of social reproduction and a series of empirical studies of the French education system (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). In the book *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), Bourdieu explored the interplay among culture, social organisation and individual action, by showing the interaction between individuals' doxic behaviour and strategic pursuit of interests, on the one hand, and wider forces of social structure, on the other. He depended upon the crucial notion of *habitus* to show how culture is embodied (Bourdieu 1977). This book provided a foundation for Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the logic of various types of capital as explanation of the reproduction of social inequalities. (I will discuss the terms later in this chapter.)

In China, education, especially tertiary education, is seen as a key for development. Although there has been a dramatic expansion in tertiary education over the past ten years, there are features of that expansion that have reproduced inequality – for example, the unequal access to education resources between rural and urban students, more restrictions on recruitment/employment opportunities for socio-economically disadvantaged students, the "qualification inflation" of university graduates, as well as the reproduction of an unequal gender ideology among tertiary-educated young graduates. I elaborate below how I can use Bourdieu's theory of

practice to analyse the factors that are influential in young adults' transition experiences in my research.

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

Bourdieu's theory of practice rests on his understanding of culture (Grenfell and James 1998). Culture encompasses the products of human activities such as objects, knowledge and ideas, as well as the processes by which these products are produced and related, which includes not only the unconsciously adopted doxa (see below) and habitus (see below) from everyday practice, but also explicitly inculcated knowledge such as formal education. Education is part of culture. In Bourdieu's perspective, social interaction is produced by a mixture of freedom – the possibilities for deployment of individual and group strategies – and constraints – the structural framework that produces a sense of limits. He argues that social practice is located in space and in time, and it is not consciously – or not wholly consciously – organised and orchestrated (Bourdieu 1977). The combination of freedom and constraint is what he calls 'second nature', i.e. the practical accomplishment of successful interaction (Nahar, Xenos and Abalos 2013, p. 72). Bourdieu's theory of practice, in a nutshell, is that "social agents are incorporated bodies who possess, indeed, are possessed by structural, generative schemes which operate by orientating social practice" (Grenfell and James 1998, p. 13). Practice is an operation, both cognitive and public in its deployment, that "is structured and tends to reproduce structures of which it is a product" (Grenfell and James 1998, p. 13). Reproduction does not mean purely replication of action; it also involves transformation, which comes through variation in the reproduction of action.

Doxa

Bourdieu used the word *doxa* to refer to "pre-reflexive knowledge shaped by experiences, [and] to unconscious[ly] inherited physical and relational predispositions" (Ishida 2013, p. 120), i.e. shared beliefs that are seen as part of the natural order of things, in order to understand people's practical reasoning based on their own vision and experience of the world. *Doxa* is used to account for actions and practice which make the natural and social world unquestionable, thus allowing reproduction of the objective social structures as well as the reproduction of these in the social agent's perceptions and practices (or, in his own word, in the *habitus*) (Ishida 2013, p. 121). In his work, *doxa* is a learnt form of ignorance, knowledge that is unaware of its own bases and hence an aspect of misrecognised symbolic power; as Marx stated, "although men make their own history, they do not do so in circumstances of their own choosing" (Nahar, Xenos and Abalos 2013, p. 70).

Habitus

Bourdieu also emphasised that social life is not simply the aggregation of individual behaviour (Nahar, Xenos and Abalos 2013). He wondered "how social structure and individual agency can be reconciled" (Ji 2013, p. 50), and in his theory of practice, "human action is constituted through a dialectical relationship between individuals' thought and activity and their objective world" (Grenfell and James 1998, p. 14). Bourdieu defines habitus as a property of social agents that is structured by one's circumstances as one grows up – familiarisation effected by family upbringing and educational experiences. It exists in one's interaction with one's environment, and is an embodied system of dispositions (Nahar, Xenos and Abalos 2013; Ji 2013). In one sense, habitus is social inheritance, which also "implies habit, or unthinking-ness

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in actions, and 'disposition'" (Grenfell and James 1998, p. 15). In my research, the embodied gender habitus of graduates, which they developed through their upbringing as well as their education experience, can also be regarded as a habitus. This habitus helps to shape graduates' practices such as job-hunting, further education and career decisions. Under traditional gender roles, women are expected to be family-oriented and make way for their partner/husband's success, while men are supposed to work for their career and be the bread winner of the family.

Field

For Bourdieu, a field is a social arena where "the constituent effect of one's habitus in and through human practice is actualised" (Grenfell and James 1998, p. 16; Nahar, Xenos and Abalos 2013). A field is a structured system of power relations through which individuals and groups are interrelated. Individuals' positions in the relationships (domination, subordination or equivalence) are based on their access to the different types of capital (discussed below) at stake in the field (Nahar, Xenos and Abalos 2013). Thus there is " 'a field of struggles' in which agents' strategies are concerned with the preservation or improvement of their positions with respect to the defining capital of the field" (Nahar, Xenos and Abalos 2013, p. 85). Education is a field, where students with different socio-economic background compete for all types of capitals, either to maintain their privileged social positions or to realise their aspiration for upward social mobility. The job market is also a field in which graduates deploy all kinds of resources and strategies, together with their capital gained through tertiary education to compete for employment.

In social practice, habitus and field are mutually constituted: on one hand, the field structures the habitus; on the other hand, habitus also "contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world" (Grenfell and James 1998, p. 17). Social practices are the result of the multiple forces of one's position in a field (capital), one's dispositions (habitus) and the social arena (field) in which the practices take place. An equation that expresses their correlation would be: "Practice=[(Habitus)(Capital)][*] Field" (Grenfell 2008, p. 51).

The Forms of Capital

Unlike the definition of capital in economic theories, which solely recognise the economic form of capital, Bourdieu insists that various forms of capital constitute the basis of domination. All its different forms need to be taken into consideration in the analysis of the structure and functioning of the social world (Bourdieu 2008). The guises of capital include economic capital, social capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 2008), though it is noteworthy that other forms of capital can be regarded as "transsubstantiated" forms of economic capital (Huang 2013, p. 102) – other forms of capital can be transformed into economic capital, and economic capital can be transformed into other forms of capital. Working out of a Marxist tradition, for Bourdieu capital comprises resources used in social relations in systems of exchange, and the term is extended "to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation" (Bourdieu 1977, p. 178).

Economic Capital

Economic capital is usually associated with monetary exchange, which can be "immediately and directly (converted) into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights" (Bourdieu 2008, p. 281). It could take the form of salary/wages, investments, profits, or property. Economic capital can be extended to increase other forms of capital, e.g. parents can invest in their children's education to enhance their cultural capital. In my research, graduates' economic capital is mainly reflected by their family's wealth, and the geographic region from where they come, for example, rural or urban origin. It is worth noting that one's geographic origin also factors into symbolic capital, where the symbolic prestige of coming from a certain region is embedded, as well as social capital, i.e. the social networks that come with being from that region. In the case of the so-called "free education" graduates in my study (I will discuss in Chapter 8), even though they all achieved very high college entrance scores (cultural capital), most of them did not have the economic capital to pay for tuition and had to apply for the free education programme with the condition that they had to go back to their remote and underdeveloped hometowns to work for a period of ten years. Their tertiary education options were restricted by their poor economic capital, which in the end limited their upward social mobility.

Social Capital

Social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to membership in a group…which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital" (Bourdieu 2008, p. 286). It is based on indissoluble material and symbolic exchanges, and can be calculated by "the size of the network

connections one can mobilise and on the volume of the capital possessed in his [sic] own right by each of those to whom he [sic] is connected" (Bourdieu 2008, p. 286). The networks of relationships are established through conscious or unconscious strategies, both individually and collectively deployed, aiming at establishing or reproducing social relationships that can be used in the short or long term (Bourdieu 2008). Most people have the basic social capital of a family, but individuals can activate extended family relations to develop their social capital; similarly, most workers have colleagues, but these relationships can be deepened beyond the workplace to enhance social capital. Mutual exchange (of gifts, words, etc.) "presupposes and produces mutual knowledge and recognition" (Bourdieu 2008, p. 287), which in turn reproduces the whole network.

This study will show the significance of this type of capital to university graduates. In the Chinese context, social capital can be reflected in one's *guanxi* networks (a Chinese term for interpersonal connections). In job-hunting, graduates deploy both direct networks, such as their family and kinship networks, and those they developed during tertiary education, such as alumni, as well as indirect social networks to help them stand out from their well-matched competitors in order to secure a job.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is defined as culturally valued knowledge, taste and consumption; it can include a wide range of areas such as art, education, and forms of language (Harker 1990, p. 13). According to Bourdieu (2008), cultural capital exists in three forms: it can be embodied in the long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; it can exist in the objectified form of cultural goods such as books, pictures and

dictionaries; it can also be found in institutionalised forms such as educational qualifications (Bourdieu 2008, p. 282). Cultural capital can be acquired unconsciously without any deliberate learning, e.g. through childhood socialisation ('familiarisation' in Bourdieu's terminology), but it cannot be accumulated beyond an individual agent's capacity. "Because the social conditions of its transmission and acquisitions are more disguised than those of economic capital" (Bourdieu 2008, p. 283), it is often predisposed to function as symbolic capital, which is recognised as legitimate competence or cultural capital rather than symbolic capital. A direct example of cultural capital is education. All the graduates in my research have received tertiary education in Shanghai, one of the most developed cities in China; they have also been exposed to 'modern' life styles, tastes and consumption patterns. These are all forms of cultural capital that they have acquired through their tertiary education. They have both consciously and unconsciously reshaped their habitus, and improved their competitiveness in the field, due to their three or four years of studying and living in Shanghai.

Symbolic Capital

Symbolic capital is "commonly designated as prestige, authority and so on" (Alipio 2013, p. 297). Symbolic capital and the forms of profit and power it warrants, only exist "in the relationship between distinct and distinctive properties, such as body proper, language, clothing, interior furnishing" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2013, p. 297), which constitute and differentiate individuals or groups into expressive styles through their perception and appreciation of these properties. Here symbolic capital is expressed in the more unconscious aspects of habitus, but there are also strategically deployed aspects. An individual's symbolic capital, which is reflected in

his/her lifestyles, can express their social position and function as a sign of distinction (Alipio 2013). Symbolic capital often functions as charisma, which exists as a dimension in any legitimate power, such as the belief in religion and prestige. A famous university would add symbolic capital to a graduates' academic credential by making him/her more competitive or popular in the job market. Using an authoritative expert as a referee (deploying symbolic capital) might also increase the graduates' employment chances.

Conversions

Economic capital can be regarded as the root of other types of capital; however, the conversion between different types of capital cannot usually occur instantaneously, and other types of capital are never entirely reducible to economic capital. For example, there are some goods and services that can only be obtained "by virtue of a social capital of relationships" (Bourdieu 2008, p. 287), which need to have been established or maintained for a long time beforehand. All types of capital need to be accumulated to realise successful upward social mobility; strategies to achieve certain goals require translating among the different types of capitals. For example, in order to gain the cultural capital and symbolic capital embodied in academic credentials, one has to invest economic capital to pay for the costs of that education, and forfeit economic benefits during the time needed to pursue academic credentials. In my study, students need to invest their economic capital in order to develop their cultural capital and symbolic capital in university; while in the job market, graduates need to exchange their cultural capital and symbolic capital gained from tertiary education, together with the social capital they have developed, for more economic capital by finding a job.

Education and Social Reproduction

To Bourdieu, education is a field in which agents struggle for cultural and symbolic capital, i.e. academic credentials. Primary, secondary and higher education could be regarded as subfields. They connect with each other within the field, as well as connecting with other fields outside of education. Schools act as effective filters, which serve the interests of the dominant group and provide them with the cultural capital to reproduce their privilege (Bourdieu 1973, p. 80; Bourdieu 1974, p. 39; Harker 1990, p. 87). Bourdieu argues that capital attracts capital, and the different types of capital are inter-convertible in many ways (Grenfell and James 1998). For example, "high academic qualifications traditionally tend to 'buy' good jobs and good salaries" (Grenfell and James 1998, p. 21). However, since the configurations of capital in the field are ever changing, the values of different types of capital are constantly being renegotiated. Qualification inflation happens where the academic qualifications get devalued as the 'players' acquire more capital (Grenfell and James 1998).

Though capital attracts capital, individuals do not enter the education field with the same amount of capital; it is not a level playing field. Bourdieu argues that individuals all begin with different cultural endowments, which put them in unequal positions in the competition (Nahar, Xenos and Abalos 2013, p. 111). In an education system, since the culture being inculcated is the dominant culture, the dominant culture, though inculcated, "is misrecognised as legitimate by subordinate classes" (Nahar, Xenos and Abalos 2013, p. 112).

Those who are bestowed with social privilege are better players in the education field, because they embody the habits, behaviour and attitudes which could help them in learning; they have inherited the appropriate cultural knowledge, *savoir-faire* and 'good taste' (Grenfell and James 1998, pp. 21-22). Conversely, there are individuals who are at disadvantage. If an individual from a non-dominant background is to succeed in the education field, he or she needs to acquire the appropriate cultural capital (e.g. educational qualification, the proper way to dress and talk, knowledge about high culture such as literature, music and art). However, the subordinate classes usually experience a lower academic success rate than those from dominant classes. For the dominated classes, higher education means great effort and constant struggle, while for the dominant classes, it is their legitimate heritage (Nahar, Xenos and Abalos 2013, p. 111). Moreover, the habitus of the subordinate classes will "reinforce their disadvantage by inhibiting their demands for access to the higher reaches of education by defining it as 'not for the likes of us'" (Nahar, Xenos and Abalos 2013, pp. 112-113). Nevertheless, to most under-privileged children, "the school remains the one and only path to culture, at every level of education" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

Bourdieu's theory of practice provides structural guidance for my analysis. In my research, I look at the different approaches and strategies that graduates deploy in their practice as they transition from education to work. I also analyse the different factors that affect graduates' transition experiences, such as their academic achievements, socio-economic background, *hukou*, gender, social networks, etc. The transition from education to work is a multi-factored practice, in which the habitus,

all types of capital held and available to the graduate, as well as the field where the transition take place all need to be taken into consideration.

Youth–Adulthood Transition Theories

This thesis is a study of young people. Youth is an "evolving concept layered upon layers with values which reflect contemporary moral, political and social concerns" (Jones 2009, p. 1). It is a field of study with significance, because some of the young people will become future leaders and power holders (Parker and Nilan 2013).

Defining Youth and Young People

Youth is a socially constructed, intermediary period of semi-dependence that stands between the full dependency of childhood and the independence of adulthood (Furlong 2013, pp. 1-3). Youth is a broad concept which sets no specific age range, nor can it be said to end with certain activities "such as taking up paid work or having sexual relations" (Furlong 2013, pp. 1-3). Given this definition, it is easy to understand that the cohort of youth is different across societies, due to different cultural traditions, education, employment, and welfare systems (Heinz 2009, p. 6; Furlong 2013, p. 3).

Adolescence is an invention of Western social science at the turn of the twentieth century, by G. Stanley Hall in the first major study of the period between childhood and adulthood. Adolescence is usually considered to begin with puberty and end when one achieves physiological and emotional maturity (Furlong 2013, pp. 1-2), or

between puberty and "the ages specif[ied] by law for compulsory education, employment and criminal procedure" (Bakan 1974, p. 8). In Hall's words (1904), adolescence is a physiological second birth of a child "marked by a special consciousness of sex" (Hall 1904, p. 832). Puberty had such fundamental emotional and mental effects that, just as Rousseau once argued, adolescence should be regarded as a separate life stage that is intermediate between childhood and adulthood (Savage 2007, p. 13). From a social-cultural construct, Mead (1928) pointed out that adolescent is different in different cultures. For example, it is a period characterised by "risky behaviour, mood swings and conflict with parents" for American youth (Furlong 2013, p. 2), due to the physiological changes associated with it, however, it does not have to be like this in other societies (Mead 1928). In my opinion, adolescence was not purely a biological category; it is a sociocultural construction comes with socio-economic development (Savage 2007).

Seeking to impose uniformity on statistical approaches among its members, the United Nations defines 'youth' as people between the ages of 15 and 24; teenagers are defined as those between the ages of 13 and 19, while young adults are those between the ages of 20 and 24 (Furlong 2013, pp. 3-4). Heinz (2009) argues that it is impossible to distinguish youth from adolescence and adulthood, "except in terms of the legal definitions of the maturity age" (Heinz 2009, p. 4), because it is just a component of the life course, not a self-contained phase (Heinz 2009, p. 4).

Bocknek (1986) argues there are at least four adult life periods (young adult, established adult, middle adult and senescent adult), where young adulthood and established adulthood are the first two in the adult life span. Havighurst (1982)

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identifies young adulthood as between the ages of 18 and 30, a stage that contains many important life tasks such as starting a career, finding a partner and starting a family, managing a home and rearing children, taking on civic responsibility and so on (Bocknek 1986). Havighurst's identification was based on the individual's social behaviour or completion of socially defined tasks, but the tasks mentioned above can be readily identified as the behaviour expected of individuals of the same broad age group (Havighurst 1982). Thus, young adulthood is not a stable or universal life stage, rather, it is a transition period.

In China, Confucius' Analects was one of the earliest works to divide the life span into different stages: "At fifteen I set my mind on learning; by thirty I [was established]; at forty I was free of perplexities; by fifty I understood the will of Heaven, at sixty I learnt to give my ears to others; by seventy I could follow my heart's desires without overstepping the line" (Watson 2007, p. 20). The Analects' identification of the different life stages has been very influential till the present day. The period between 15 and 30 years of age is usually regarded as the youth period, which covers a transition period from dependent childhood to independent adulthood, as individuals pursue self-identity and independence, complete their education, get married and have children (Hooper 1985).

In traditional Chinese society, age, generation and sex are recognised as the three basic elements of the hierarchical social system in both public and domestic domains (Yan 2009). According to custom, a person was regarded as an unreliable child until marriage (Waltner 1986; Watson 1989; Yan 2009). It was not until the student movement of the 1920s that the word "youth" (*qingnian/nianqing*ren in Chinese)

gained some social meaning, that is that youth is an important social force (Yan 2009).

The term "youth" or "young people" is used quite loosely in present day China and the boundaries of the present Chinese terms for adolescence (*qingshaonian*), youth (*qingnian*), young people (*qingnian/nianqingren*) and young adults (*qingnian*) are quite fuzzy. The words are sometimes interchangeable.

There are at least six different definitions of the age range for "*qing(shao)nian* (youth/young people)": for the Chinese Communist Youth League, youth refers to persons between 14 and 28 years of age; schools and government institutions tend to classify staff who are below 30 years of age as youth, while for the selection of outstanding youth of every level, the upper age limit for candidates is 40 years; the upper age limit for a committee member in the All China Youth Federation is 40 years, while for members of the standing committee of the All China Youth Federation, the upper age limit can be extended to the age of 45; in the areas of business, industry, literature and the art world, the definition of youth can usually be extended to 45 years, sometimes even up to the age of 49 (Mo 2009).

According to the statutes books of the General Principles of the Civil Law (Fourth Session of the Sixth National People's Congress 1987) and the Minors Protection Law (The NPS Standing Committee 2007), 18 years of age is regarded as the legal division between adults and minors. In the Chinese population census, young people are divided into different subgroups according to age cohorts, covering the population from ages 14 to 29. The formal definitions of youth are differentiated in

terms of different purposes, and there are no clear boundaries between child and youth, and between youth and adulthood. This is very confusing.

Young people are often treated as being on the way to adulthood, which implies the incompleteness of young people and denies them as a cohort of their own (Wyn and White 1997). The main features of the transition to adulthood have traditionally included the transitions from school to work, from home to independent living, and from dependence to independence, in a linear progression (Clark 2007, p. 14). However, given the significantly different circumstances that young people are facing today from those encountered by previous generations, young people's life trajectory today is very different from the traditional linear model of transition. For example, prolonged education and delayed entry into the labour market and marriage has postponed young people's transition into adulthood all around the world. So far, the literature on youth "transitions" has been mainly focused on youth in developed post-industrial societies such as in Europe, Australia and the United States. Moreover, rather than looking at youth as independent from any other life stages, most of the youth transition theories see youth from the perspective of adulthood and still treat youth as a developmental stage toward adulthood, i.e. as an inmature and incomplete version of adulthood (e.g.Côté 2000; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Chisholm and Bois-Reymond 1993). Just as the Conventions on the Rights of the Child has recognised and supported children's needs, rights and intrinsic worth (Whitehead 2009), it is of equal importance to study adolescence, assuming that adolescents have potential agency (Parker 2008).

This research is about the education-to-work transition experiences of educated young people in China. I look at the job hunting experiences of young people who have finished tertiary education but have not yet reached social adulthood. Social adulthood in China is usually marked by entering marriage and parenthood for both sexes (Nelson and Chen 2007) . All my participants are above 20 years of age and below the age of 29; they have all finished tertiary education and none of them is married. I use "young people" to refer to them, not only because they fall in to the category of young people in all definitions, but also to avoid confusion caused by the terms "youth" or "young adulthood", which mainly emphasise an age cohort.

The Socio-economic Context of Youth Transitions Studies

Studies of the problems and new trends in the transition from study to work of young people born after 1970 in Europe, North America, the United Kingdom and Australia have showed that economic restructuring and changing labour market requirements have caused increasing complexity and uncertainty in young people's lives (Raffo and Reeves 2000; Shanahan, Mortimer and Kru¨ger 2002). Social capital is now often regarded as a key element for individual development and change, and factors such as gender, family socio-economic background and ethnicity still greatly affect and limit young people's ambitions, choices and opportunities (Raffo and Reeves 2000). However, young people have also been found to have become less dependent on traditional social values and are more self-reliant in making choices about their transition to work (Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Côté 2000). At the same time, scholars also found that young people are staying home longer in Europe and the United States due to reasons such as extended education and employment difficulties of young people (Cherlin, Scabini and Rossi 1997). A "choice biography" has put

young people in a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, there are more options to choose from, but on the other hand, young people also need to deal with the uncertainty and the risks that go with the choice (Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Chisholm and Bois-Reymond 1993).

Arnett (2006) proposed the term "emerging adulthood" to argue that the transition to adulthood in 1970s America has been prolonged; the period of youth transition is configured with responsibility to oneself, making independent decisions and becoming financially independent. However, contrary to Arnett's model of free choice in emerging adulthood, Côté and Bynner (2008) argue that this prolonged transition to adulthood can be more simply explained by the economic, social and demographic factors of its time. Because of structural socio-economic changes, the outcomes of transition have become increasingly uncertain, which "places greater weight on the role of personal agency, operating in conjunction with support from friends and family and advice from educational counselling and other sources" (Côté and Bynner 2008, p. 263). Thus, the dominant mode of youth transition has shifted from a "normal biography" to a "choice biography" (Chisholm and Bois-Reymond 1993; Du Bois-Reymond 1998).

The validity of choice biography theory has been much criticised. Criticisms include the pervasiveness of gender patterns and the uneven distribution of economic, social, and cultural capital among young people (Davey 1998; Brannen and Nilsen 2007), as well as the lasting role of family background (Côté 2002; Iannelli and Smyth 2008; Wyn, Lantz and Harris 2012) in shaping young people.

These studies have all stressed the impact of the socio-economic development of each country on the transition from higher education to employment. They provide excellent sources for understanding some of the core characteristics of a modern mass system of higher education in times of socio-economic transformation. This project draws upon this field of inquiry by contrasting the results of these studies in developed countries with the transition experience of graduates in contemporary China. In so doing it will provide valuable insights into youth transition from the perspective of a non-Western society.

There is general agreement among scholars of youth that youth transitions, even in advanced post-industrial societies, are increasingly open-ended, multiple and non-linear. However, studies have also confirmed the persistent effects of structural factors such as gender, social background and race/ethnicity on educational and occupational attainment (Stoll 2010). For example, in the study of the difference caused by educational attainment and race/ethnicity in the initial transition to work of young men in the U.S., as educational attainment levels increased, racial inequality in the labour market and economic outcomes widened (Stoll 2010). This suggests that efforts to boost academic achievement for racial/ethnic minority men will probably not overcome racial inequalities in outcomes. The racial/ethnic ratios did not change much as educational attainment levels increased; on the contrary, many indicators of racial/ethnic gaps increased with educational attainment.

The findings of these studies support Bourdieu's social reproduction theory, especially its concern with the limits imposed by structural factors. Despite the fact that late modernity or the "risk society" (Beck 1992) implies "more uncertain,

fragmented, and ultimately individualised transition processes" (Lehmann 2004, p. 383), social-economic background and gender continue to influence individuals' school-to-work transitions significantly. Yet, it is important to recognise that young people's decisions are not entirely structurally determined: they form dispositions based on a reflexive understanding of their position in the social structure.

Precarious independence or precarity is another feature of young people's transition experiences in late modern labour markets. The diversified and complex transitions, the loss of predictability, the inflated risks and the emergence of new biographical options lead to a precarious condition in young people (The European Group for Integrated Social Research 2001). The precarity of young people is double sided: on the one side, precarity represents flexibility, self-management and freedom of movement, while on the other hand it also implies a high risk of unemployment, casual, informal labour contracts, potential exploitation and intermittent income (Ross 2008; Martin-Iverson 2012).

The discussion of precarity usually has a Eurocentric flavour and ahistorical assumptions (Neilson and Rossiter 2008); however, the concept of precarity does apply to Chinese young people in similar circumstances. The mass expansion in tertiary education since 1999 has created a large number of new graduates which has put great pressure on the Chinese job market. Graduate un/under-employment has become a serious problem in contemporary Chinese society (Lian 2009; Bai 2006).

The transition studies of developed societies have all highlighted the socio-economic changes that have taken place in developed Western societies since the 1970s and

how they have impacted on the transition of young people from higher education to employment. These studies offer an extended understanding of national differences in the pattern and timing of young people's transition in the West. Transition studies of young people in Asia provide interesting comparison to the experiences of young people in the West and serve to contextualise my own research of young people in China.

Studies in Asia have found that young people there are also experiencing a protracted transition to adulthood (Yeung and Alipio 2013; Huang 2013). Globalisation, which has resulted in economic and social structure changes, has also made the paths to adulthood more complex. There is a general trend towards more schooling, later marriage, and lower fertility in young people's transitions in Asia (Nahar, Xenos and Abalos 2013; Huang 2013; Ishida 2013). However, due to the different socio-economic and cultural contexts, young people's pathways have become more diverse than those in countries in the West (Yeung and Alipio 2013): differences in history, economy, culture and state policy within nations across Asia lead to diverse patterns in youth transition (Furstenberg 2013).

Expansion in tertiary education has leaded to postponed marriage among young people in East Asia countries such as China, Taiwan and South Korea (Park 2013; Huang 2013; Lian 2009). Young Taiwanese tend to postpone their age of marriage to around 30, when they have finished education and compulsory military service (for males only) and found a full time job; the desired age for parenthood is even later (Huang 2013) . In South Korea, young women tend to have an earlier transition to marriage than their male counterparts, who have compulsory military training and so

delayed employment (Park 2013). Even though cohabitation of young people without marriage is becoming more common, young people in these countries still have low cohabitation rates and low out-of-wedlock births compared with young people in Western countries due to the strong cultural norms (Park 2013; Ishida 2013).

The study of both Western and Asian transitions for young people contributes to a better understanding of youth transition experiences in a global context and at the same time also shows a contingent trend based on social contexts. Adaptions are obvious needed in applying these theories in a Chinese context; however, they do offer useful hypotheses and theoretical contexts for my research. Following the insights of the above-cited studies I study how socio-economic background, gender, geographic differences and government policies affect young people's education-to-work experiences. In this research, I am not going to treat young people as becoming adults; I study young people as a social cohort of their own.

The Demographic Context of Chinese Young People

The sixth Chinese population census in 2010 showed a youth population (aged 14-29) of 344.2 million, accounting for 25.8% of the total Chinese population (Fan 2013; State Council Population Census Office 2012). In the 14-19 year-old sub-cohort, the population was 115.8 million; in the 20-24 year-old sub-cohort, 127.4 million; and in the 25-29 year-old sub-cohort, 101 million (Zhang 2012; Fan 2013).

According to the sixth population census in 2010, the Chinese urban population was 0.6 per cent larger than the rural population, while the difference between the urban

and rural youth populations is much greater: the urban and rural youth population is 189.28 million and 154.92 million respectively, with the urban population comprising 55 per cent of the total youth population (and rural 45 per cent) (Fan 2013; State Council Population Census Office 2012). These data reflect the important part that youth play in the process of urbanization in China.

The overall educational attainment of Chinese youth improved significantly during the decade from 2000 to 2010. In 2010, 17.79 per cent of the total youth population aged 14-29 achieved a junior college education (two to three years of tertiary education with a diploma) or above, which is a dramatic increase from 2000 when the tertiary-educated youth population only accounted for 5.8 per cent of the total youth population (Table1). The rapid increase in the number of tertiary- educated youth was greatly influenced by the government policy of expanding the number of colleges after 1999 (Bai 2006).

Table 1: Highest Qualification Achieved by Young People Aged 14-29,

2000 and 2010

Education Level	Never go to School		Primary Education		Junior High School		Senior High School		Junior College (Diploma)		Bachelor's Degree		Post Graduate Education		Illiterate	
	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010
Population (in millions)	4.49	2.00	63.98	24.07	186.55	169.89	40.16	85.08	12.43	33.51	6.66	25.70	0.33	2.02	4.40	1.42
% of total youth population	1.33	0.58	19.0	7.0	55.1	24.7	11.9	24.7	3.7	9.7	2.0	7.5	0.1	0.59	1.3	0.41

Source: The Sixth Chinese Census Information (Fan 2013, p. 48; State Council Population

Census Office 2012), my translation

Young people are the fresh recruits in the Chinese workforce: in 2010, 283.48 million young people (aged 14-29) were engaged in economic activities, which comprises one third of the Chinese labour force (ages 16-59) (Fan 2013). Most of the youth who are not engaged in economic activities are students. With a population of 69.73 million, they account for 76.1 per cent of the economically inactive youth population – they can be counted as the reserves of the Chinese labour force (Fan 2013). In 2010, the youth unemployment population[14] was 9.95 million, comprising 3.5 per cent of the total youth population (State Council Population Census Office 2012). According to Fan (2013), there are three main reasons for youth to be unemployed: 49 per cent of youth unemployment was due to failing to find a job after graduation; 15.3 per cent was because of suspension of contracts or failed to renew a contract; another 9.4 per cent of youth became unemployed because they needed to take care of the family; it is notable that female youth comprise the largest cohort in this category (Fan 2013, p. 49).

Young people are the primary group for population mobility (*renkou liudong*) in China. The main reason for youth mobility is economic activities and education (Fan 2013). In 2010, there were 102.69 million youth "floating", taking up 39.4 per cent of the total floating population in China (Fan 2013; State Council Population Census Office 2012)[15]. The migration of young people into cities reflects the structural transformations in Chinese industry, society and population.

Wang and Wu (2013) found that education, occupation and family socio-economic background are significantly related to the age of first marriage. Young people

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[14] This refers to young people who are not students and are unemployed.
[15] The floating population, or *liudong renkou*, refers to the large and increasing number of migrants without local household registration status (*hukou*) (Liang and Ma, 2004).

postpone marriage and child bearing, reflecting a prolonged transition to adulthood. The mean age of first marriage for women was 21.9 years in 1987 (Chen 1991); in 2005, the average age of first marriage for women was 23.4 years of age, compared with the average age of 25.3 for Chinese men (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2005a; National Bureau of Statistics of China 2005b). In 2010, the average age of first marriage for Chinese men was 26.7 years of age, while the average age of first marriage for Chinese women was 24.9 years of age (State Council Population Census Office 2012). Not unexpectedly, higher education has been found to be associated with later marriage, with a stronger effect on female than male youth, especially on those female youth from rural origins (Wang and Wu 2013). In 1987, the average age at first child was 23.04 years of age (Chen 1991). In 2000, average age at first child was 26.29 years of age, while in 2010, the average age was 28.18 years, showing a 1.89 years of postpone compared with10 years ago (Fu, Zhang and Li 2013).

Thus, youth in contemporary China are experiencing a longer period of education, later age of entry into workforce, postponed marriage and later age of childbearing. Just as many youth transition studies have argued that there is a trend toward prolonged and non-regular, non-linear youth-adulthood transitions among contemporary young people in the West (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Côté 2000; Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Wyn 2004; Arnett 2006), I would say the same shift is occurring in China. To study the transition experiences of youth in China from their own perspective is of vital importance especially given the large size of the current Chinese youth population (Fan 2013). My aim in this thesis is to study the transition experiences of university graduates in China, to look at their struggles and dilemmas,

so as to better understand young people as a group and the youth transition in contemporary China.

Conclusion

Bourdieu used the various forms of capital to study the French education system. Education is a field, where people with different socio-economic backgrounds (habitus) compete for capital. Although cultural capital can be accumulated through education, one's habitus is a restriction: that is, the yield of education depends on the capital held. The different types of capital are interchangeable, with economic capital as the root of other types of capital; however, sometimes pre-requisites (such as time) are essential for the conversion from other types of capital to economic capital. People from humble socio-economic backgrounds, even though they can acquire cultural capital through education, can almost never become elites because they lack the elite habitus and other types of capital. The inability to accumulate all types of capital will usually result in the failure to achieve upward social mobility, thus reproducing social inequality.

Even though one's socio-economic background can be a legitimate predictor of life trajectory, Bourdieu's social practice theory neglects that young people are not passive agents in the transition, but are conscious and creative and, despite the constraints, are able to make choices in their transitions (Willis 1977).

Previous youth transition studies, mainly in post-industrial countries, have shown a more complex and protracted youth transition to adulthood due to the shift of

economic forces and the increasing importance of education in the job market (Furstenberg 2013). There is a general trend toward longer education, postponed marriage and lower fertility among young people in the twenty-first century everywhere. Young people now have more choices than before, but this also implies loss of predictability and higher risk. Precarious independence increasingly features in young people's transition experiences, and un/underemployment of young people is becoming a serious problem in many countries. Young women are living in a paradox: on the one hand, they enjoy a longer period of education and more possibility to realise their aspirations; on the other hand, their dreams are restricted by the traditional gender ideology of their domestic identity. Most of the transition studies see young people as being in a process of becoming adults; however, I argue that young people have their own culture and unique experiences as being young, and should be studied as a group of their own.

In this study of young graduates' education-to-work transition experiences, I look at how tertiary education as cultural capital works in young people's transition. At the same time I also find it is necessary to study their other types of capital, as conditioned by their social class backgrounds, gender and social networks as well as how young people negotiate their transition with the capital they hold.

Chapter 4: Higher Education and Social Mobility in Contemporary China

The expansion of higher education in China since 1999 has enabled millions of college-aged people to attend universities each year. In 2013 the number of university graduates reached 6.99 million (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2013). University and college graduate status has been regarded as the entry point to the middle class in contemporary China (Goodman 2014). For this reason the expansion of Chinese higher education has been hailed as having created a potentially massive middle class (Lin and Sun 2010). However, social reproduction theories (e.g. Bourdieu 1973; Apple 1982; Collins 2009) hold that higher education mediates the association between class origin and destination, resulting in the reproduction of the individual's class.

In this chapter, I will first discuss class in contemporary China and proceed to analysing the expansion of higher education and its articulation with the formation of the middle class. Then I will look at rural-urban disparity in terms of educational development and inequalities in higher education admissions. In the following discussion of social reproduction in higher education and social mobility, I look at how social origin affects the transition experiences of my research participants in terms of upward mobility. I argue that even though the expansion of higher education in China has contributed to creating a larger middle class, young people of lower socio-economic backgrounds are disadvantaged in their initial access to higher education and in the competitive labour market; one's class and geographic origin greatly affect the outcomes in young people's striving for upward mobility.

Class in Contemporary China

All human societies that reach a certain size and complexity go through a process of division of labour and social stratification. Since the time of Aristotle (384 B.C.–332 B.C.), social theorists have attempted to understand this social division of labour in terms of its role in the functioning of society. Some scholars have attempted to justify a certain form of class stratification (Aristotle 1953; Smith 1953), while others have focused on the critique of class reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Apple 1982). Karl Marx regarded social-class stratification and the perceived "class struggle" between the dominant ruling class and the "subservient class" as the very motor of history and so-called progress (Marx and Engels 1988). To explore the class structure of contemporary Chinese society, I will begin by looking at different concepts of class in the West, with a concentration on the Marxist theory of class, as it was the basis of the ideology of the Chinese state in the Maoist period. I will then discuss class both in the Mao period and the post-Mao period, and the Chinese *hukou* system. After that I will look at higher education and upward social mobility, and the higher education expansion in China. In the last section, I discuss class in graduates' education-to-work transition.

Class in the West

There are many different ways in which "social class" has been defined. Such variation was due to the different social realities of each society and the different research methodologies adopted in the analysis of social stratification and conflict (Guo 2012, p. 723). Aristotle (1953) divided society into three classes based on the possession of wealth: one very rich, another very poor, and a third in the middle.

Adam Smith (1953) divided society into three classes: the land owners, the workers who live on their wages and the employers who live by profits. Marx believed society was divided on the basis of ownership and access to the means of production into two major social classes with conflicting interests according to property relations—the possessing class and the proletarian class (Marx and Engels 1988) – though he also articulated varous intermediate classes (e.g. the petit-bourgeoisie), deploying a finer degree of differentiation than the basic dichotomy.

From a Marxist perspective, classes constitute "common structural positions within the social organisation of production" (Wright and Perrone 1977, p. 33). Conflicting social interests can be associated with the various structural positions, and such interests and relations would spring into class "action against the social structure and ultimately change society" (Morrison 1995, p. 235; Guo 2012). The unity between structure, consciousness and action is what Pahl (1989) calls the S-C-A model, and it is the essence of Marx's theory of class and historical materialism (Guo 2012). In Marx's view, social classes have a decisive function in the evolution of human society, and class struggle determines "the transition of society from one revolutionary stage to another" (Jordan 1971, p. 22). He believed that economic power is the most significant factor in the analysis of power relations, and there is a connection between social class structure and the political system: "political power is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another" (Marx and Engels 1906, p. 51), while "the State is an instrument of class domination and class exploitation" (Jordan 1971, p. 59).

The Weberian approach to social stratification was more pluralist, deriving from a number of factors, including exchange relations in the market. Weber stated that "a class is a number of people having in common a specific causal component of life chances. This component is represented by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income under conditions of the market." (Weber 1968, p. 927; cited in Morrison 1995, p. 233). Moreover, in Weber's view, society has various spheres that function autonomously (Morrison 1995). For example, in contrast to class, which is defined with respect to the market situation and economic activities, a status group "operates outside the market and is defined by patterns of consumption, lifestyle and habits of taste" (Morrison 1995, p. 239; Weber 1968, p. 937). Political parties, in Weber's view, constitute the third dimension, which aims to "secure power and maintain separation from the economic and status spheres" (Morrison 1995, p. 243). Weber argues that wealth, power and status are theoretically independent dimensions of class, and class organisations may arise based on all three dimensions, while the coexistence of different classes does not necessarily result in class struggle and revolution (Weber 1968, p. 303).

The most widely adopted approach in class analysis is the "structural model", where classes are arranged in a hierarchy to reflect the unequal rewards in material and symbolic wealth among different groups (Guo 2012). In the structure model, occupation is often used as a marker of class, with occupants of a position or a cluster of positions forming one class (Guo 2012, p. 726; Blau and Duncan 1967). For example, the Registrar General's class schema in Britain classified people into six different social classes by their skills, with the professionals at the top and the unskilled at the bottom (Szreter 1984). The Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero (EGP)

model, which is of great influence in the comparative analysis of social mobility even today, divided society into seven classes according to people's employment position (Savage et al. 2013; Goldthorpe 1980), with higher-grade professionals such as managers and administrators at the top, and semi- and unskilled workers and agricultural workers at the bottom.

To move away from an exclusively Marxist materialist conception of power and inequality in the discourse of social classes, Bourdieu introduced the concepts of cultural, social and symbolic capital (Pierre Bourdieu 1985). Bourdieu described the social field as a multi-dimensional space of positions where agents are distributed within it according to the composition of their capital (Pierre Bourdieu 1985, p. 724; Grenfell 2008). He emphasises the social aspects of positioning, which is constituted not just by things 'on display', like cars and houses, but are embodied in people. Individuals' positions in the social space shape their lifestyles and habitus, and their habitus and lifestyles lead to a tacit "sense of place" or "class unconsciousness" (Grenfell 2008, p. 88). For example, in *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984), Bourdieu explained that the differences between the habitus of manual and white collar workers are because of their respective distance from material necessity (Grenfell 2008). Bourdieu also showed how privileged groups reproduce their advantage by securing their children's access to similar social positions (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Children of wealthy backgrounds not only inherit wealth but also form embodied dispositions that are recognised and valued in the educational field. Thus, these children appear more intelligent and naturally more cultured than others, because the cultural knowledge and abilities that are valued as cultural capital in the

education system are what those children have experienced and acquired at home (Grenfell 2008).

Similarly, in his research on "how working class kids get working class jobs", Paul Willis (1977) argued that it is the working class counter-school culture that most effectively prepared working class kids for the manual work they would finally take up (Willis 1977). He claimed that even though macro determinants such as class location, region and educational background are important factors, "macro determinants need to pass through the cultural milieu to reproduce themselves at all" (Willis 1977, p. 171).

All social class discourses have undergone revisions and criticism in the past century, as have discourses on class in China. In particular, Marxist views of class have declined in China in the post-Mao era (Guo 2012), and descriptions of social groupings have become more complex in the post-Mao era. Class, which used to be central to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) ideology in the Mao era, "has now become an obstacle to reform and the construction of a 'harmonious society'" (Guo 2012, p. 729), and is therefore downplayed and diluted.

Class in the Mao Era

After the establishment of the New China in 1949, Mao and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) aimed to create a more egalitarian social order by attacking the vast inequalities in "feudal" society. In the land reform of the late 1940s and early 1950s, people were classified into classes according to their relationship with land and labour (Zhang 2013), called *chengfen* (Kuhn 1984). For example, landlords and rich

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peasants made up the exploiting classes, while poor peasants and lower middle peasants were designated the exploited classes (Zhang 2013). While the term *jieji* is closest to the Marxist conception of social class, in the Chinese context, the two terms for "worker" and "capitalist" are often used together as "*jieji chengfen*", which could be translated as "class subsection" (Kuhn 1984).

After the land reform and socialist transformation of the mid-1950s, the CCP declared that the exploiting classes had disappeared and the property-linked concept of class had been eliminated. However Mao maintained that class struggle would continue for a long time (Guo 2012; Zhang 2013), as "the old class enemies were not resigned to socialism and new class enemies such as 'revisionists', 'new bourgeois elements' and 'capitalist roaders' had emerged in the newly established socialist society" (Zhang 2013, p. 440; Kraus 1981).

In the Mao era, the proletariat was said to be "the most progressive force of history and the embodiment of the most advanced forces of production" (Guo 2008, p. 40). Together with peasants, they were the "masters of the country" (Guo 2008, p. 40). In the Mao era, individuals were officially differentiated by their *jieji chengfen* (Zhang 2013). Those who were labelled with a non-progressive status, such as the bourgeoisie and landlords, faced discrimination and deprivation of civil and political rights. After Mao's death and with the rise of Deng Xiaoping, the CCP finally officially put an end to class struggle followed by the renunciation of class labels in 1979 (Zhang 2013). However, the far-reaching impact of Mao's class politics lasted till the 1980s, affecting millions of Chinese to varying degrees (Guo 2012; Zhang 2013). In particular, the Chinese household registration system (*hukou* system)

created a spatial hierarchy within Chinese society and prioritised the city over the countryside (Cheng and Selden 1994).

Class and the Chinese *Hukou* System

The Chinese household registration (*hukou*) system, begun in 1950, was the key to the rural-urban divide. It used to permanently restrict all Chinese people to their birth place prior to the economic reform (Bian 2002; Chan and Zhang 1999; Solinger 1999). The *hukou* basically determined where one lived, as well as the benefits to which one was entitled. Under Mao, urban residents were assigned to jobs in a work unit (*danwei*), through which most of the urban subsidies – "compulsory education, quality schools, health care, public housing, [and] varieties of food stuffs" – were allocated (Bian 2002, p. 93). Without an urban *hukou*, people could not work in the city, nor could they enjoy the benefits that were allocated to urban citizens. Only a tiny fraction of rural-born Chinese could obtain an urban *hukou* through military service, marriage, or higher education and subsequent job assignments (Bian 2002; Wu and Treiman 2007).

The pro-urban economic priorities of the Mao era left the countryside severed from the rapidly growing urban economy (Watson 1984, p. 14). The rural areas became just a source of agricultural products to feed the urban population who were provided with "secure jobs, subsidised housing, education, medical care, rationed allotments of food and consumer goods and other benefits…while the rural residents were outside of the state budget" (Whyte 2010, p. 9). Due to the big disparity in living standards between the countryside and the city, a social consciousness of "stratification of places" was produced (Shirk 1984, p. 60): there was a preference

for working in the cities rather than as a peasant in the countryside. The social status of urban and rural dwellers became very different: the winners were those who lived and worked in the cities, while the losers were usually in the countryside. The big gap between rural and urban economies constituted China as a dual society economically and socially (Knight and Song 1999).

Class in the Post-Mao Era

Since the reform in 1978, the development of the economy has been given top priority, with state policy shifting from a planned economy to "a market economy with Chinese characteristics" (Yan 2007). The transition has been very successful, with a quickly growing economy and a dramatic improvement in people's overall living standards, as well as significant poverty reduction over the past thirty years. However, regional development has been very uneven (Chien 2007), and the rapid economic growth has caused a widening income gap between the rich and the poor: "China has become a more polarised society and social conflict is on the rise" (Guo 2008, p. 39).

Deng's famous announcement, "Let some people get rich first" (Deng 1993), could be understood as the trigger for accelerating the rural-urban development disparity. South-eastern coastal China has a great advantage in attracting direct foreign investment and conducting export businesses due to its history and geographical location, and those areas are the most developed regions in present-day China. To narrow the regional disparities and promote the development of the rest of China, the Chinese government has launched several projects, such as "the western China development" (*xibu dakaifa*) in 1999, the "revitalisation of the Northeast" (*zhenxing*

dongbei) in 2003, "the rise of the Central Area" (*zhongbu jueqi*) in 2004 and the Tianjin Binhai New Area (*Tianjin binhai xinqu*) in 2005 (Chien 2007, p. 138). However, the effectiveness of those strategies is in doubt, because the income gap between the east and the west keeps growing. For example, in 2012, the average income of urban residents per annum was 24,564.7 *yuan* (~AUD 5,060), while for rural residents, the figure was 7,916.6 *yuan*, only one-third the income of their urban fellows (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2013). However, living in the city is much more expensive than living in the country. For example, in 2012, the per capita annual consumption expenditure was 16,674.3 *yuan* in urban China and 5,508.2 *yuan* in rural China (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2013). The differences between urban and rural areas in important mechanisms of economic development, such as "skilled labour, research and development (RandD) capacity, infrastructure, institutional coordination and environmental capacity" (Chien 2007, p. 138), are very dramatic.

The *hukou* system has undergone a few reforms since 1978. A temporary *hukou* was introduced in the 1990s to give rural migrants permission to work in the cities; however, it did not guarantee them the same benefits enjoyed by urban residents (Zhao 2007, p. 175). Migrant workers became an underclass in the cities, with low wages, less welfare and a lack of job security. The potential for conflict between urban and rural residents has intensified, particularly between migrant workers and permanent urban residents (Yan 2007, p. 198).

All in all, there has been a great deal of economic and social change in both urban and rural areas as a consequence of the shift to a market economy (Whyte 2010). The "Chinese class stratification has transformed from a rigid status hierarchy under Mao

to an open, evolving class system in the post-Mao period" (Bian 2002, p. 91). Chinese society has become more mobile both socially and geographically (Chan 1996).

Class in a Changing Social Context

In contemporary China, there is a general rejection of Marx's ideas of revolution growing out of class struggle. Nowadays, social classes in China are not perceived as having anything to do with Marxist theories of class conflict and struggle (Guo 2012; Goodman 2014). Rather, class "is conceived in respect of positions in the technical division of labour" (Guo 2012, p. 734). Many social scientists use the terms "stratum" or "strata" instead of "class" in the analysis of Chinese social structure (Lu 2002; C. Li 2005), so as to avoid conflict with the CCP's claim that there is no longer a bourgeoisie in Chinese society (Guo 2008). Usually a stratum analysis posits a hierarchical structure based on "objective indexes such as income, occupation, consumption, education and life styles" (Guo 2008).

Even though the CCP still claims to be the vanguard of the proletariat and the organisation that represents the working class (Guo 2008, p. 40), scholars have argued that Chinese workers have lost their privileges because of the emergence of the new rich (Blecher 2002). Economic development "requires advanced productive forces and consumers with ample purchasing power, rather than revolutionary forces ready to wage class struggle" (Guo 2008, p. 41). In 2002, Lu Xueyi and his colleagues at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Institute of Sociology, developed a social structure of "upper, middle and lower" gradational strata, which were further divided into ten sub-strata (Goodman 2014; Guo 2008; Lu 2002). The

upper stratum includes state and social administrators, managers and private entrepreneurs; the middle stratum includes individual business owners, professional and technical personnel and office workers; the lower stratum (workers) includes employees of commercial services, the industrial working class, agricultural labourers and urban and rural jobless, unemployed and semi-employed (Goodman 2014).

In the West, the middle classes are regarded as "the drivers and guarantors for their vision of modernity, democracy and freedom" (Donald and Yi 2008). Members of the middle class are supposed to be educated, with stable purchasing power, and to be politically moderate, thus acting as a buffer between the rich and the poor, maintaining social stability (Guo 2008, p. 50). An olive-shaped society with the middle class as the main body is believed to be the most stable social structure by many liberal thinkers (e.g. Li 2006), economists (e.g. Chen 2004), and Chinese social scientists (e.g. Li 2001; Lu 2002; Lu 2005). The CCP has said that their central commitment is to create a harmonious, olive-shaped society by enlarging the middle class, and ensuring that the majority of the Chinese population will eventually join the middle class (Goodman 2014; Guo 2008; Xi 2013). This is a policy that aims to manage social inequality.

Despite some detailed variation, there is general agreement among Chinese social scientists on the characterisation of the middle class: a member of the middle class is expected to have received higher education (Goodman 2014), is usually employed in a high-status position (usually a white-collar position such as a manager, engineer or office worker), and has internalised new notions of consumption and lifestyle (e.g.Lu

2002; C. Li 2005; Lu 2005; Sun 2004). Middle class lifestyles are exemplified by consumption habits such as having private housing and a car, buying international brand products, eating out and travelling internationally (Goodman 2014, p. 53; C. Li 2010).

Higher Education and Upward Social Mobility

Social mobility refers to a change in social status (usually reflected by intergenerational changing of occupations) (Carlsson 1958). However, whether people can change their class through social mobility is another story. Blau and Duncan's path analysis estimates the relative importance of different determinants of individuals' occupational attainment (Blau and Duncan 1967). They found that people's "social origins exert a considerable influence on [their] chances of occupational success" (Blau and Duncan 1967, p. 402), but people's own education and early job experiences (such as their first job) exert a more pronounced influence on their occupational achievement; education, in large part, mediates the influence of family origin on career success.

Education is often seen as the key channel to upward social mobility (Cremer, Donder and Pestieau 2010). For example, Plato, in his *Republic,* advanced a theory of social selection and recruitment. He believed that children from the lower classes who had qualities befitting a member of a higher class should be educated for upward mobility (Heath 1981, p. 11). Elitist policies are often advocated in the literature on education, and even though no society is willing to admit that its educational system is elitist, it is often the case (Cremer, Donder and Pestieau 2010).

Schools usually play a role as an agency of selection. Schools do not make children cleverer, but they do certify for employers which ones appear cleverer than others. Sorokin wrote:

> [I]t is certain that the school, while being a 'training and educational' institution, is at the same time a piece of social machinery, which tests the abilities of individuals, which sifts them, selects them, and decides their prospective social position. The whole school system, with its handicaps, quizzes, examinations, supervision of the students, and their grading, ranking, evaluating, eliminating and promoting, is a very complicated 'sieve', which sifts 'the good' from 'the bad' future citizens, 'the able' from 'the dull', 'those fitted for the high positions' from those 'unfitted' (Sorokin 1927, pp. 188-9).

Thus, the education system becomes, in Sorokin's language, "a more important channel of vertical circulation[,] and the direct inheritance of occupations becomes less important" (Heath 1981, p. 39).

In their study of education and social class mobility, Ishida, Muller and Ridge (1995) found that "education mediates the association between class origin and destination" (Ishida, Muller and Ridge 1995, p. 145). Wright (1979) demonstrated that class is the main explanation of the differential returns on education for people of different races and gender groups, and that the economic return on education is strongly related to people's class origin. To Bourdieu, education is "a field in a multidimensional space through which individuals (or whole social groups) would trace a certain trajectory" (Harker 1990, p. 97; Bourdieu 1984, p. 110); that trajectory, as argued by Bourdieu, is largely dependent on the volume of inherited capital as well as "individual's skill in preserving or enhancing their initial reserves of received capital" (Bourdieu 1984, p. 110; Friedman 2014, p. 361). Habitus is important in Bourdieu's discourse of social mobility, as it conceptualise how a "mobile person's past can shape their horizon of expectations in the present" (Friedman 2014, p. 362; Bourdieu 1984).

More specifically, the embodied disposition, posture and accent may all show the trace of one's class origin (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 93-94).

Similarly, Apple (1982) asserts that education plays a fundamental role in the reproduction of class, status, and the continuation of the gendered division of labour and patriarchal power. In his opinion, education is part of the overall economic and ideological configuration: "the real issue is not what education alone does, but how it is related to class, race and gender and the control, production, and distribution of economic (and cultural) power" (Apple 1982, p. 7). Although acknowledging that both the curriculum and school culture can have some effect on students' life chances, Apple (1982, p. 2) highlighted the importance of economic reproduction through education. The intervention of economic, political and ideological forces limits the possibilities for education to enable social mobility (Apple 1982, pp. 6-7). In short, when studying the role of education in social mobility, we should not look at education in isolation: social and economic background also plays a significant part in educational mobility.

Nowadays, the expansion of education is a phenomenon found all over the world: people of all backgrounds now have more access to education. This has produced many benefits: for example, the overall educational level of the population has improved, and so has the accompanying socio-economic development of society globally. However, the relationship between educational level and occupational status may change. That is, a person may have to have more education to get a position in a certain type of occupation than was the case before. This is known as upward credentialing (Carlsson 1958, pp. 122-123). Carlsson (1958) argued that the

extension of education could have two effects on social mobility. One possibility is that with education becoming more accessible to larger groups, the effect of other factors, such as parents' status, on mobility would be reduced, and the society would become more "education conscious". However, a second scenario is also possible: that is, the prevalence of higher education would make employers more likely to consider other factors such as family background. For example, in their research on the role of education in social mobility in contemporary British society, Jackson, Goldthorpe and Mills (2005) found that the value of educational qualifications has been reduced by the expansion of education, and the effect of educational qualifications in class mobility is declining. Indeed, the effect could also be a mixture of both, depending on circumstances: greater mobility for a larger portion of the society in the general workforce, but with the highest-level positions still reserved for the offspring of the "ruling class".

Higher Education Expansion in China: 1999—2012

Chinese education was significantly disrupted during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and the admission of university students and postgraduate students was completely stopped for twelve years from 1966 (Hannum et al. 2008). The structure of primary and secondary education was streamlined; vocational schools and teacher training schools were also shut down in the first six years (Zhou 2005).

After the Cultural Revolution, Chinese society was in total chaos. Everything needed reconstruction, and the Chinese government was faced with a severe political crisis.

Realising the importance of science and technology for Chinese economic revival, Deng Xiaoping asserted the need to revive education by focusing on the improvement of educational quality at all levels of the education system. In 1977, higher education was re-established with its important role of providing intellectual talent, knowledge and skills needed for national development (Tsang and Ding 2005). Numerous social reforms and transformations have taken place since the reform and opening up in 1978, and the Chinese government has continued to expand its higher education system to both bring about and adapt to social and economic development (Ciupak and Stich 2012).

Since 1998, aiming to achieve "mass higher education", Chinese higher education has expanded rapidly. The over-all number of university students increased by more than fivefold from 1998 to 2009 (Quan and Zhao 2007). Enrolment in higher education has jumped from 1.14 million in 1980 to 5.56 million in 2000, and to 13.3 million in 2004 (Hannum et al. 2008, p. 18). By 2011, there were 24 million students in university and 7.3 million more students were recruited in that year (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2012).

As discussed in Chapter One, the expansion in higher education brought its own problems. The uneven distribution of educational resources, and different college admission scores according to region have resulted in unequal university entrance opportunities. For example, some studies found an uneven CEE (College Entrance Examination) entrance-score line across provinces, with students in eastern provinces having more entrance opportunities than students from underdeveloped inland and western provinces (L. Li 2010; Ross and Wang 2010). In 2010, the

acceptance rates of first-ranking universities for students from Beijing, Shanghai, Shandong and Henan were 20.1 per cent, 18 per cent, 7.1 per cent and 3.5 per cent, respectively (Quanguo Gaoxiao Zonghe Xinxi Chaxun 2013). Shandong is located on the east coast, while Henan is in the middle of China. They are among the top five provinces which have the largest population of *Gaokao* (College Entrance Examination) participants. In 2013, the numbers of students who took part in the *Gaokao* for those four cities or provinces were 72,700, 53,000, 509,000 and 716,300, respectively (Quanguo Gaoxiao Zonghe Xinxi Chaxun 2013). Due to the low acceptance rates and large number of *Gaokao* participants in Henan, the competition is much fierce and it was relatively more difficult for students to succeed in the *Gaokao*.

As well as the difference in university entrance opportunities between rural and urban students, migrant children in urban areas also experience inequality in their education opportunities. They inherit their parent's official status as a rural resident and are denied the entitlement benefits of local students (Meng and Zhang 2001). Though many aspire to higher education, migrant students' opportunities for upward social mobility through education are restricted due to the unequal access to schooling and the fact that they are denied the right to take the *Gaokao* exam in the cities. As some studies have argued, "when the option for higher education carries a risk, it is rational for members of disadvantaged classes not to aspire for further education" (Koo 2012, p. 561; Breen and Goldthorpe 1997). Women were also found to be significantly underrepresented in university enrolment, and university is thus announced as "a rich, Han, urban and male club" (Wang et al. 2013, p. 469).

Since the job market could not expand as fast as the higher education sector, many scholars (Bai 2006; Quan and Zhao 2007; Bai 2013) expected there would be a rise in graduate unemployment. From 2003 to 2005, the number of unemployed bachelor degree holders increased from 750,000 to 1.2 million (Quan and Zhao 2007). In 2004, unemployed university graduates accounted for 41 per cent of the total of 2.4 million graduates (Quan and Zhao 2007, p. 195). As mentioned in Chapter One, in 2013, there were 6.99 million university graduates in China, at a time of gloomy employment prospects (Bai 2013). While more and more young people can enjoy a higher education, employment after graduation has become a big problem. The mismatch between supply and demand is one of the most important reasons for graduate unemployment.

Class in Chinese Graduates' Education-to-Work Transition

Chinese people are said to believe that higher education will bring higher-paid jobs, so education is perceived as a key to economic success and upward social mobility, especially for unprivileged social groups (Koo 2012; Wu and Treiman 2004; Walder, Li and Treiman 2000). The expansion of higher education since 1999 has been heralded as enabling a larger population from all sectors of society more access to middle class status (Lin and Sun 2010).

However, there are also scholars who have argued that higher education only benefits those from privileged groups (e.g.Goodman 2014; Wright 2010). Julia Kwong's (1983) research in the early reform era found that "parental social position

had an overwhelming influence on children's educational achievement and access to higher education" (cited in Ross and Wang 2010, p. 3). Kwong also found that "the system accentuates inequality by selecting a disproportionate number of students from the intellectual and cadre families" (Kwong 1983, p. 93). Unsurprisingly, in another study, students from higher social backgrounds were found to "have more opportunities to receive a good quality higher education", while children of farmers, self-employed workers and the unemployed are at a clear disadvantage (Wang 2010). In terms of school choice, studies have found that "children from middle and upper class families are more likely to secure places at key schools" (Wu 2012, p. 362), as they can afford to send their children to elite high schools with good records of university entrance by paying high tuition fees (Wright 2010, p. 66; Lee 2009, p. 220; Wang 2010). Rising tuition fees are another obstacle for poor people to receive higher education (Wright 2010; Koo 2012; Breen and Goldthorpe 1997).

Class and Graduates' Transition Experiences in Shanghai

As Koo has argued, inequality in educational opportunity and achievement greatly affect educational outcomes: "one's social origin determines the types of resources available to one, and thus plays an important role in the formation and justification of one's educational goals" (Koo 2012, p. 547). In my research, I found that graduates' social class backgrounds affect their transition trajectories and decision making. Class in China is closely related to *hukou*, gender, and it is also reflected through one's *guanxi* connections. *Guanxi*, or interpersonal connections, is indeed social capital. *Guanxi* networks are found to be not only helpful in one's entry into the labour force, but also can facilitate inter-firm mobility, and reemployment after being laid off (Bian 2002, p. 107). However, the efficiency of one's *guanxi* networks

(social capital) is closely related to one's position in the social class hierarchy (Bourdieu 2008). According to Bian (2002), *guanxi* networks could promote job opportunities for their users, "while constraining those who are poorly positioned in the networks of social relationships" (Bian 2002, p. 107; Bian 1997). I will explore in more detail how *guanxi* networks shape graduates' transition experiences in Chapter 5, while in the following sections, I will draw on my research data to look at how one's class origin determines the volume and quality of one's capital, leading to different education-to-work transition experiences. I will introduce the stories of Dong, who comes from a poor inland farming family with uneducated parents, and Xiaoshi, who comes from a high-rank cadre family in one of the richest cities in China. They are positioned at the opposite ends of the class spectrum in my sample of interviewees. They had completely different transition choices and experiences, and their class origins played a very influential role. I interviewed them when they graduated in 2011 and again in 2015, when they both had married and started a career.

"Education Will Change Fate"

Dong was a male graduate majoring in mechanical engineering at Tongji University, a top 10 Chinese university famous for its engineering courses. He was from a farming family in Henan Province, with uneducated farming parents and no connections at all in Shanghai. He scored 654 (out of 750) for the CEE, 14 points above the university admission score line.[16] He has a brother who was in first year of university. Having little income from the land, his parents had deserted their farmland and worked as migrant workers (*nongmin gong*) in a city in Henan

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[16]The admission scores vary according to province. For Shanghai local students the admission score was 584 in that year.

Province. He applied successfully for a loan to pay for his four-year university tuition fees. He had a good academic record (top 30% in his major), which rewarded him with some scholarship funds to live on every semester. In addition, he depended on private tutoring and on-campus part-time positions to pay for his living expenses.

Dong had considered the pros and cons of whether to find a job or to further study for a Master's degree, and in the end he chose further study.

> Dong: I have thought it over, but I realise that it [looking for a job] was unfeasible…moreover, most of my town fellow students chose to study for a higher degree, and those who did not, are struggling with their living.
>
> Me: What did your parents say about your decision?
>
> Dong: They know nothing, they are just old farmers who have no knowledge at all. It is all up to me. They are quite democratic… because they think you know more than they do, you went to [university], they think you have better judgement, because you went to university. If your parents are cadres or university professors, they may be able to give you some suggestions. (Interview date: 18/03/2011)

When saying his parents were democratic about his future plans, he seems to be implying that they do not believe in the old 'feudal' or 'Confucian' hierarchy, that parents should be respected because they are older and wiser, and in filial piety. He is really talking about a transformation of the social order. In Dong's view, his parents were not able to help him or give any useful suggestions for his transition, because they knew nothing about what qualities the job market is looking for, his qualifications and the sort of job he was trained for; nor could they support him economically or provide him with any social connections.

Even though Dong could find a job in Shanghai with his major, he realised that with the salary he could get, he would not be able to live a good life.

Material wealth is very important, if you do not have private housing, no car and no money, you cannot even find someone to marry…If you have money, you can do anything, you do not even need to go to university… Nobody can survive by working on the land, there is no profit at all… Even if I did not go to university, I would go out to work as a migrant worker. [By working on the land] you cannot even afford your children's tuition…Higher education makes me want to pursue a high quality life. But people like me, all I have is a head [by which he means his knowledge], and further study is the only way that I can depend on to be successful… [In order to become successful], I need to make extra effort, but I have no one to blame. (Interview date: 18/03/2011)

Dong was well aware of the different trajectory he needed to follow for a comfortable life. He planned to go to the USA for a PhD and aimed for a middle-class life there. Even if he could not stay in the USA, he believed that with an American PhD degree, his future life in Shanghai would be admirable. With little economic and social capital, Dong said he believed in "education to change fate" (*dushu gaibian mingyun*). Just as Huang (2012) has mentioned, higher education plays an important role in enabling the rural student to "jump… out of the rural gate" (p. 29). For students like Dong, the importance of higher education is life changing; it enabled him to escape from a poor farming life and to obtain a formal job in the city.

Four Years Later (2015)

Dong did not go to the USA after receiving his Master's degree in mechanical engineering: he got married during his Master's study in 2012 and decided to settle down. He now works in Shanghai Electronic Company, an SOE, with an annual salary of around 100,000 yuan (about AUD$21,000 equivalent). His wife works in an import-export company; her annual salary is not very stable (it depends on her sales performance), but could be up to 200,000 yuan.

Rural background graduates such as Dong, who successfully manage to find a job and settle down in the big cities, are called "phoenix men" (*fenghuang nan*) or

"phoenix women" (*fenghuang nü*) (Huang 2012).[17] Compared with their urban counterparts whose parents usually offer help in purchasing a wedding apartment, the "phoenix men" often receive little or no financial assistance from their parents. More often, they need to send money back to help their parents or other siblings (Huang 2012). In 2015, Dong and his wife deposited 500,000 yuan (about AUD$105,000 equivalent) to buy a 70 m^2, 30-year-old apartment in the rural-urban fringe zone of Shanghai. He has not purchased a car, and it takes him four hours to commute every day. His mum is now living with him to look after their son. His brother just found a job in Hangzhou, one hour south of Shanghai.

> Me: Do you think education changed your fate?
>
> Dong: Education did not change much... the effect of education is limited…An SOE company like the one I am working in, they do not have strict requirements for employees' academic achievements. Even someone without a high school diploma can be recruited….Family background has a very strong impact… The habits you formed since young ["habitus" in Bourdieu's words] have a big impact in job interviews. I felt a sense of inferiority in the interviews compared with those urban fellows, they have better *suzhi*[18]… The interviewers are inclined to recruit these fellows and they have network resources. (Interview date: 20/11/2015 by telephone)

Dong thought that higher education had a limited effect on upward social class mobility, and that higher degrees had been devalued due to the expansion of the higher education sector. Other factors such as one's social origin and *guanxi* connections play a significant role in job seeking.

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[17] The two terms originated from the Chinese idiom "Sparrows turn to phoenix" (*Maque bian fenghuang*), indicating great upward social mobility.

[18] As mentioned in Chapter One, *suzhi* has become an important concept in discourses around population and human resource development in China. *Suzhi*, which can roughly be translated into English as 'quality', became conjoined with the ideal of population (*renkou*) after economic reform. *Suzhi* was first used in the investigation of rural poverty in China. The failure to modernise the 'low quality' (*di suzhi*) of the population was identified as the cause of rural poverty. As economic reform deepened, "*sushi*'s sense has been extended from a discourse of backwardness and development (the quality of the masses) to encompass the minute social distinctions of defining a 'person of quality' in practices of consumption and the incitement of a middle-class desire for social mobility" (Anagnost 2004, p.190)

Dong: The expansion of higher education allows higher class children easier access to university. Elite education has become mass education… Higher education's effect as a channel [to social upward mobility] has been weakened…. The channel has been destroyed… Since rural students entered universities, the emphasis now is on so-called quality education (*suzhi jiaoyu*), looking at things like playing the piano, the ability to speak fluently in a foreign language, all that kind of stuff a rural student has limited access to from the time of being young. (Interview date: 20/11/2015 by telephone)

Suzhi, often translated as 'quality' or 'human quality' in English, is used to justify all sorts of social and political hierarchies in the PRC. *Suzhi jiaoyu* (quality education), in contrast with Y*ingshi jiaoyu* (education for the purpose of passing exams), is advocated by the government to focus on education in a broader sense for the purpose of improving the overall quality of the people (Kipnis 2006). Through the different ways that they have been brought up and educated, what Bourdieu calls a "natural distinction" is formed between Dong and other urban graduates reflected by their different habitus, tastes, language abilities and lifestyles, which are the internalised signs of distinction and symbols of power (Bourdieu 1984, p. 279). Playing the piano and the ability to speak a foreign language fluently are forms of cultural capital which can transform into symbolic capital. For Dong, education as one form of cultural capital was enough to get him the interview, however, his lack of the class-based forms of cultural capital (such as playing the piano and speaking a foreign language fluently) distinguished him from higher class interviewees. Thus, the knowledge gained from one's education, is not sufficient for mobility, as 'quality education' demands enhancement of symbolic capital, the prestigious aspects of one's status. Dong thought that these signs of distinction had practical and discriminatory effects in the job selection process. Yet, it is irrefutable that it was through education that Dong escaped the farming life and obtained a high-paid job and permanent residence (a local *hukou*) in Shanghai. Thus, in his case, education did enable upward mobility – though not as much as he once hoped.

"Your Social Origin Determines the Value of Your Degree"

Xiaoshi was from an army cadre family in Shanxi Province. He was majoring in administration management in a university in Shanghai. Unlike Dong, Xiaoshi did not take the CEE to go to university. In his own words, "I do not like study; if I had taken the exam, I would definitely not have passed it". Instead, towards the end of senior high school, he and two other classmates grouped together to enter a few national biology contests, and they applied for universities using the prizes they won in the contest. They received two university offers: one was from a science and technology university in Beijing and the other was from Shanghai University. Because he had no interest in mathematics, he chose to study administration management at Shanghai University.

Such a pathway to university was never available to Dong and his classmates in the inland countryside, where all of them studied day and night to achieve a high score in the CEE in order to continue study in the big cities. In the end, half of Dong's classmates chose to take a remedial course and re-take the examination, after failing to achieve their ideal score in the first attempt.

At university Xiaoshi joined a hip-hop dance club. He often skipped classes and spent most of his time practising dancing and hanging out with friends in the club. In his fourth year, he realised he had failed too many units and had to apply for an extension to re-take some units in order to graduate.

Xiaoshi's father was a senior officer? in the army. His parents were very disappointed that he could not graduate on time. "In our living community in the army, my father has the highest ranking. He was already very unhappy that I chose this university rather than the one in Beijing which is more famous, not to mention how outraged he is now, knowing that I cannot even graduate." So the top task for him was to pass the exams to get a bachelor's degree. He was confident that after graduation, he would find a good job in Shanghai without the help of his father: "I don't need my dad to arrange a job for me, and I am not going back to Taiyuan [capital city in Shanxi Province] to work under his surveillance." (Interview date: 22/06/2011)

Four Years Later (2015)

Xiaoshi spent another two years trying to pass all the units. However, in the end he still failed to get a bachelor's degree. Falling out with his parents, he tried to live on his own resources for a few months, giving dance performances and doing some other part-time jobs such as food delivery before giving in and going to his father for help. His father found him a job in an SOE in Shanghai through his connections (with a similar salary to Dong's), but in the end he decided to go back to his hometown.

> The salary in the SOE is OK to live on, but I still have to work very hard for a comfortable life… Going back to my hometown is a different story… I can save 20 years' effort! We have many properties … and I can totally depend on my parents' connections, [or] I do not even need to work. (Interview date: 20/11/2015)

Xiaoshi's father now occupies a key position in the provincial government. Xiaoshi is now living in Taiyuan. He started his own company last year doing business with the local government, and it has turned out to bring in very high profits. He got

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married in September 2015, his parents bought him two wedding apartments, and he drives a BMW X 5 for daily transport. His wife holds an Australian Master's degree, but she does not work. I asked him: "Do you think a university degree is important?" He replied:

> No, a degree is not important at all, at least nowadays in Chinese society. To be frank, your social origin determines how important your degree is… People are born different, many of my parents' friends send their children overseas to study, many of them could not pass the exams and could not graduate…but it doesn't matter. They [the parents] just want them to gain some experience… Many of them [the children] now are doing business like me, and they earn tens of millions each year... (Interview date 20/11/2015)

Scholars such as Lin and Bian (1991) have argued that "a father's work-unit status had a direct and significant effect on a son's work-unit status" (cited in Wu and Treiman 2007, p. 416). In Xiaoshi's case, his family background provided him with plenty of economic capital, social capital and embodied symbolic capital (*suzhi*). His father's official position shows how the symbolic capital of power and the social capital of *guanxi* connections were important in helping Xiaoshi establish his own career. All these types of capital enable him to have not only a comfortable life, but also a successful career. The absence of a university degree made no material difference to Xiaoshi's success.

Conclusion

From my examination of graduates' transition experiences, I have found that higher education has a limited effect in upward social mobility. In my sample, social origin is the major influence in upward social mobility. While socially disadvantaged graduates can achieve a limited improvement in their financial situation and social

prestige, compared with their parents' generation, by gaining more cultural capital through higher education, their efforts receive less reward than their peers from more privileged backgrounds, due to their poor economic, social and symbolic capital. The ability of higher education to promote upward social mobility is moderated by graduates' socio-economic origins, as often reflected in their possession of all forms of capital. In the next chapter, I will elaborate in more detail how Chinese *hukou* registration system affects graduates' transition experiences and outcomes.

Chapter 5: The *Hukou* Barrier in Graduate's Education-to-work Transition

In this chapter, I will discuss how the Chinese household registration system (the *hukou* system) affects graduates' transition experiences. As background, I start with an introduction to the Chinese household system and the Shanghai resident card system. Then I discuss how ownership of a Shanghai local *hukou* affects graduates' job-hunting experiences, the reason why so many graduates choose to come to Shanghai to work and to live, as well as the effects of not having a Shanghai *hukou* on non-local graduates' job-hunting experiences and their struggles about whether to carry on or to leave Shanghai. The hierarchical structure of population management in China has led to citizenship stratification. For university graduates in the job market, not owning a local Shanghai *hukou* has a significant negative effect on their job-hunting experiences. I argue in this chapter that the existing *hukou* system creates a dual form of citizenship between local and non-local graduates. The inequality in access to job opportunities and resources between local and non-local graduates creates discrimination and exclusion, which has a discouraging effect on the non-local graduates' transition experiences and hinders their upward social mobility.

The Chinese Household Registration System (*Hukou*)

The Chinese household registration system, which is known as the *hukou* system, was first established in the cities in 1951 (Ministry of Public Security 1951) and was

extended to rural areas in 1955 (Ministry of Internal Affairs 1955; Council 1955). The residential registration system is not inherently a form of institutional exclusion and is found in many nations. However, the Chinese *hukou* registration system is special in that people are treated differently according to different categories and locations of registration, and migration between regions is strictly restricted (Wang 2005). Initially, the *hukou* system acted as a tool of migration monitoring, and there was a short period of free movement into and out of the cities and throughout the countryside in the early 1950s. However, since the heavy influx of rural migrants became a heavy burden for the cities, the government had to enact measures to stop what it regarded as the "blind flows" of rural labour. As a result, the first *hukou* legislation was established in 1958 (Chan and Zhang 1999).

The Pre-Reform Era (1949–1977)

In the pre-reform era, the *hukou* system acted very much as a domestic passport system by dividing the whole population into two "castes" of non-agricultural and agricultural, with the approved location of residence as either urban or rural (Stockman 2000). The former was economically and socially superior to the latter (Chan and Zhang 1999).

Chinese citizens are required to register with the local *hukou* authority (the local police station) at birth. A person's *hukou* status was not determined by his/her birthplace, but by his/her mother's *hukou* location and type, and it was not "until 1998 when a child was allowed to inherit either the father's or the mother's *hukou* location and type" (Wang 2005, p. 23). The spatial distribution of the population was strictly controlled by the government and made rural-to-urban mobility very

difficult: "The state almost completely controlled rural-urban migration and decided where people should work and reside, leaving very little room for individual preference" (Chan and Zhang 1999, p. 830).

Unapproved mobility between rural and urban areas was made difficult by the administrative control of access to many of the daily necessities: "Goods such as grain, cooking oil and cotton clothes were rationed, only urban dwellers with appropriate *hukou* were issued with coupons" (Stockman 2000, p. 54). Other entitlements such as housing, the right to send one's children to school in a certain village or city, as well as the wage, pension and the medical care people could receive all depended on their *hukou* registration (Wu and Treiman 2004; Li, Li and Chen 2010).

Except through a very few special channels, no one could acquire legal permanent residence and the associated rights and privileges anywhere other than their *hukou* location. The few channels for rural people to gain a non-agricultural *hukou* usually included recruitment by state-owned enterprises, enrolment in an institution of higher education, promotion to a senior administrative job, and so on. The special channels included workers shifting from temporary to regular positions in state-owned enterprises and other special situations, such as the returning of educated urban youth from the countryside and demobilised military servicemen who were assigned urban jobs. In this way, the *hukou* system fundamentally determined the life of every Chinese citizen, limited and even eliminated Chinese people's rights of internal migration; and at the same time created social injustice and economic inequality (Wang 2005). Hence, the functions of the *hukou* system went far beyond

simply controlling population mobility (Chan and Zhang 1999). The *hukou* system "could be said to have rewritten the class or status underpinnings.…[T]he *hukou* system actually set up a new class distinction between urbanities and ruralities" (Solinger 1999, p. 35).

The Reform Period (1978–Present)

Since China's reform and opening-up from 1978, the *hukou* system has experienced a transformation in its functions and operation (Li, Li and Chen 2010). The *hukou* system's well-known function of controlling internal migration has been considerably relaxed. With the development of a market-oriented economy, surplus rural labour has been released to work in the cities in the form of *liudong renkou* (temporary residents, or floating population). Many of these people are de facto urban residents, but their *hukou* location and status have not been changed. The *hukou* location continues to determine access to resources and to define one's life chances (Li, Li and Chen 2010).

In order to improve the *hukou* registration administration in these new circumstances, rural migrants to the cities began to be issued with a temporary urban-residential permit (*zanzhuzheng*) for legal employment purposes. By the early 2000s, the national migration population was between 85 and 120 million (Wang 2005). Among these there were also illegal migrants who did not register as temporary residents (Wang 2005). The value of *hukou* is linked with the place of registration and is roughly in accordance with the hierarchy of cities; in another word, the more developed the city, the more services and welfare the city will offer to the local *hukou* holders; as a result, the more valuable the *hukou* is. Metropolitan

cities such as Beijing and Shanghai are not only the most popular destinations for migrants but also the most difficult for which to gain a local *hukou* (Li, Li and Chen 2010). Since the state government has decentralised *hukou* management to the city governments (Wing Chan and Buckingham 2008), the city governments have tried to benefit from the *hukou* management of non-locals and are reluctant to loosen the *hukou* policy for applicants, in order to avoid the obligations of welfare provision such as housing, education, medical care and pensions (Li, Li and Chen 2010).

The Resident Card System (*Juzhuzheng zhidu*)

A temporary resident card is required for those who work or live outside their registered *hukou* locations; it is like a temporary visa that many countries grant to foreign visitors. Formerly, non-locals who stayed in urban cities for more than 3 days were obliged to register at the local police station (Wang 2005, p. 74); now, all Chinese residents aged 16 and over who intend to stay in urban areas (especially the metropolises such as Beijing and Shanghai) other than their *hukou* registration place are required to apply for a temporary residence permit. A Shanghai temporary resident card is usually valid for six months and should be renewed before expiry. People with a temporary resident card are not counted as members of the local population, and temporary *hukou* cannot be changed into permanent *hukou,* no matter how long their holders have lived or worked legally in the city (Wang 2005, p. 74). Most of those applying for a temporary resident card are rural migrant workers who have moved to cities or coastal areas (Chan and Zhang 1999; Guo and Iredale 2004), and who usually work in jobs that are not wanted by local residents, such as manual labour in the construction and service industries. Their chances of getting white-collar jobs are still limited (Guo and Iredale 2004; Solinger 1999).

Nevertheless, the number of migrants keeps rising. It was estimated that rural-to-urban migration in China accounted for seventy-nine per cent of urban growth during the period 1997-2003 (Lu and Wang 2006).

In the case of Shanghai, the resident card system was introduced for migrants "without challenging the *hukou* system"; it "established a hierarchical system [that] leads to citizenship stratification" (Li, Li and Chen 2010, p. 146). By the end of 2008, there were 6.42 million migrants, constituting thirty-one per cent of the whole population, compared with 13.7 million local Shanghai *hukou* holders. Migrant workers produced thirty-one per cent of the total GDP in Shanghai in 2007 (Li, Li and Chen 2010). However, since they do not hold a local *hukou*, they are not considered to be members of the city and are not eligible to enjoy the services and benefits that local people enjoy. The interests and rights of the local residents are protected,   while the interests and rights of those without a local *hukou* are ignored (Guo and Iredale 2004).

Along with the growing size of the migrant population (*liudong renkou*) in big cities, which are the most desired destinations for migration, the demands for permanent migration are increasing as well. To accommodate these demands, "a transitional *hukou* was created to allow legal migration of a selected group of people – mainly the rich and the educated –through *hukou* relocations and changes" (Wang 2005, pp. 50-51). Eligibility for *hukou* changes is based on one's contribution to the localities either in terms of dollars or education and skills (Chan and Zhang 1999). The main way to obtain urban *hukou* status is through higher education, but it is a very narrow, competitive, long journey (Li, Li and Chen 2010).

Students who are enrolled in higher education institutions in Shanghai are usually registered under the collective *hukou*[19] of the university. Upon graduation, the graduates need to apply for a formal *hukou*, since they can no longer be registered under the university collective *hukou*. In order to get a formal Shanghai *hukou*, university graduates need to first secure a job in Shanghai, and then they should reach the threshold score for the *hukou* rating system, which is based on educational attainment, professional qualifications, the rank of their university of graduation, and the status of their employer (Shanghai Municipal People's Government 2010). University graduates who cannot get a Shanghai *hukou* have to have their *hukou* returned to their places of origin and have to apply for a residence card in those places (Shanghai Municipal Human Rescources and Social Security Bureau 2013).

In 2002, the Shanghai government introduced the "skilled" residence card system with partial citizenship for skilled migrants – mainly university graduates who hold a Bachelor's degree or higher in special areas. Instead of being given a local *hukou*, non-local graduates now are given a talent residence card, "which in fact increased the difficulty of (local) *hukou* attainment" (Li, Li and Chen 2010, p. 153). A hierarchical structure of population management has thus been established based on the *hukou* and residence card system, which leads to further citizenship stratification (Li, Li and Chen 2010).

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[19] The collective *hukou* is a temporary *hukou* status valid for the study period.

Shanghai *Hukou* and Graduates' Job-hunting Experiences

Possessing a local Shanghai *hukou* greatly affects graduates' job-hunting experiences and future life plans, because of the social, cultural and symbolic capital embodied in it. I interviewed both local Shanghai graduates and graduates from other provinces. A Shanghai *hukou* guarantees graduates more choices in the job market, more welfare and benefits, such as housing, transportation, public utilities, education and medical care, and even provides advantages in the marriage market, because the "redistribution of income by the local government, in the form of welfare, poverty relief, unemployment insurance, and community cultural activities, generally benefits only local *hukou* holders" (Wang 2005, p. 67).

Local *Hukou*: A Free-Pass for Shanghai Graduates

Owning a local *hukou* gives Shanghai local graduates many advantages in the job-hunting process. For example, to obtain well-paid and highly competitive jobs such as positions in banks and as civil servants in government offices, having a local *hukou* is almost a prerequisite, and speaking the local dialect (*Shanghai hua*) is an unwritten requirement. Compared with graduates from other provinces, local graduates are gifted the natural benefits associated with the local *hukou* by having been born in Shanghai. Their job-hunting focus thus can be on other non-*hukou*-related issues such as whether the job has a good career prospect, matches their own interests and so forth.

When asked about their opinion on why it is easier for local Shanghai graduates to find a job compared with graduates from other provinces, the answer of one of my informants was quite representative:

> Of course, because we do not have the *hukou* problem, and we are more stable than those people from other provinces, they do not have a Shanghai *hukou*, and they always complain about the high rent and the living stress in Shanghai…the companies would be concerned that they might not stay in one job for long. But we are different. Shanghai is our hometown; we will never leave here. (Interview date: 12/04/2011)

For the local graduates, because they have grown up in Shanghai, they have formed a doxa that make them take their privileges for granted. They have the habitus and cultural capital (such as the local dialect) that is acquirable only by growing up in Shanghai. Moreover, having a local *hukou* is also a social capital, as it indicates their membership and connections to the local community. Owning a Shanghai *hukou* has given the local graduates a 'natural' sense of superiority, which, on the one hand, has enabled a smoother job hunting experience and, on the other hand, shows the inequalities of the transition experiences between local and non-local graduates due to their different *hukou* locations.

Local *Hukou*: A Formidable Obstacle for Non-local Graduates

Non-local graduates, who do not have a Shanghai *hukou*, have gone through rather difficult transition experiences in Shanghai compared with the Shanghai local graduates. Even though they have managed to realise a geographical transition – from Hicksville to Global City – through higher education, and were eligible to find a job in this big city, they are like second-class citizens without a Shanghai *hukou*. The inequality in job applications and the unequal access to such benefits as housing

subsidies, medical care, the pension and children's education all have very negative effects on non-local graduates' transition experiences.

Nevertheless, despite the discrimination and challenges, more and more graduates rush to Shanghai for job opportunities. To them, Shanghai, a city full of skyscrapers, fashion shops and white collar office workers, is more than just a geographical location. It represents a modern, glamorous and civilised way of living, which is the opposite to the perceived dirty, illiterate, under-developed lifestyles in the countryside, or actually in any other Chinese city. It has such glamour that even the metropolitan cities such as Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen cannot compete. Living in Shanghai means saying goodbye to a backward peasant lifestyle and being in the forefront of modernity.

Why Shanghai? Job Opportunities and Living in "Modernity"

The strict *hukou* policies of Shanghai and the discrimination towards non-locals do not stop graduates from rushing in for job opportunities. Working in Shanghai conveys more than just economic rewards; the symbolic value of living in modernity outweighs any real economic and social value:

> The bund is the financial zone of Shanghai, which witnessed the establishment of the highest building in Asia; the show windows of the shops lead people to experience the fashion from Paris and New York; young people bring in the youthful energy by working in this busy modern city. Shanghai, the biggest city in China, is catching up with Tokyo and Hong Kong and is gradually becoming the commercial and financial centre of Asia (Shanghai Eastday News 2001).

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Shanghai, once a French concession and with many historic European-style buildings, is often described as the "Paris of the Orient" in many Chinese literary works and reports. Shanghai is considered to be the most westernised city in China, which, by Chinese standards, represents "the most fashionable and Westernised lifestyle" (Chen 2011, p. 218). Shanghai is regarded as the birthplace of a unique urban culture, which distinguishes it from other Chinese cities and represents an emerging form of Chinese modernity (Yeh 1997).

A good representative of modernity in Shanghai is the image of Shanghai women. In Shanghai writer Weihui Zhou's famous neoliberal-themed novel, *Shanghai Baby* (Zhou 1999)*,* Shanghai women are described as having "a unique sense of glamour, sexiness, fashion and sophistication derived from their knowledge of and exposure to Western lifestyle and commodities" (Chen 2011, p. 218). Shanghai women stand out from the "'masculine' women of the North and from the 'vulgar' and flashy women of the South" (Chen 2011, p. 218).

A desire for modernity, associated with urban living, motivates hundreds of thousands of young people to come and work in Shanghai every year. Many graduates view studying in Shanghai universities as a good opportunity to find a job and to melt into the modern life in the big city.

> There are only a few big (modern) cities in China: Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. To me, Beijing is too dirty; while in Guangzhou, people speak Cantonese and the Cantonese culture is so different from mine…As for Shanghai, I visited Shanghai once in my third year at university and had an unforgettable trip, Shanghai is like a foreign city – it is so modern! (Interview date: 24/05/2011)

Other graduates made similar comments about Shanghai to explain their preference for finding a job there. They often described their impression of Shanghai as

"modern", "developed", "big", replete with "opportunities" and even as "Western". For example, when talking about his experiences of living in Shanghai, my interviewee Li said: "If you stay in Shanghai for a few years, even other big cities such as Beijing and Tianjin are like small towns [compared with Shanghai], and the differences [between Shanghai and other cities] are quite obvious" (Interview date: 16/03/2011). Thus, a Shanghai *hukou*, to non-local graduates, is symbolic capital because of the charisma and prestige it represents.

"There Are More Opportunities in Big Cities"

Being the financial centre and one of the most developed metropolitan cities in China and with more than sixty local universities, Shanghai has attracted all kinds of multinational companies to establish overseas offices, especially companies in ICT and the financial sector. The great career prospects in those areas attract graduates from all over China.

I interviewed Guo in his one-bedroom apartment not far from a Metro Line station in Minhang District in the southern suburbs of Shanghai, about one hour by train from the downtown area (People's Square). He finished his undergraduate degree in computer science at Henan University in 2011, and at the time of interview, was working in a software engineering company in Shanghai.

Guo is an only child from a farming family in a remote village of Henan Province. He has been a top student at university. In the beginning he wanted to study for a postgraduate degree, but he finally gave up this idea due to financial difficulties. In the summer holiday after his second year as university, his mother was very sick, and

his father had to quit his job as a rural migrant worker (*nongmin gong*) on a construction site to return home to take care of her. His mother's illness had cost all their savings, and he had to borrow money from his neighbours to buy a bus ticket back to university. Even though his parents were both quite supportive of his plan of further study, he realised that his family was too poor to afford his tuition fees any more. It was then that he decided that he would not pursue another degree:

> I arrived at university two days before the new semester started, just to get the remaining money out of my school account, so that I could have some money to support myself for one or two months. If I arrived late, the university will deduct money from my account as part of my tuition fees. I prefer to have tuition debts than to have no money to live on. I have not paid all my tuition fees even today…I feel that my parents' [financial] burden was too heavy, and I do not want them to suffer any more by supporting me to finish another degree. (Interview date: 26/03/2011)

The desire to become economically independent and to be able to support his family financially led him to his situation when I interviewed him. So eager was Guo to get out of his financial trap that he had never planned to work in a second-tier city. He believed there were more opportunities and the salaries were much higher in metropolitan cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, so he could earn more and save more money. Since he was young he had been eager to visit the Tiananmen Square in Bejing, which, to him, was a symbol of a developed metropolitan city and the heart of China. His dream was to find a job in Beijing and become a member of the modern city. The main reason he came to Shanghai instead of Beijing was that Beijing was too polluted to live in and the price of housing was too high.

Guo shared a one-bedroom apartment with four young male graduates; they were all graduates from inland rural regions of China, and all were working in the IT

industry. The furniture in his apartment was very basic: there were two beds and one table in the living room and another three beds in the bedroom; the only electronic appliances were a refrigerator and an old television. But Guo was quite satisfied with his living conditions, because, he said, "the rent is cheap, and it has a kitchen so we can cook [to save money]." He was a poor farmer's son, and he had lived in much worse conditions (such as those in which his parents were living), which basically guaranteed his tolerance of any basic living conditions as long as he could save more money. He cooked with his roommates, and they shared the bills. He cooked two meals every day: noodles for breakfast and different dishes for dinner (mainly vegetables), and he took the dinner leftovers as the following day's lunch. He never ate out. He bought a second-hand bicycle to commute to work, which took him forty minutes to an hour for each journey. Even though his salary was only 50 *yuan* (about AU$8) per day, he managed to save most of his salary by living this way and he was about to pay back all his tuition debts.

> After I get my salary next month, I can pay back all my tuition debts… Even though the [costs of] consumption here are quite high, my salary is higher [compared with smaller cities], and I am quite thrifty myself, so I can save more money than if I were in a smaller city. After I pay back my debts, I can support my family a bit. (Interview date: 26/03/2011)

Guo did not manage to get a Shanghai *hukou*, due to his educational background and the low level of his job that he could not reach the cut-off point to be granted one. However, Guo did not seem to concern about it too much, may be because it was not the most urgent matter for him for the time being. Guo was very satisfied with his current job and was relieved that he no longer needed to ask his parents for money. He was also very proud to have been able to find a job in Shanghai. He was very

grateful for the opportunity that this big city had offered him: it was as if a dramatic change had occurred in his life's destiny, and he could officially announce himself to be an urban dweller and believe in a very bright future.

Native-Place Identity and the Exclusive Attitude towards Non-locals

> Native place identity assumed ethnic meanings. It was the basis on which the we/them dichotomies most central to the structuring of social and economic hierarchies were based (Migrant *Subei* (the north part of Jiangsu Province) people in Shanghai) (Honig 1992, p. 129).

The meaning of a native place identity is beyond a literal place name; it is socially and historically constructed. In contemporary China, rural or provincial identities remain strong "even as the villagers [find] themselves in an urban setting" (Yeh 1997, p. 464). To be a *Shanghai ren* (Shanghai local resident) carries the symbolic prestige of being urbane and sophisticated in contradistinction to the crude, backward *Waidi ren* (non-locals). Shanghai people are also known for their elegant petty bourgeoisie and even petit-bourgeoisie life styles and their arrogant exclusive attitudes toward non-locals. For example, non-locals are often referred to as "rustic fellows" (*xiangxia-ren*) in Shanghai locals' daily conversation.

Beside social discrimination, *hukou*-based discriminatory policies and urban prejudices make it very difficult for young migrant graduates to settle down in Shanghai (Gaetano and Jacka 2004, p. 42). When talking about their job-hunting and living experiences in Shanghai, non-local graduates often describe it as "lonely", sometimes "unfair", and they feel "helpless"; their impression of Shanghai people is that they are "exclusive" and "cold".

The Job-hunting Struggles of Non-local Graduates in Shanghai

Despite their ambitious longing to settle down in Shanghai, non-local graduates all seemed to have a plan to leave Shanghai in the future – it was really a "Plan B" in case they failed to get a Shanghai *hukou*, which is a prerequisite to becoming a "real Shanghainese". When I asked my interviewees about the downsides of Shanghai, besides the high consumption cost, most of them complained about the difficulties of getting a local *hukou*. Even though owning a local *hukou* does not necessary mean being accepted by the locals, a Shanghai *hukou* does convey an identity that enables possessors to claim they belong to this city, or at least enables them to enjoy the welfare and services which are only available to local *hukou* holders. Even though no interviewees specifically mentioned about how important having a Shanghai *hukou* was, from their future plans one can easily tell that the *hukou* was a factor that would determine whether or not they would be able to stay in Shanghai permanently.

Nevertheless, the stigma of not being able to find a job in Shanghai is formidable: such a failure threatens to ruin young graduates' reputation at home and damages their pride and their family's "face". In order to save "face" in front of friends and sometimes even family members, some graduates hide the truth that they have not found a job in Shanghai.

"I Want to Be a Real *Shanghai ren* (a Local Shanghainese)"

Qi was born in Xinjiang province in the Northwest of China. She graduated from a nondescript three-year college in the suburbs of Shanghai, and her major was tourism management. Even though she won a prize for being an "excellent Shanghai

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graduate", upon graduation her education credentials were too low and the fame of her university was not sufficient to help her to gain a Shanghai *hukou*. At the time of our interview, she was undertaking a part-time undergraduate programme in international business at Fudan University in Shanghai, trying to build up her academic portfolio in order to win a place in the job market and settle down in Shanghai permanently. When I interviewed her, she had just lost her second job.

She decided not to work as a tour guide when she was in her second year of college, because she considered it would be difficult to change her profession if she did not start it from the beginning:

> I enrolled in this college as a springboard [so that I could come to Shanghai to study], but I never thought that I would work as a tour guide… It is a job for young people. Yes, you can earn some money when you are young, but what can you do when you are old?...A guide knows about nothing but showing tourists around, and a company would not hire someone who knows nothing. (Interview date: 05/03/2011)

In her last year of college, she started an internship working as an intern secretary at Shanghai Skilled Records Centre (*Shanghai Rencai Dang'an Zhongxin*), while all her other classmates worked as interns at all kinds of tourism agencies in Shanghai.

The most difficult thing for her was to find a cheap place to live. With her first job, as a non-local (*waidi ren* in Chinese), she could only get 1000 *yuan* (about AU$154) per month, but her monthly rent was 800 *yuan* (about AU$123), without utilities. In order to cover all the expenses, she had to work part-time at a nearby KFC after finishing her daytime work in the Skilled Records Centre. She liked her daytime job very much and learned a lot, but the salary was too low to cover her daily expenses, so after two months she decided to quit. Later, she found her second job as an administrator in a newly-founded company. Her monthly salary was 2,200 *yuan*

(about AU$338), and she moved to a shared apartment close to her new job, where the rent was 1100 *yuan* (about AU$169). In order to save money, she shared a bed with a colleague who was also a new graduate from Hunan Province. However, the fledgling company went bankrupt in just three months and the manager ran away without paying her third month's salary. It was near Chinese New Year and Qi was without a job again and therefore had no money to buy a ticket to go home. She thus lied to her parents, saying that she had to work during the Spring Festival and could not go back home.

She was still looking for a job when I interviewed her, and she regarded her salary expectation for the next job was quite realistic:

> For now, I just want to find a job with a stable income to support myself to finish my study. Hopefully I can learn some techniques from my study so that I can be more competitive in the job market… I expect my salary to be 3000 *yuan* or so. The basic cost of living in Shanghai is around 2,500 *yuan*, and anything above that would be my real income…By the way, I have to pay tax for that part of my income that is above 2,000 *yuan*, which is another expense. I can barely save any money. (Interview date: 05/03/2011)

During her job-hunting period, she was sick in hospital with kidney stones and had to call her parents to ask for financial support, as she has no medical insurance in Shanghai and had had no income for a few months. She had to tell her parents the true story of how she had lost her job and was not able to go back home for Chinese New Year. She was very stressed about her situation and felt helpless that she had no one in Shanghai to support her. Even though she admitted that as a non-local she confronted many disadvantages compared with local graduates, she never thought of leaving Shanghai. She also strongly believed that she (and other non-locals) had much strength that made her more outstanding than local people: "We are more hard-working, and we seldom complain."

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Qi was very indignant about the *hukou* discrimination in job-hunting, saying: "Sometimes they will say directly that they only want people with Shanghai *hukou*, or someone who can speak *Shanghai-hua* (Shanghai dialect), but requirements such as those have nothing to do with the job itself." Being a non-local graduate with low educational achievement, her job-hunting experience was doomed to be full of challenges and setbacks. However, overcoming these challenges strengthened her determination to settle down in Shanghai and become successful in the near future, as she commented: "I want to learn more stuff in this fast-developing city. If I follow this way and finally become good enough, then I can finally settle down and become a real Shanghainese (*Shanghai ren*), which is my ideal and perfect state." Both her parents hoped she could stay in Shanghai, and she took on this desire as her responsibility to her family, that is, she was their only hope for changing the whole family's destiny – to become a Shanghainese, not a non-local outsider.

"There Is No Sense of Belonging in Shanghai"

Hong was from Jiangxi Province in South China. She came to Shanghai in early 2011 after working in Shenzhen, a city adjacent to Hong Kong, for three years. She had been dreaming of moving to the big city to try her luck. After one month of staying in Shanghai, she found a job as a sales representative in an import and export company. At the same time, she joined an online undergraduate course at Fudan University.

When I interviewed her, Hong was living in Jiading district, a remote suburb of Shanghai, two hours from downtown and one hour from her company, because the

rent was much cheaper there. With her working experience, she was able to find a job with a salary of 5,000 *yuan* per month but without any welfare provisions or superannuation. She was sharing a two-bedroom apartment with two other people; her share of the rent was 600 *yuan* (about AU$100) per month, and her monthly living expenses were about 2500 *yuan*. She was not satisfied with her present salary and situation and was looking for job opportunities in more promising industries: "The competition in Shanghai is so fierce that you have to be farsighted."

Compared with her expenses in Shenzhen, she found the cost of living in Shanghai to be much higher.

> The prices are almost doubled here! With 600 *yuan*, you can rent a one-bedroom apartment in Shenzhen, but here it is only enough to rent a room in the suburbs. I used to always go to restaurants with my friends in Shenzhen, but here in Shanghai I dare not go to restaurants very often. (Interview date: 26/03/2011)

She preferred to live in Shenzhen, which was a middle-sized migrant-friendly city with the slogan: "You become a Shenzhen citizen once you move to Shenzhen", because the majority of the population in Shenzhen were migrants. Hong added:

> The majority of people in Shanghai are still *Shanghai ren* (Shanghai locals). Shanghai is too big, and to be frank, there is no sense of belonging here. Shenzhen is more energetic and friendly! Moreover, Shenzhen has a much better living and working environment than Shanghai; the air is much cleaner. (Interview date: 26/03/2011)

Hong was somewhat regretful about having moved to Shanghai, and she planned to go back to Shenzhen after she had graduated from Fudan University after two years, because she could not bear the high pressure of work in Shanghai.

"It is Difficult to Find a Teaching Job without a Local Shanghai *Hukou*"

> If you want to find a (decent) job, it is important to have a local Shanghai *hukou*. Some people, if they've already found a job and the job is good, they might not care too much about whether they have a Shanghai *hukou* or not, but for graduates like me who want to find a teaching job in Shanghai, they would want to have a Shanghai *hukou*. Because if we do not have a Shanghai *hukou*, we will not even get the opportunity for an interview in the schools….They will not even look at your résumé at all….You are rejected because you are a non-local. (Interview date: 02/06/2011)

Luo was a female graduate from Zhoushan, a small island in Zhejiang province. She insisted that "Geographically, it is actually much closer to Shanghai than to Zhejiang". She received both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in geography from Shanghai Normal University. When she applied for jobs after getting her Bachelor's degree, she found that graduates who held a Master's degree were more competitive in the job market, and were preferred by the high schools; even non-local *hukou* holders with a Master's degree could get a high school teaching job in the suburbs of Shanghai, which is good enough for graduates from other provinces. By contrast, non-local graduates with only a Bachelor's degree were at a very disadvantageous position, and could barely get any interview opportunities. Therefore, she decided to further her study with a Master's degree, hoping it would help her to secure a teaching job after graduation. However, the situation changed after three years, and even with a Master's degree, she was finding it very difficult, if not impossible, to find a teaching job in the suburbs of Shanghai.

Besides not having a Shanghai local *hukou*, she had experienced other forms of discrimination while job-hunting, such as those relating to gender, marriage and fertility status:

> If you are a girl, the selection requirements will be much stricter. Because the schools expect you to get married soon (within one or two years after graduation), and before you make any contribution to the school, you will have maternity leave ….They do not want to waste their time and money to train you and pay you salary and welfare for nothing. If you are married and already have a child, you will be more competitive and the chance of getting the job is higher….Usually they will at least give you an interview. (Interview date: 02/06/2011)

Luo gained the impression from one of her job-hunting experiences that female graduates who were married and had a child were more competitive. Once, there was a high-school teaching position advertised in one of the suburbs of Shanghai, so Luo and all her female classmates applied for it, but no one received a reply from the high school in question except for one young woman, who was "married and [had] a child". The young woman was given an interview and was finally accepted by the school. Non-local female graduates usually face more challenges in the job market than local graduates or their non-local male counterparts. As the female graduates gain more education, their age and marriage status become more influential in their job-hunting – issues which I will discuss further in the next chapter.

Having failed to get a teaching job in Shanghai, Luo then shifted her focus to looking for jobs in the commercial sector. At the same time, she was waiting for her boyfriend to finish his PhD and was hoping that he would be able to apply for a Shanghai *hukou* with a doctoral degree. Owning a Shanghai *hukou* or not would greatly affect Luo's future plans and would determine whether she and her boyfriend could stay in Shanghai. Lue expressed her concern that not having a local *hukou* would affect not only her own life but also her future child's educational opportunities:

Owning a Shanghai *hukou* will benefit your child in the future. Without a local Shanghai *hukou*, migrant children [such as her future child] will face many problems such as being accepted into local schools… If you don't have a local *hukou* in Shanghai, it will be difficult for your child to go to school here. (Interview date: 02/06/2011)

It is a strict rule that children who do not have a local Shanghai *hukou* have to pay extra fees in the form of tuition or "donations" if they wish to study in a local school. Usually, it is a very large amount of money that "very few families can afford" (Gaetano and Jacka 2004, p. 28).

"I Will Leave Shanghai One Day if I Cannot Get a Local *Hukou*"

Weilong was a male graduate who majored in computer science at Henan University. He moved to Shanghai after Chinese New Year in 2011 and found his present job in a software development company on his second day in that city. "I studied software development at university. There are a lot of job opportunities in Shanghai and it is so easy to find a job," he said. For graduates like Weilong who were majoring in IT related areas, it was not difficult to find a job in Shanghai, as there are many IT companies and IT industry is one of the biggest industries in Shanghai. In general, graduates do not necessary need to have a local *hukou* to be able to work in Shanghai, it is just that they could not enjoy the welfares that local people are granted to if they do not hold a local *hukou*. Weilong was on a three-month internship, earning a wage of 100 *yuan* (about AU$15) per day; later, it would be raised to 3500–4500 *yuan* (about AU$540-700) per month, depending on performance, and he was quite satisfied with that. Previously, he had worked for a few months in Wuxi, a medium-sized city in Jiangsu Province two hours by train from Shanghai, but the salary was only 2000 *yuan*, and he was not happy with it, so he left to work in another company in Jiangxi province in the south of China. Even

though the salary was higher (3000 *yuan* per month) in Jiangxi, the working hours were too long – from 9:30am to 10pm – and sometimes he had to work extra hours on the weekends. After a couple of months, Weilong resigned from that job and relocated to Shanghai, because there were more software companies in Shanghai than in other cities and he had a few classmates who worked there who could help him with accommodation.

Even though his new company was located in an industrial park in a remote suburb south of Shanghai, Weilong was very satisfied with the working environment: "The working situation here is very good, my colleagues are all young people, and the atmosphere is very friendly." He lived with Guo and three other young men; he cooked breakfast and dinner, and the company provided a free lunch; his main daily expense was the commuter bus ticket between his apartment and his company, which cost ten *yuan* (about AU$1.70). He had not been to the famous tourist attractions in Shanghai and the downtown areas since they were too far from where he lived, but he was already very impressed by this mega-city after visiting one of the shopping centres near his apartment at the edge of Shanghai.

Generally, Weilong was quite optimistic about his future in Shanghai. He worked very hard and was hoping to get a promotion as soon as possible. He even planned to get married in two years' time (even though he did not yet have a girlfriend) and finally to settle down. He was not scared by the skyrocketing housing prices in Shanghai and was confident that he would finally have his own apartment one day, as long as he worked hard. The only thing that haunted him was the difficulty of getting a local *hukou*:

I cannot get a local *hukou* here… Even though housing prices are very high in Shanghai, if I work hard enough, I am still quite confident that one day I can afford an apartment. But a *hukou*… you cannot get a local *hukou* by working hard. (Interview date: 26/03/2011)

Sometimes getting a Shanghai local *hukou* can take more than ten years, which is even more difficult than getting permanent residence in some foreign countries. As a non-local, the hassle of being treated unequally with regards to accessing social welfare such as medical care, education, pension and so forth, generates a sense of insecurity when it comes to long-term plans to reside in Shanghai. Because of this, Weilong also admitted that later he also planned to go to a smaller city for a better life, after a few years when he had gained more experience in his area. In all, for those young people, leaving Shanghai is not an easy decision, not only because there are more job opportunities in Shanghai but also because of the "halo" of being a civilis

ed urban dweller and the illusion of living in, or being part of, "modernity".

To many non-local graduates, Shanghai surpasses most (if not all) Chinese cities in many (if not all) respects. The main reason why so many graduates rush to Shanghai to find employment is partly due to the uneven development of the Chinese economy and the great differences in social welfare between rural and urban China. The possibility of realising upward social mobility through migrating to Shanghai is the lure for young graduates who hope to pursue their dreams of settling down there. Even though they are likely to face considerable discrimination in the job market and be treated differently from local Shanghainese graduates in work-related welfare, they feel superior to those who are not able to find a job in Shanghai, such as their parents and their peers in their hometowns.

Faced with the awkward situation of not being able to get a local *hukou* so as to enjoy the same citizenship benefits as local graduates, young people from other parts of China are aware that sooner or later they will have to make choices to leave Shanghai, either to go back home or move to some less-developed cities. They say that they will go home "in a few years", or "one day", but they also have a romantic desire to establish themselves in that mega-city of Shanghai, with the hope that one day the *hukou* policy would change so that they would not have to leave or return home, which is probably their true wish.

> I feel if I return to my hometown right after graduation, I will regret that I had not taken the opportunity to work hard and see how much I could achieve. Maybe life in my hometown is much more stable, but I always feel that I will regret it one day if I do not try my luck in Shanghai. (Interview date: 24/05/2011)

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Conclusion

Citizenship, as T.H. Marshall mentioned in his famous 1950 essay, is "a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community" (Marshall 1950, p. 8). The social component of citizenship consists of "the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society" (Marshall 1950, p. 11). Even though the Chinese *hukou* system has undergone some reforms and the *hukou* classification is not as important as it once was, *hukou* location continues to define people's life chances by determining their access to resources and welfare (Solinger 1999; Li, Li and Chen 2010). Citizenship in China is still interlocked with the *hukou* system (Wu 2010; Solinger 1999).

The Shanghai government has its own concerns about loosening the *hukou* restrictions: if too many migrants rush into Shanghai to share its limited resources, the local residents will be adversely affected. Nonetheless, the non-local graduates contribute to the development of the city by working and paying taxes as much as the local people do; yet, the *hukou* system makes it impossible for them to share equal citizenship with local graduates.

In this chapter, I found that a Shanghai *hukou* is constituted with social, cultural and symbolic capital, which is reflected by one's sense of belonging to the local community, the familiarity and connection to the local culture, dialect and lifestyle, as well as the symbolic prestige it represents. Higher education as cultural capital

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failed to earn the non-local graduates full citizenship in Shanghai due to the difficulty to break through the barrier of the *hukou* system, given that the Shanghai *hukou* entry threshold keeps on increasing. As has argued by Li, Li and Chen (2010), "without a uniform status of citizenship, the young migrants can never become… genuine member[s] of the municipality" (p. 153), the uncertainty and helplessness of a graduate migrant's life might well cause young migrants to question the fairness of population management policies in China. In the next Chapter, I will look at how the importance of gender discourses and gender ideology in affecting graduates' transition experiences, as has already been touched on in the case of Luo in this chapter.

Chapter 6:   Higher Education and the Reproduction of Gender Ideology in Graduates' Transition Experiences

The modernisation and development theory treating gender and education sees education as the driving force of development. It holds that the improvement of women's education will contribute to women's empowerment in society and improve gender equality, as well as the well-being of the family. On the other hand, the literature on the sociology of education sees education as a force for social and cultural reproduction, as the amount of cultural capital one can obtain through education and the ways one can accumulate and deploy social and symbolic capital are influenced by one's social background. Thus, it becomes apparent that the two bodies of literature take almost oppositional positions on the effects of education, especially regarding women and gender inequality. To examine the effects of both education and traditional gender ideology on the transition choices of young graduates today, I will look at the history of gender discourses in China, as well as young graduates' perceptions of gender roles and how gender relations affect their love lives, further education, tonsillitis and career choices. I argue in this chapter that even though education has many positive impacts on gender equality and women's empowerment in Chinese society, the persisting patriarchal ideology still greatly affects young graduates' transition plans by putting limits not only to other types of capital, but also the symbolic capital that women can accumulate and deploy. In other words, education fails to equip women with equal rights and prestige as men; instead, gender inequality is reproduced through education.

Theories on Gender and Education

Education and Women's Empowerment

Many studies have shown that education for women benefits the overall wellbeing of the family and promotes the smooth functioning of society (Schultz 2002; Tyer-Viola and Cesario 2010). Worldwide, empirical evidence has shown that females yield a greater return on education than males. For instance, studies have found that education equips women with the knowledge to gain employment, to empower women to be independent and to contribute to pulling the family out of poverty (Tyer-Viola and Cesario 2010). Moreover, women's education level is found to be more positively related to the health and schooling of the next generation than men's (Schultz 2002). More women working in the labour market would broaden the tax base which would potentially reduce tax distortions (Schultz 2002, p. 26). Thus, as Schultz has argued, "increasing investments in women's human capital, especially education, should be a priority for countries seeking to increase both economic growth and human welfare" (Schultz 2002, p. 207).

The United Nations has put women's empowerment[20] and gender equality as key objectives (Malik and Courtney 2011). Many international efforts have been made relating to this issue, such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (United Nations 1996), and the United Nations' Millennium Declaration (United Nations 2000). Moreover, gender equality and empowering women is one of the top three goals of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United

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[20] According to the definition of the United Nations Population Information Network (POPIN), women's empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally (Malik and Courtney, 2011).

Nations 2000), which aim to eliminate gender disparity in all levels of education. Taken women's educational achievement as the main benchmark, the outcomes of this goal include equal enrolment in advanced education, literacy parity between young men and women, as well as women's equal representation in government (United Nations 2000; Tyer-Viola and Cesario 2010).

Education and the Reproduction of Gender Inequality

The dominant human capital and functionalist theories have perceived higher education as an instrument for achieving social development and equity, as well as a pathway to realise upward social mobility for individuals (Jayaweera 1997). However, many sociologists of education tend to hold a different opinion. For example, Bourdieu uses his theories of capital to explain human activities of resource accumulation so as to enable them to "appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour" (Pierre Bourdieu 1985, p. 83). As I discussed in Chapter Two, education is a way to obtain cultural capital; however, the domestic transmission (in the forms of habits and class culture, what Bourdieu labels 'habitus') of cultural capital in the family is also determining, because "the scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family, (and) the economic and social yield of the educational qualification depends on the inherited social capital" (Bourdieu 1977, p. 179) .

Chisholm and Bois-Reymond (1993) found that education plays a double-edged role between social reproduction and change. The positive correlation between educational participation and achievement for women in paid work and life potential is undeniable. However, education also provides access to a route out of the

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reproduction of gender divisions; that is, regardless of what an individual woman may be able to negotiate and achieve in her life, the collective life patterns of women remain sharply different from those of men (Chisholm and Bois-Reymond 1993). Similarly, in the study of the transition experiences of Indonesian youth, Naafs (2013) found that young women's participation in education and work offered them more autonomy in their personal life, but patriarchal values still greatly affect their involvement in work and a gendered boundary (for family responsibilities) differentiates them from their male peers.

By studying the parental gendered expectations of only children in contemporary Chinese families, Liu (2006) found that deep-rooted gender-specific expectations are also prevalent in parental expectations for their child. Gendered expectations for both girls and boys remain largely the same as in the past. From a Bourdieuan perspective, gender-specific parental expectations and gender-role socialisation lead to a gendered habitus, which will unconsciously guide "the agents' thinking and behaviour along the prescribed division between the sexes" (Liu 2006, p. 502).

Gender Discourses on Education and Work in China

"The patrilineal family sustains the social, cultural, and economic need for at least one son" (Murphy, Tao and Lu 2011, p. 683). The partiality for sons and the neglect of daughters in China has a very long history, and is even recorded in the *Book of Odes,* from before the eighth century B.C. (Hu 1992, p. 4):

When a son is born,
Let him sleep in a bed,
Clothe him with fine dress,
And give him jade to play with.
How lordly his cry is!
May he grow up to wear crimson
And be the lord of the clan and the tribe!

When a daughter is born,
Let her sleep on the ground,
Wrap her in common wrappings,
And give her broken tiles for her playthings.
May she have no faults, nor merits of her own;
May she well attend to food and wine,
And bring no discredit to her parents!

The poem shows how sex at birth is transformed into gender through different treatment of boys and girls, the different socialisation into gender roles, and the different expectations of boys and girls. Sons were treasured by the parents not only because they continued the patri-line of the family but also because they were viewed as an economic resource, and would stay and ideally support the parents until death. Daughters were undesirable since they would be married out, into another family, and therefore the natal family would lose their labour (Murphy, Tao and Lu 2011). Expressions of son preference can be found in many sayings, such as: "a son is born facing in and a girl is born facing out", "men rear sons just as they grow trees for shade", "a daughter married is like water poured out the door", "a daughter belongs to somebody else's family", and "a family with daughters is a dead end family" (Croll 1995, p. 95). These sayings not only express profound preference for sons, but also reflect the traditional gender hierarchy and ideology in Chinese society.

As the *Book of Odes* suggests, girls and boys have been treated very differently from birth over centuries. The birth of a daughter was usually disappointing. A second daughter would bring even more grief, and she would perhaps even be killed or be

allowed to die. If three daughters were born in a row, it would be disastrous and a matter of great shame to the mother (Wolf 1985, p. 1). When the daughters grew up, their one and only destiny was to marry into another family. Women were like commodities that could be purchased in a marriage: they were their father's property, they had no rights to decide who to marry, and often they would never meet the groom before the wedding. Women's role in marriage was to reproduce. If they were infertile or bore only daughters, their husband was encouraged to take a concubine, and the wife could be repudiated by the husband (Hall 1997), because, according to Mencius' teaching, recorded in the third century B.C., having no male heir is the gravest of the cardinal offences against filial piety (Chyi and Mao 2012).

Security in old age is regarded as the most important reason for child rearing in most rural areas in China. As mentioned before, the son is expected to be responsible for taking care of parents in old age, and sons customarily inherited the family property. Even though the Chinese Inheritance Law (1985) bestows equal rights on women, daughters usually give up their inheritance rights since they are married out to another family (Peck 1985).

Even in the present day, the preference for sons is still quite common. Given the fact of the one-child policy, having a son is still considered to be the best choice among many Chinese families. In some provinces, in a regional modification of the One-child Policy, rural parents are allowed to have a second child if the first child is a girl (Greenhalgh 1993; Huang 2012). Moreover, due to the historical cultural preference for sons an alarming sex-ratio at birth has been caused by non-registration of girls at birth, female infanticide (Mungello 2008), as well as sex-selective abortion (Chu

2001; Loh and Remick 2015). The sex-ratio at birth refers to the proportion of male live births to female live births. The Chinese sex ratio at birth rose dramatically since the One-child Policy from 109 in 1979, to 111 in 1988, to 117 in 2001(Hesketh, Lu and Xing 2005, p. 1172)., and peaked at over 120 in 2011 (Loh and Remick 2015). The effect of many years of imbalance has resulted in a large population of excess males. For example, "in 2005, there were more than 32 million excess males under the age of 20" (Loh and Remick 2015, p. 297). There may be serious social consequences if this trend continues: firstly, it will be increasing difficult for males to find partners to marry; secondly, girls who are not registered cannot receive education or have access to other social services and "must live on the margins of society"; thirdly, women might become valuable commodities to be traded for marriage, which leads to a deterioration of women's social status in society (Loh and Remick 2015, p. 297).

Gender Difference in Education in China

Gender difference in all education levels is historically rooted in China (Hall 1997, p. 17). Gendered space segregation, which began in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), held that women's correct location was within the house (*nei*), while men dominated the space outside the household (*wai*) (Croll 1995). The male – female segregation of space prevented women from receiving formal education and taking part in the civil service examinations, as well as from participating in political, social or academic events (Liu and Carpenter 2005, p. 278; Bailey 2007).

From around 1000 years ago, girls from noble families could receive private tutoring at home; the main purpose of this tutoring was to educate them about how to become

a faithful wife and a virtuous mother (*xianqi liangmu*) (Liu and Carpenter 2005). For example, some scholars insisted that every girl must study the Classics on Filial Piety, the Analects, the Book of Poetry and the Book of Rites before she left her parent's household (Bailey 2007, p. 5). A woman's social value was viewed as subordinate to the value of her husband and son, and marrying well was worth far more than education because it would "add dignity, grace and status to a female" (Apple 1982, pp. 277-278). The old saying, "lack of talent is a virtue in women", was often used to justify opposition to women's education (Li 1992, p. 105), Chinese women's' ambitions for study thus encountered many obstacles.

In the early twentieth century, ninety per cent of females in China remained illiterate (Wei 1995, p. 23), but the centuries-old ideology of appropriate gendered space was being challenged and the public education of women became increasingly popular (Croll 1995, p. 40; Bailey 2007). The development of women's education in the twentieth century went through stages, progressing from home education, segregated female schools to co-educational schools, mass schooling and finally to higher education for a small number of women.

The formal education of women in China was established after Western Christian missionaries came to China in the 1840s. The first school for female students was established in Ningbo in Zhejiang province in 1844 (Liu and Carpenter 2005), with the intention to Christianise the young girls. In 1898, the first Chinese-owned female school —Jingzheng Female School—was established in Shanghai (Brown 1990, p. 42). Soon after 1900, there were a few more private female schools founded in other

coastal cities, such as Suzhou and Tianjin, and women's education began to shift from being a home function into the public domain (Bailey 2007, p. 6).

Nevertheless, in the first half of the twentieth century, most girls had to struggle against family and village opposition to go to school. Those girls who were lucky enough to receive education were considered to be akin to boys, since they were considered to be entering "spaces hitherto denied them or as entering a boy's world" (Croll 1995, p. 41). Girls' education was not taken as seriously as boys', for "it [was] not so important for a girl to study anyway" (Croll 1995, p. 42). The goals for women's education then were still mainly defined as preparation for being a good wife and good mother. Even in the most liberal families, girls were usually only allowed to receive some early schooling. As they came close to marriageable age, they were usually brought home from school to prepare for marriage. The women who fought for higher education considered themselves not only as rebels, but also "denied having had a conventional Chinese girlhood" (Croll 1995, p. 43).

Despite all these facts, women were exposed to new role models, Western ideas and literature through education. The May Fourth movement of 1919, which included attempts to emancipate Chinese women, disseminated the revolutionary ideas of women's liberation and gender equality to almost every corner of the country, and received great support from Chinese women (Verschuur-Basse 1996, p. 12; Jin 2001, p. 107). Ideas on women's emancipation proposed by Chinese feminist leader Qiu Jin at the time included gender equality, marriage freedom, opposition to foot binding, promoting female education and female economic independence, and women's involvement in the administration of national affairs (Y. Li 2005). The

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ideals of "freedom", "individualism", "self-fulfilment" and "gender equality" became very popular among students in the first decade of the twentieth century (Croll 1995, p. 46).

Since the establishment of the 'New China' in 1949, strenuous efforts have been made to create a greatly-expanded opportunity for women to receive education. In 1982, the Constitution of the People's Republic of China established equal educational rights for both men and women (Article 48 Clause 1). As a result, the "literacy rate among females increased from ten per cent in 1949 to 77.4 per cent in 2000" (Liu and Carpenter 2005, p. 279). Over the years, the number of women who received a higher education has increased dramatically, so that, according to figures from the Ministry of Education, in 2011 the number of female students accounted for nearly fifty per cent of the total population engaged in higher education (Ministry of Education 2012).

However, the improvement in women's educational enrolment does not mean that women and men are given equal opportunities in education regardless of their family's economic situation, residence location or other factors (Huang and Placier 2015). Many studies (e.g.Hannum and Xie 1994; Adams and Hannum 2007) have shown that boys still have an enrolment advantage. Girls' schooling is still vulnerable in remote and economically less developed rural regions (Adams and Hannum 2007), and is more sensitive to their household's economic situation than boys' (Hannum 2005; Davis et al. 2007): girls are often the first to be sacrificed from education in order to help the family financially (Adams and Hannum 2007). Moreover, the traditional "*zhong nan qing nü* (preferring boys to girls)" ideology is

still prevalent in Chinese families by putting limits to the capitals that women can accrue, such that girls' education was not considered as important as their brothers', since females' main responsibility is to take care of the housework (Jingming Liu 2007).

People in rural areas consider that daughters should get married early so they do not become "left-overs" or "old maids". As a result, the dropout rates of female students in rural areas have remained quite high. Despite the government policy that requires nine years of compulsory education, 4.8 million children dropped out of school in 1990. It is worth highlighting that more than 80 per cent of these 4.8 million dropouts were girls (Summerfield 1994, p. 720). In contrast, most girls in the most developed urban regions complete the nine years of compulsory education and are able to go to high school and university (Kaufman and Yin 2009, p. 185).

The Gender Division of Labour in China

> *Women are indeed human beings, but they are of a lower state than men and can never attain to full equality with them* (Confucius, Fifth Century B.C.).

For a long time in Chinese society, women's roles were confined by the Confucian gender ethic to being "a virtuous wife and good mother [who] assists her husband and brings up the son" (Liu 2013, p. 19). As the Classics stated, women worked "inside" and men worked "outside", thus ensuring that women were excluded from the outside labour market and were restricted to within the household (Mann 2000). Women were regarded as "leaning on their man" (Croll 1995, p. 14; McLaren 2004). This is not to say that women never worked "outside" – it was just that "this sphere was not seen as natural to them" (McLaren 2004, p. 170). In fact, it was quite

common for women to work in the fields and sometimes to help with the family business, and they were also a crucial labour force in making handicrafts, but as there was scarcely any written record of women's work, women's labour was almost invisible (McLaren 2004; Croll 1995). Women's work did not receive equal prestige or value as that of men, and the fields (Bourdieu's terminology) they can work in are more limited.

Women's bound feet were the most obvious impediment for women to enter the workforce (McLaren 2004). Introduced in the Song dynasty (960-1279), this practice lasted for more than 1,500 years (Li 1992, p. 75). Foot-binding was originally a custom of the upper class in the northeast, but, unfortunately, the middle classes as well as some peasants and workers also bound their daughters' feet in order to enhance the daughters' marriage prospects. Foot-binding not only destroyed women's health, but also confined them within the home, and emphasised their subordinate status within the family. Small feet were considered erotic and were also a way of preventing women from running away (Hall 1997, p. 9).

The Chinese classical teachings *Nü Jie* (Precepts for Women) and *Nüer Jing* (The Classics for Girls) were among the most influential instructions for women's proper behaviour. The *Nü Jie* exhorted women to be "obedient, unassuming, yielding, timid, respectful, reticent and selfless on the basis of 'first others, then herself'"(Croll 1995, p. 13). A proper wife should always respect and be obedient to her husband for "he is Heaven" and "the husbands' word was the law" (Hall 1997). The *Nüer Jing* posited similar ideal qualities of women, but these were more detailed, and later became known as "The Three Obediences" and "The Four Virtues". "The Three Obediences"

refer to the authority of three men over women: their father, when women are young; their husband, when the women are married; and their son, when they are widowed. The Four Virtues are: firstly, women should behave in total compliance with traditional ethical codes; secondly, they should not chat too much, so as not to bore others; thirdly, they should dress to please their husbands; and finally, they should perform their household duties well (Croll 1995, pp. 13-14; Wolf 1985).

As we see from the above, in feudalistic Chinese society, women's lives were defined by the patriarchal ideology. Women's social domain was constrained within the household and women were considered as stooges of their husbands. They were at the bottom of the social hierarchy of Chinese society with little autonomy in their own lives. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, "gender equality became an important socio-political task" (Liu 2013, p. 19). The Marriage Law and the Constitution stipulate equal rights for women and men in all aspects of life (Liu 2013; Croll 1974). Mao's slogans, such as "Times have changed, men and women are the same" and "Women can hold up half of the sky", were widely quoted, and implied the equal rights of men and women in work and education, as well as eliminating gender discrimination in other aspects of life (Liu and Carpenter 2005).

The Great Leap Forward launched in 1958 saw a revival of women's participation in the workforce. In rural areas, grandmothers were encouraged to look after grandchildren so that the mothers could join the labour force. In urban areas, housewives also took jobs in light industry and the service industries. The working role was a new addition on top of women's family roles (Thakur 1997, pp. 50-52).

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During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), women's role in the workplace was honoured. Women were encouraged to become "Iron Girls" and Communist heroines. They were to demonstrate that they could do whatever men could do, and compete with men in physical strength, vigour and speed in the workplace (Liu 2013). A new female image was established, by which "decorum and temperance were to be replaced by boldness of bodily gesture" (Croll 1995, p. 71). With their specific female physical features covered in overalls or overlooked, women occupied new positions hitherto denied them, such as workers in factories, drivers, writers and so forth. Women began to represent themselves in all aspects of life. Women were said not only to have stood up, but also to stand equally alongside their male counterparts. However, feminine identity was discouraged. Women were to be asexual and to be like men.

With the collapse of Maoist hegemony and the establishment of the opening up policy, the individualisation of Chinese society started (Yan 2009), and a new image of gender difference could be seen (Thakur 1997; Croll 1995). The qualities of women deemed unique were reclaimed, such as "female softness", "female beauty", and "women's perception of the world" (Croll 1995). It was commonly acknowledged that women had been alienated from their "nature" in the pursuit of gender sameness, which resulted in "a loss of image, demeanour and perceptions distinctive to women and different from the male other" (Croll 1995, p. 153). Since the 1980s, there has been a recreation of "femininity" of Chinese women "by make-up, jewellery, and attention to the female form through fitted or 'revealing clothing'" (Hooper 2003, p. 170). Women have increasingly been utilised in popular Chinese magazines and televisions for commercials purposes (Hooper 2003). The revival of

femininity is also represented by the emergence of the Chinese housewife, the domestic image of Chinese women which had largely disappeared from public discourse, "replaced by the active participant in production" in the Mao era (Hooper 2003, p. 179).

Since the late 1980s, women have had greater freedom in their expression of gender difference. Women's liberation in the Mao era has been criticised for its erasure of sexual difference, as critics have said that modern Chinese women should lose the "masculine" characteristics they acquired from the Mao era and express their natural "female beauty" (Thornham and Feng 2010).

The opening-up in China created many job opportunities for both men and women in China, but the opportunities fell disproportionately to men (Summerfield 1994). With women entering the workplace, they now have a double burden: full-time work and housework. Besides women's normal shifts at their work unit, they have to do a "second shift" after work, which includes shopping, cooking, cleaning, laundry and child care, and all those household chores have to be squeezed into the hours before and after work (Wolf 1985, p. 57). In the West, married women with children are often employed part-time or use childcare. In China, where there are few part-time employment opportunities, women usually do not change their work pattern in order to take care of their child. There is a lot of discontentment about married women in the workplace, as they are seen to have less enthusiasm for work after marriage or child-bearing (Jieyu Liu 2007). This perception strengthens the belief that women are inferior to their male counterparts. The judgement of men and women remains

different: men are judged only by their work performance, while women are judged by their housework and denigrated for their work performance.

Moreover, gender discrimination in the workplace is an extension of the stereotypes about gender characteristics and roles in society. Most companies prefer male employees to females, as they consider maternity and childcare benefits (assumed to have to be provided for women, not men) an extra cost for the company (Summerfield 1994, p. 726), and having to provide a nursery is also a concern for companies. Although women and men are entitled to equal opportunity of promotion, studies have found that men always have priority in upward mobility (Cleveland et al. 2000; Jieyu Liu 2007 about China; Chatterjee 2010 about USA). Men are more likely to be hired for professional and managerial positions than similarly qualified women (Cleveland et al. 2000, p. 57) because they are considered be bolder, more open-minded and more organised than women and are good at work management. (Jieyu Liu 2007). In general, the Chinese patriarchal ideology not only greatly affects women's job prospects, but also limits the fields (in Bourdieu's terminology) in which women can operate successfully.

Gender Ideology and Graduates' Transition Choices

"Modern" and "Chinese" are the two "diverse yet interconnected themes in the official construction of femininity" in present day China (Hung, Li and Belk 2007, p. 1038). A "modern" Chinese woman is charming and beautiful, and she works on her looks to enhance her attractiveness. This image is "a far cry from the androgynous female ideal of the Cultural Revolution era." (Hung, Li and Belk 2007, p. 1038). On

the other hand, being "Chinese" requires that women maintain the traditional gender image of being soft, virtuous and family-oriented. The official ideal woman is "gentle, hard-working, caring, modest, decorous and undemanding" (Liu 2013, p. 21; Hung, Li and Belk 2007).

While a balance between the "modern" and the "traditional" definitions of women is emphasised, the social expectation of women's role in the family has still not been shaken. A modern Chinese woman may be a cultured nurturer, a successful career woman (*nu qiangren*, strong woman), or a westernised urban sophisticate; however, no matter how successful a woman might be, it is important that she does not lose her habitus of the gentle "Chinese" side (Liu 2013; Hung, Li and Belk 2007). Women have been given a dual role, both work outside the home, and housework inside the home (Li 1992, p. 114). In expressions such as a woman is "not the moon" and urging to "be true women", females are encouraged to become more independent, and to pursue their free will and independence of spirit (Croll 1995, pp. 155-156). At the same time, women's most important and inescapable role remains to bring up the next generation and to support their husbands—to be 'virtuous wives and good mothers' (Croll 1995, p. 83; Li 1992, p. 115). Women's reproductive duty – to sustain the continuity of society – is of greater weight than the particular interests of women as women, for "the ultimate purpose of an individual's activities is for the good of the family, the country and the society" (Li 1992, p. 117).

Unlike the claim of 'retro-sexism' in the West since the 1990s (Whelehan 2000), the reassertion of sexual difference in the Chinese context takes an understanding of the

gender relationship as based on "natural" sex differences and "grounded in the notion of 'interdependence' and 'mutual complementarity' of the two sexes" (Liu 2013, p. 20). Gender discourses today in China can be understood as mediation between the "modern" and the orthodox Chinese models in defining ideal women (Liu 2013); the gender discourses in contemporary Chinese society remain largely patriarchal.

Some studies have argued that there are great differences between the experiences of young people in present-day China and those of their parents due to changes in government policies (Thornham and Feng 2010). The young graduates in my interviews were all born in the post-Mao era, and most of them are the only child of their family. Their identity construction includes "both the discourse of female independence and the discourse of traditional gender role" (Liu 2013, p. 22). The pressure to succeed is reinforced by their wish to fulfill their filial duty to their parents as the only child, regardless of their gender. They have all experienced fierce competition in order to enter university, and their whole educational experience was predicated on the idea of "individual success", which accompanied the reform and opening-up of Chinese society. However, when they finish their education and are about to enter the workplace, gender differences, which are officially denied in their educational experiences, seem to re-appear and be perpetuated, even after years of higher education.

In their narrations about their own transition experiences, these graduates seem to vacillate between the traditional patriarchal ideology and the "modern"

individualistic culture in their understandings of gender discourses. The embodied gender habitus of graduates, which they developed through their upbringing as well as their education experience, helps to shape graduates' practices such as job-hunting, further education and career decisions. On the one hand, they believe that it is important for women to obtain economic independence, a modern urban life, and a dual-income family; on the other hand, they are also quite comfortable with the belief that it is women's "natural" right to depend on her man and it is a man's responsibility to support the family. Their perceptions of appropriate gender roles tend to lead these young women to limit their self-expectations both in education and in the workforce.

"Leftover Women" (*Sheng nü*) and Embarrassments in Job-Seeking

In China, a Confucian saying goes: "At thirty, be married and settled down (*Sanshi erli*)". So, it is generally expected that one would have married and started a family before the age of 30. In present day China, in contrast to trends in other East and Southeast Asian countries, marriage remains universal and relatively early (Ji and Yeung 2014; Ananta 2013; Jones and Ramdas 2004).

In 2007, the All-China Women's Federation defined the term "leftover women'"(*shengnü*, in Chinese) as "single women older than 27", and this was broadened by the mass media to include women from age 25 (Fincher 2014, p. 16). In an investigation of marriage by the marriage and family research association of the All-China Women's Federation[21], in collaboration with the matchmaking website Baihe, "leftover women" were divided into four different types. Women aged 25 to

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[21] 30,000 people participated in the research.

27 are called "leftover warriors" (*shengdoushi*, in Chinese), meaning "women who still have the courage to fight for a partner" (Fincher 2014, p. 16). Women who are aged 27 to 30 are called "women doomed to be leftover" (*bishengke*, in Chinese), meaning they have reached an alarming age and that they are running out of opportunities to get a partner. Women who are aged 31 to 35 are called "Buddha of defeated battles" (*douzhanshengfo*, in Chinese), indicating that these women have usually achieved much in their career but would fail in any battle to win a partner. Women aged over 36 are called the "great leftover equal of heaven" (*qitiandasheng*, in Chinese): women belonging to this type usually have superior economic capital, but are the least popular in the marriage market, and would usually remain single (Marriage and Family Research Association 2010). This typology reveals the stigmatisation of the older unmarried woman. As I have discussed in Chapter One, even though receiving tertiary education does delay young people's entrance into marriage (Ji and Yeung 2014), it is generally accepted by most graduates that one should get married at an appropriate age to avoid becoming undesirable "leftovers" (*Sheng nü*).

Gender empowerment theories argue that receiving tertiary education increases female graduates' human capital and competitiveness in the job market. However, a higher degree is not always a positive factor in female graduates' job-hunting and mate-seeking experiences. For postgraduates, who are usually 26 or 27 years of age upon graduation, age plays an increasingly influential role not only in their marriage prospects, but also in their job opportunities. On the one side, they are faced with the pressure to get married soon so as to avoid becoming leftovers; on the other side, female postgraduates also face a lot of discrimination and challenges in their job-

hunting experiences, regarding their soon-to-be-married identity and all the consequences of marriage, such as childbearing.

"Since you are older after obtaining a Master's degree, they (the employers) will be more censorious of you", said Luo, a graduate majoring in Geography at Shanghai Normal University. She wanted to find a job as a high school teacher, and in order to become one she needed to have a Master's degree. However, after she obtained her Master's degree, she had reached the average marriageable age. Her search for teaching positions had been quite unsuccessful; the reason, in her own words, was that "the schools are concerned I will get married soon and will have maternity leave within a year or two… [T]hey usually would prefer someone to teach for at least three years…from Year 10 to Year 12…to have a full understanding of the curriculum before having maternity leave". "But if you are already married and have a baby, the situation is different", Luo said. (Interview date: 02/06/2011)

Not long before she graduated, Luo and her five roommates all applied for a teaching position in a remote Shanghai high school. They were of similar qualifications and age: all of them held a Master's degree in geography. Luo considered herself slightly advantaged compared with her other roommates, because she received both her Bachelor's and Master's degree in this university, she spoke fluent Shanghai dialect, and she had lived in Shanghai for seven years, while her other roommates only came to Shanghai for their postgraduate study. However, among the six of them, only one girl, who was already married and had given birth to a child, received an interview opportunity and was finally granted the job. This incident led Luo to come to the

conclusion that her age and her not-married status[22] were the main obstacles for her to find a teaching job.

Due to China's One-child Policy, most women are only expected to have one maternity leave. Employers are more likely to prefer a female graduate who is not expected to get married in the next year or two, or one who is already married and has a child, considering the effort that will be put in to training a new teacher and the hassle to look for a replacement for maternity leave. Because of all these concerns, female graduates with a Master's degree or higher usually have to come through quite a lot of challenges and dilemmas in their job-hunting, and sometimes they have to give up their original career goals to look for something more achievable.

Luo finally gave up looking for a teaching job and decided to find a temporary job in a company while waiting for her boyfriend to complete his PhD degree. She hoped her boyfriend would find a teaching position in a university. She believed that it was more important for her boyfriend to find a proper job, while she was prepared to follow him to wherever he worked.

Gender-Different Standards on Mate-Seeking

The above-mentioned investigation by the All-China Women's Federation also showed that female teachers and male civil servants are voted by the opposite sex as the most ideal potential partners. This investigation showed that men's mate selection criteria remain focused on appearance, but this was valued only a little over their other qualifications such as work ability. Women mainly look at economic

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[22] She also acknowledged that her non-local household status was another reason in her failing to find a teaching job. This has been discussed in Chapter 5.

power and work ability when choosing a prospective life partner. Over 70 per cent of women investigated considered that a prospective husband should have bought a property (or at least should pay for the majority of the marital home), and have a stable income and savings before getting married. 63 per cent of women would prefer their future husband has twice as much salary as they do, while over 63 per cent of men in the investigation showed no particular requirement for their future spouse's income (Marriage and Family Research Association 2010). Over 90 per cent of men in this investigation held that women should get married before age 27 to avoid becoming unwanted; about 32 per cent of them regarded age 20 to 24 as the ideal age for women to get married. With regard to women's selection criteria, over 50 per cent of women considered the best marriage age for men to be between 28 and 30 years of age, because men at this age have usually worked for a few years, have a relatively stable career and solid economic foundation (Marriage and Family Research Association 2010).

For male graduates from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the value of higher education is much appreciated: it carries their aspirations and hopes to realise upward social mobility so as to realise the transformation from a "frog" to a "prince". However, they are also under great pressure to become successful as soon as possible to be competitive in the marriage market.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Dong was a male graduate majoring in mechanical engineering, and he had decided to pursue a Master's degree instead of looking for a job due to his lack of economic and social capital. Dong's girlfriend was a university student majoring in English literature in their hometown, who was also going to

graduate. "She always complains that I am so poor, and she calls me every so often to remind me to study harder", Dong lamented. Even though he admitted the pressure to become financially successful as soon as possible to reach his girlfriend's standard, he was still quite confident about their future marriage life: "but she is a village girl so she is not too demanding compared with urban girls, plus we have been together for five years, so our relationship is reasonably strong".

Dong also realised the different standards for male and female spouses: "Being a girl is so good—you can find a teaching job after graduation – and later you just find a guy to marry. But life is so different for men; we have to support the family and the woman". Moreover, talking about his university life, he said:

> There are different situations among students. There are those who come from rich families: they even drive cars to university. If you have no car, no apartment and no money, no one will marry you, and no matter how much she loves you she will always complain. Every girl has a Prince Charming [(*qingwa wangzi* in Chinese; the literal translation would be "frog prince")] in their mind— but be aware, what they want is a prince, not a frog [poor guy with nothing in his hand]! (Interview date: 18/03/2011)

The purchase of an apartment is an essential part of wedding preparations, and it is usually the responsibility of the groom's family. Sometimes if the groom's family is not wealthy enough to buy the apartment outright, they are expected to pay the initial deposit at least, and leave the new couple to pay off the mortgage. Due to his rural background in central China, Dong had little economic capital upon which to depend in Shanghai. With the salary he could earn, it would take him years to pay the deposit for an apartment, but he was also clear that his girlfriend would not marry him unless he could buy a wedding apartment. A few months after I talked to Dong, he left me a message on QQ, the Chinese version of Facebook, saying that his girlfriend had broken up with him and was going to get married soon to a man who

was a well-off civil servant in their hometown. This incident reinforced his belief in the importance of economic success in mate-seeking.

The pressure of having to become the breadwinner of the family has forced many male graduates to seek career success before marriage. As one of my other interviewees mentioned, "Living in Shanghai, if you don't earn 10,000 *yuan* [approximately AUD $2080] or more per month, how can you support the family? I will not think about marriage unless I can earn 10,000 *yuan* per month".

In general, the mate-selecting standards for an ideal spouse remain unchanged: an ideal husband would be career-oriented and with the ability to become the family bread-winner, while the criteria for an ideal wife mainly focus on a woman's appearance and virtue, with little demanded on the education or employment fronts. A good wife should be gentle and supportive, but she does not need to have a successful career.

Guomeng was a male graduate from Henan Province majoring in Computer Science. He came to Shanghai after graduation to work as a computer programmer. His attitude towards gender roles in marriage life was very similar to that of Dong:

> Men should be responsible for buying the apartment and a car, while the wife can go to work if she feels like it, but she can also prefer to stay at home. Women should depend on their men: a woman's salary does not need to be very high as long as she can earn some pocket money to spend on entertainment or to buy some cosmetics, which will be more than sufficient. If she does not earn enough, the husband should be responsible for supporting her financially. (Interview date: 26/03/2011)

Initially Guomeng was planning to find a girlfriend and get married within the next two years, but he soon realised it was impossible, after seeing how difficult it would be to buy an apartment and support a family in Shanghai. Despite this reality, he still considered it ideal to get married early, "as the old saying states, men should start a family before they establish a career (*xian chengjia, hou liye)*". He believed that if a woman married a man after he had already established a career, she would be less treasured by the husband, because she would be suspected of having married for money; while if a woman married a man before he became successful, he would respect her and treat her well, for it is said that a wife who shares her husband's hardship must never be cast aside (*zaokang zhiqi bu xiatang*). Thus, Guomeng did not accept the simple dictum that a man must be established before he could attract a wife: he added the extra criteria of sharing burdens and mutual respect. He hoped to find a girlfriend who would share the hard times with him and, in return, he would always hold her in high regard.

When I first met Shujuan, she was in deep sorrow from the break-up of her relationship. She explained it was a silly short message that had destroyed the relationship. The message was sent from a guy whom she had met at a job interview about two months previously:

> It was the night before our engagement party: when [my fiancé] was checking my cellphone message inbox, he found a two-word message from two months ago from a guy, which said "*zhen guai*" [(meaning "so cute")]. He immediately lost his temper and scolded me for being immoral and unclean. He told his family about this incident and they were all very unhappy and cancelled the engagement party the following day. (Interview date: 18/06/2011)

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She was still deeply in shock when she recounted the whole incident to me, saying: "I could not imagine that that message would have triggered such a disaster and I even tried to call up that guy who sent the message to prove that I was not familiar with him at all, but nothing would help". Her boyfriend emphasised that he was a very traditional man and would not stand for such immoral behaviour. But Shujuan insisted that the main reason led to the break-up was the boyfriend's family who were not satisfied with her. In her boyfriend and his family's eyes, Shujuan's behaviour obvious betrayed the traditional moral standard of a chaste woman, and thus was not a desirable marriage partner.

Shujuan and her boyfriend had been undergraduate classmates and lovers. After graduation, the boyfriend went to Shanghai to study for a PhD, while Shujuan went back to their hometown to work as a high-school teacher. In order to follow him, Shujuan quit her job and started her Master's degree at Shanghai. "Wherever he went, I followed him", she said. In 2011, when they were both about to graduate, her boyfriend was thinking to find a teaching job in a university in Tianjin, so Shujuan started to look for positions in Tianjin and even went to a few job fairs. In the end, one university in their home province of Shanxi recruited her boyfriend. So Shujuan started job-seeking in Shanxi.

Shujuan's boyfriend was always the target of her life trajectory, and she was always willing to support whatever decisions he made. Her career and life plans were not so important, because it was her boyfriend's career that was the real measure of her life success. Shujuan came from a farming family in Shanxi province. She thought that

the disparity in their socio-economic backgrounds contributed to the failure of her relationship:

> He is from the urban area of my province, and I am from the rural area. My parents don't have a pension or public medical insurance from the government; his family was concerned that my parents would be a big burden since they would need us to support them when they are too old to work. (Interview date: 18/06/2011)

She said she already knew from her boyfriend's parents that a girl from a similar background would always be preferred. "*Men dang hu dui* (a marriage between families of equal social rank)" was a traditional consensus in traditional Chinese culture. It has been the traditional belief that people from similar family backgrounds would share similar lifestyles and moral values, so that such a couple would have more in common, and their marriage would be harmonious and long-lasting. Given her poor background and her "immoral" behaviour, the boy's family considered that she did not deserve such a good husband. "His parents think he is too good for me. He can easily find a girl from the same city who is much younger and prettier than I am, and she could also already have a job!"

Shujuan also recounted her efforts (in vain) to go back to the high school where she had taught three years previously. Unfortunately, all positions there had already been filled over those past three years. She regretted that she had situated her boyfriend at the centre of her life, and had planned her future based upon his decisions about where he would work. Now she was left behind and totally lost. She said she would keep looking for jobs in Taiyuan, where her boyfriend was going to work, and to try her best to win him back. "As long as he stays unmarried, I still have an opportunity, and I shall not stop trying," she said.

It is sad for me to see that Shujuan had surrendered her whole life to the whim of her ex-boyfriend, but I cannot help thinking that Shujuan's experience was just one example of many tertiary-educated young women. No matter how high their educational achievement, tertiary education does not seem to equip women with more power and capital in the relationship, nor did it shake their habitus of the unconscious obedience to the patriarchal ideology. Appearance and age have always been important criteria for an ideal wife; family background is also often considered important, but educational achievement as a capitalist not as important for women as it is for men.

Family Roles and Career Choice: Avoid Becoming Strong Women (*Nu Qiangren*)

In universities in China today, as in most parts of the world, female students usually dominate in majors such as nursing, teacher training, finance and accounting, foreign languages and humanities, and social science; male students are usually the majority in Computing Sciences, Physics, Maths, Engineering and other Science majors (Fan 2011). Many people in China believe that women are not as smart as men at science because men have different chromosomes: "many girls were advised at an early age that science and engineering are not appropriate careers for them" (Peck 1985, p. 60). The traditional beliefs about women sketched above strongly influence young people's major-choosing behaviours, thus forming a gendered division between disciplines. Women have been reluctant to enter a major signified with "male culture". It is very common to see a graduation ceremony in pre-primary education full of female students, and sometimes it is very difficult to find a female student in a

science and engineering university. Moreover, the different choices of disciplines between men and women result in a gender division in the workplace. Women are found in industries which are considered to be more "feminine": They are overrepresented in the service industries and nondurable manufacturing; women are more likely to become day care and primary school teachers, to work as nurses, and to work in the garment industry.

Jiayi was a 22-year-old female Shanghai local graduate majoring in Hearing and Speech Rehabilitation Science at East China Normal University (ECNU). At the time I met her, she had just found a job as a primary school teacher in Zhabei District of Shanghai. Before she signed up for this job, she had had two internship experiences: one was in a multi-national company, and the other was to work as a teaching assistant in a primary school in Shanghai. Her parents were very happy about her teaching job, because they considered it very stable and comparatively less pressure, so that she would be able to concentrate on family duties after marriage. They also perceived that this occupation would make it easier for her to marry "up" — traditionally, a Chinese woman would improve her status by marrying a spouse of higher status (Jiang, Feldman and Li 2014). Jiayi's comment reveals that she holds a traditional view of women as natural nurturers:

> Even though I don't quite agree with them that being a teacher is an easy job…
> it is quite realistic to think that once a woman is married and has a baby, her
> main focus can't be on the career; it is a woman's responsibility to take care of
> the family. (Interview date: 12/04/2011)

She expressed the view that a married woman should not have much ambition in her career, because she should become family-oriented. She also shared her opinions about women working in companies, suggesting a "glass ceiling":

> They have to work really hard at their job; working extra hours is quite common, but it is very difficult for a woman to be promoted, and if they make a small mistake they might be discharged easily. (Interview date: 12/04/2011)

Jiayi strongly believed that women should become economically independent, but she also felt that a woman's main focus should be on the family once she married and had a child. In her view, a job that always demands extra hours of work is not suitable for women, for it would conflict with women's top priority— taking care of the family.

Panyi was a female graduate majoring in accounting at Shanghai University of Finance and Economics. Talking about her future plans, she said she would stay in Shanghai to work for two years till she got her CPA certificate, and then she would return to her hometown in Anhui province to find an easy job and lead a slow-paced life. The reason she chose to stay in Shanghai was because it was a modern city full of competition; she believed that the fast-paced working environment would benefit her with some valuable work experience and social skills. However, Panyi was prepared to make a step back to family once married; the traditional gender ideology is reflected in her opinion of women's success:

> I don't want to be very successful [in my career] in the future; women should learn to enjoy life but not to become a workaholic. If I can earn enough money to buy myself new clothes occasionally, and to have some pocket money I would be quite happy with that; while for buying a house and supporting the family, it is the man's job! I think a man should be responsible for this. (Interview date: 14/03/2011)

Many girls shared the same opinion as Panyi when looking for a job. They wanted to gain economic independence; however, they were reluctant to become very

successful in their career, as the image of strong woman is a challenge to the patriarchal culture. A strong woman, usually marked by career success but lack of female softness, is not wanted in the marriage market. As Strober and Arnold[23] (1987, p. 113) suggest young women see "marriage as their most favourable economic alternative", and they generally choose a job that marks them as attractive marriage partners, such as a teaching position that provides a stable income but is not too demanding of their time, because it allows them the leeway to take care of their family. Women tend to limit their expectations and aspirations when planning their married life. Work will always give way to maintaining a harmonious family.

In my interviews, traditional gender values are often reflected in graduates' expression about their future family plans. Males are faced with the pressure to become the main breadwinners, while females are prepared for the role of natural nurturer. As discussed before, Chinese women have gained much economic independence through paid jobs since the 1950s. With the expansion of higher education in China, more opportunities have been opened to women; however, family roles are still firmly gendered (Attané 2012). Even though the graduates I interviewed have all received tertiary education and have been exposed to modern lives in Shanghai, a metropolitan city, the traditional Chinese value asserting that "men are responsible for the outside, and women are responsible for the inside" is still deeply rooted in their worldview. Women's career is still regarded as less important than men's; men still assume that they will have to be the breadwinner of their family. For women, the idea of "a good marriage is better than a career (*Gan de*

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[23] Strober and Arnold's study is on young women in the US context.

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hao buru jia de hao)" is prevalent among the young female graduates (Attané 2012, p. 9).

Qiong graduated from Ocean University of China in Shanghai. At the time I met her, she had just quit her second job as a real estate consultant and was preparing for the civil service exam. Before she graduated, she was thinking of going overseas for a PhD degree, but her boyfriend did not support this idea, saying "a doctorate degree is too much for a girl". So she started job-seeking in Shanghai.

Qiong's first job was in the Chinese branch of a Top 500 multinational company, where she worked as an administrator. But she only worked there for one month, because her boyfriend complained that she did not have enough time for family chores, as the company was too far from where they live. She soon found her second job in a real estate consulting company, but she struggled to achieve a balance between her work and home duties there too:

> Because I always had to work overtime, and after work I felt so tired…sometimes I couldn't prepare the dinner. My boyfriend said he didn't see the point, why should a woman work so hard for a job to the extent that she ignores her duties in the family? He urged me to quit my job and to prepare for the civil servant examination. He said if I could pass the written exam, he would try to use his connections to help me pass the interview, so that I could have an easy job. (Interview date: 08/03/2011)

Qiong's boyfriend was a very promising lawyer, of which she was very proud. Even though he had not proposed to her yet, she believed that they were fated to be together and he would become successful and rich very soon, buy her an apartment and give her a good life in Shanghai. Given her standard of living in Shanghai, Qiong realised it would be impossible to give up her income to become a full-time wife, but she did not want to share the household duties with her boyfriend. She

believed that women should be a *xianneizhu* (supporting wife) to take up the domestic responsibilities, so that the conflict between work and family can be balanced. Women graduates are quite ambivalent: she buys the "traditional" idea that women should be the household managers, but she has an "aspirational" lifestyle (materialist ambitions).

Xiaohu was a young man from a farming family in Shanxi Province. He received his Master's degree in Law, and had just found a job as a legal adviser in a Sino-foreign jointly-founded company in Shanghai. His girlfriend has been working in a bank in her hometown Changsha, Hunan Province (1100 kilometres southwest of Shanghai) for two years, and was trying to persuade him to find a job in her hometown.

Xiaohu was very reluctant to work in his girlfriend's city, even though he knew she was settled there. "She has a stable job, and her family has already bought her an apartment in Changsha", he said. His girlfriend's family offered to help Xiaohu find a job in Changhai, but Xiaohu refused, as it seemed to him that such patronage would undermine his masculinity and independence:

> To live in Shanghai you have to face a lot of pressure, but most of it is financial, which I think I can overcome through my own efforts. Living in Changsha is another thing: even though the life there would be much easier – they [his girlfriend's family] could find me a job and they have already bought us an apartment – I don't want to feel like an appendix to her family. I just don't like it. (Interview date: 27/03/2011)

Xiaohu insisted that he would not work in his girlfriend's city. He admitted there was the possibility that after a few setbacks he might go to his girlfriend's city, but for the time being he wanted to explore possibilities in Shanghai in his own way. He did not say directly that he wanted his girlfriend to move to Shanghai, because he did not yet have the economic foundation. Despite his difficult situation, he was

determined to work very hard and to achieve success as soon as possible to provide his girlfriend with a reliable future, so that he would have the authority to ask her to give up her job and join him in Shanghai. The traditional ideology about gender roles made him believed that it was his responsibility to give his girlfriend a good life, and that when he became successful, his girlfriend would automatically give up her career to join him.

The thought of going to his girlfriend's hometown to depend on her family for a job caused great anxiety for Xiaohu, because it would shift the gender roles and his sense of masculinity would be threatened, in addition to that, he was afraid to be called someone who was incompetent and "dependent on a woman" (*chiruanfan*). In contrast, his girlfriend's career was not important at all to him because for him it was natural for women to be dependent: women should be willing to make sacrifices to support a man's career, because the traditional gender teaching goes: a husband's success is a wife's honour.

The experiences of Qiong and Xiaohu show the reproduction of traditional gender roles among "modern" educated young people. Even though they both received postgraduate education, which is a significant characteristic of the "modern" generation, the habitus of deep-seated patriarchal traditions of gender roles is tacitly accepted by these young men and women.

Female Rebels Fighting Back

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, desirable qualities of an ideal wife include being "'soft', 'gentle', 'dutiful', 'virtuous, and 'good looking'" (Liu 2013, p. 20). Women who pursue career success are called strong women (*nvqiangren*), and

women with high academic qualifications are called the "third gender" (*disan lei ren*) (Liu 2013). These women, just like the "iron girls" of the 1970s, are criticised for their alienation from their traditional nature. Women certainly face more dilemmas and challenges in pursuing their career or education than their male counterparts.

Xiaojuan obtained her Master's degree in history. She had always wanted to become a journalist. During her last year of study, she worked for a very famous magazine in Shanghai as an intern, but unfortunately it did not recruit her, because her major was not journalism. She then applied to many news organisations in Shanghai and other cities, including newspapers, television stations and magazines, and finally she received an offer from a magazine in Hubei province, 850 kilometres west of Shanghai. She was initially thrilled to hear the news, but immediately after she felt very sad, for she did not want to leave her boyfriend in Shanghai.

Xiaojuan's boyfriend was a postgraduate in Physics in Tongji University, who was going to graduate the following year. Xiaojuan and her boyfriend had made a promise together that they would both find a job in Shanghai after graduation and get married. Xiaojuan did not want to give up the opportunity that the Hubei magazine had offered her, but she was asked by her boyfriend to make a choice between their relationship and her job. In the end, Xiaojuan decided to accept the position in Hubei. It was a hard decision, since she loved him very much, and they had once planned a future together in Shanghai. Her decision was distinctive as it went against the traditional ideology of that women's focus should be on the family. It would not

have been very difficult for her to find a job in Shanghai, if she had not insisted on finding one in journalism.

Xiaojuan also shared with me the stories of her two roommates. In order to stay in Shanghai, one girl broke up with her boyfriend and married a Shanghai local man, and the other chose to find a local Shanghai boyfriend from the very beginning. She totally understood her roommates' choices: "They have the right to pursue the lifestyle they want, even if it is material things. I do not think I am more sublime than them, for I am chasing my own dream as well; we are just chasing different things". In the end, Xiaojuan paid a great price to chase her own dream, but she also got a huge reward. After two years, she quit her job in the Hubei magazine, and now she is a very promising journalist working at a famous newspaper in Yunnan province in Southwest China.

Females who pursue a PhD degree are often regarded as a Third Gender. While I was in the process of writing this chapter, one of my best friends at university in China messaged me and asked: "How is your PhD going? You poor thing, have you lost a lot of hair?" This message obviously showed she cared about me, but I was also somewhat annoyed. I replied to her, saying: "Yes, I am doing all right", at which she was very amazed. She said:

> Oh, apparently you are very strong-minded. I remember the PhD officemate I had when I was doing my Master's degree. Her situation was horrible: she had instant noodles for every meal, and she didn't care about her appearance at all, she lost a lot of hair due to stress and she looked so dumb! ….I am so amazed that you can handle this so far!

A popular Chinese saying goes: "There are three kinds of people in China: men, women and female PhDs." Female PhDs are regarded as women who have overstepped the social expectations of education for a woman. They are not desirable marriage partners because they have over-achieved (Liu 2013), as the doctorate is a male domain, and to enter a male-typed area would result in "a diminution of their perceived femininity with consequent reduction in their prospects for marriage" (Strober and Arnold 1987, p. 115).

Many people in China have a perception that female PhD students have to spend more time than men doing their academic research in order to achieve the same as their male counterparts, since women are assumed to be not as smart as men. It is also presumed that female PhDs sacrifice a large amount of time which should have been spent taking care of the family, or maintaining a good love relationship. Thus, by devoting too much time to research, female PhD candidates have lost their feminine charm, which is not acceptable to the public. The female PhD in my friend's description is a template image of female PhDs in ordinary Chinese people's minds.

If a girl studies continuously all the way up from an under-graduate to a doctoral degree, she is usually in her late twenties or early thirties by the time she graduates. By this time she will have failed to live up to traditional notions of woman's social roles, as wife, housewife and mother, and will probably have been stereotyped as a pedant who lacks feminine characteristics. Who would want to marry a female PhD? No one. Most female PhD students and graduates are doomed to be the "leftovers" in

the marriage market. Being a PhD student myself, I have experienced people's suspicions during my fieldwork.

"Wow, a PhD?" Some of my interviewees were so surprised that I was doing doctoral research that they did not seem to believe me. "No, you don't look like a PhD! You look so normal!" What should a female PhD look like? With disheveled hair, glassy eyes and a stiff expression on the face, someone who cares for nothing but her research? The reason that I was not like a PhD student to the interviewees was because I appeared to be a normal girl, interested in fashion, popular culture and familiar with the latest popular Korean TV series they talked about. Most importantly, I shared with my interviewees that I had a ten-year-long relationship and that I was going to get married soon. But all of this information seemed not to fit their image of a female PhD student, and they would usually conclude with, "You are not suitable for a PhD. You should do something more fun!"

Some female graduates would start by saying: "Wow, you are so smart!", but immediately they would add: "A PhD is too much for me!" Most graduates show a positive attitude to a Master's degree, but a PhD represents a dividing line between men and women: it seems that men can do a PhD, but women who attempt one must be either supernatural or denying their feminine nature. The modern perception of an educated woman seems to reach a compromise with the traditional discourse of womanhood: women should be educated, but they should not be overly educated. In other words, women can receive higher education, but a PhD degree is not necessary, and actually it could be quite scary.

This can be seen from the discourse on female PhDs and marriage. In Chinese traditional conceptions, men are the head of a family and are usually the ones with the highest educational achievement. According to the standards of hypergamy[24] (discussed in Chapter 1), a man with a Bachelor's degree should marry a girl with the same degree or lower; a man with a Master's degree should marry a girl with a Master's or lower; and a man with a PhD degree would marry a girl with a doctorate or lower. If a girl with a PhD marries a man with a degree lower than hers, the man is often thought to be in an inferior position, as his authority would be threatened. But if a man has a doctoral degree, his range of choice is much wider: he could marry a girl with a much lower educational achievement so as to enjoy more authority in the family. Thus, it is easy to understand why female PhDs are the least popular in the marriage market, and this belief scares away female graduates from pursuing a PhD degree. For males, the higher their degree, the more chance of a promising job and an ideal marriage.

Conclusion

The Chinese government has put great effort into improving its education system in primary, secondary and higher education, and both men and women are better educated now than ever before. Just as the education and development literature has promised, women's education has greatly improved in China, and women's social status has improved significantly. More and more women are enjoying tertiary

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[24] Hypergamy refers to the marriages where the wife has a lower socioeconomic background than her husband.

education and marriage is postponed accordingly. Moreover, women are also playing an increasingly important role in the Chinese workforce.

Nowadays, women can have high achievement in education. However, education does not enable women to accrue same prestige as men; the traditional gender ideology still greatly limits the capitals that women can gain through education; the fields that women can successfully operate in are largely affected by the traditional gendered labour division. As women's educational achievements become higher, other factors such as age and marital status become increasingly influential. Women can be successful in their career and be economically independent, but these are not standards for their success. They are still expected to become family-oriented once married, and to shift their focus from career to family. In other words, women can have a job without the prospect of promotion, and they are not expected to build up their own career. Women who pursue self-fulfilment and success in the workplace often have to face conflict between family and career, as well as harsh social judgment. By contrast, male graduates enjoy a smoother education-to-work transition, accompanied by more job opportunities and less discrimination in the job market. Their job opportunity is usually in proportion to their academic achievement, but they also have more pressure to find a good job and become successful due to their huge family responsibilities. They are expected to be the breadwinner of the family, to support their wife and any children, to buy the wedding apartment, and so on.

The ideology of gender roles has not changed much after all, as both men's and women's responsibilities are still quite clear. Women are expected to be family-

oriented and to make way for their husband's success, while men are supposed to work for their career and be the breadwinner of the family. However, if highly-trained female graduates do not want careers and only want low-level jobs, it will not constitute a good return to educational investment for China, and it will represent a missed chance to make the best use of the potential female university-educated workforce. It seems that women in China have reached a "glass ceiling" because of the strength of traditional gender ideology, and education is not empowering women vis-à-vis their husbands, nor giving them more autonomy or freedom.

Chapter 7: The Effects of *Guanxi* Connections on Graduates' Employment Opportunities

"Before, I had naively imagined that I would have a good life as long as I work hard, as long as I live from my heart, as long as I live frugally, as long as I fight to win. But, actually, these are just self-deceiving excuses. In this society, many people were born with noble lineage, with a great fortune and a wide social connections network (guanxi). To those kinds of people, life is like sailing with the wind. While for people from poor backgrounds, the situation is totally the opposite. Just as the saying goes: 'poor people do not need to go to university, because education won't change anything. Rich people do not need to go to university either, because they already have a good life without higher education'."

—A diary on the blog of one of my high school classmates,

my translation

The Chinese economic reform over the past 30 years has led to rapid economic growth to pull millions of people out of poverty. At the same time, it has also led to uneven development among different regions (Wang and Lowe 2011). Another big change that has accompanied Chinese rapid economic development is the abolition of the previous lifetime job allocation system and the emergence of a labour market. The development disparities between coastal cities and interior areas make a job in the city more preferable, as it is "to some extent a guarantee of a high income" (Bai 1998, p. 528). Shanghai, one of the most developed metropolises on the east coast, is without doubt the most appealing work destination for university graduates.

Nowadays, great changes have taken place in the labour market, now that the previous job allocation system has been abolished and graduates are now fully responsible for their employability (Bai 1998). On the one hand, these changes in the labour market have increased the challenges and uncertainty in graduates' employment; while, on the other hand, it has also stimulated the young graduates to be more active in their job searches (Wang and Lowe 2011). Studies (such as Bian and Huang 2009; Wang and Lowe 2011) have shown that graduate job hunting is a multi-factorial process; that is, educational achievement being important, other factors such as *hukou*, gender and social capital (in the form of *guanxi* networks in the Chinese context) also contribute to graduate employability.

Previous studies have demonstrated that network connections were crucial in linking people to job opportunities and providing information on new jobs in both Western and Chinese context (Granovetter 1973; Bian and Huang 2009; Bian 1997). For example, Granovetter (1983) has demonstrated that weak ties are more likely than strong ties to "provide people with access to information and resources [such as non-redundant information about jobs] beyond those available in their own circle" (Granovetter 1983, p. 209); others (Marsden and Hurlbert 1988; Wegener 1991) have argued that strong ties and weak ties are of equal importance in mobilizing social resources. In the Chinese context, Bian (1997) has shown that weak ties are useful in spreading job information, while strong ties of trust and obligation, rather than just providing information to the job seekers, can be used to "influence job-control agents to assign a job for someone". Thus jobs "can be channeled through strong ties more easily than through weak ties" (p. 381). However, some studies (for example, Hanser 2004; Guthrie 1998) have argued that *guanxi* connections no longer

play a primary role in the reform era, or that *guanxi*'s effect is declining in graduates' job-seeking, given the profound changes in the labour market. It is true that, due to the economic and social transformations after market reforms, young people have more freedom and channels in accessing job information, which have a direct effect on people's attitudes towards *guanxi* (Hanser 2004). However, it is expected that people will continue to use *guanxi* to find jobs, as it is one of the job hunting tools (Hanser 2004). In this chapter, I first look at social capital and different types of *guanxi,* as well as *guanxi*'s effect in job placement. I then illustrate how family *guanxi* facilitate both local and non-local graduates' job hunting. I also look at other extended *guanx*i connections that graduates deploy in trying to locate a job. What I intend to show in this chapter is that one's social capital, in terms of both direct and extended *guanxi* connections, remains an important factor in graduates' job-hunting outcomes. Especially for desirable job positions, such as jobs in the state-owned sectors and governments, *guanxi* networks play an influential role, reinforcing the reproduction of social inequality among graduates of different socio-economic backgrounds through their varied job-hunting experiences.

Social Capital, *Guanxi* Networks and Job Placement

Interpersonal relationships exist everywhere, and the use of social networks for expressive and instrumental purposes is seen in every human society (Laumann 1966). Previous studies have divided tie strength into strong ties and weak ties. For example, family members, relatives and friends are classified as strong ties, while acquaintances, neighbours and colleagues are considered weak ties (Granovetter 1973; Marsden and Hurlbert 1988).

Guanxi, as a Chinese term for interpersonal connections, has its unique meanings in the Chinese social and economic context. In the Chinese dictionary *Cihai* (*The Sea of Words*) the word *guan* has a meaning of "to connect" or "to make a linkage" (Yang 1994, p. 49). In contemporary China, the ability to using *guanxi* is a basic requirement to enable a person to negotiate with the obstacles or challenges one faces (Yang 1994, p. 49).

A few studies (Simmons and Munch 1996; Gomez 1998; Lovett, Simmons and Kali 1999) have tried to link *guanxi* with some western business concepts, such as advantage, networking and relationship marketing. However, *guanxi* is complex and defies exact translation—there is not an accurate word for *guanxi* in English (Fan 2002, pp. 545-546). Gold (1985) stated that "*guanxi* is a power relationship as one's control over a valued good or access to it gives power over others" (Gold 1985, p. 660). Buttery and Wong (1999) claimed that "the concept of *guanxi* is a complex social construct that encompasses elements of trust and mutual obligation in interpersonal interaction" (cited in Bedford 2011, p. 149). Fan (2002) held that even though "*guanxi* is a kind of relationship[,]…relationships do not necessarily produce *guanxi*" (Fan 2002, p. 546).

According to Yang (1994), *guanxihu* (*guanxi* household) and *shouren* (familiar person) are the two main types of *guanxi* resources that a person uses in the *guanxi* network in order to get something done (*banshi*). *Guanxihu* are "those persons or corporate groups to whom one owes *guanxi* favours, and to whom one has an obligation to exert one's influence to give assistance" (p. 64). A *shouren* (familiar person) is a person with whom one has a preexisting relationship and is in a position

that one can ask for a favour to obtain help to obtain a desirable goal or object. People might not have the right *shouren* in the right positions at the right times, but they can use their *guanxi* networks to reach persons who does not have a direct relationship with them in order to realise their goal. This is called *la guanxi* (to pull relationships) or *zou houmen* (going through the back door).

Renqing, which means human feelings, is another word closely connected with *guanxi* (Yang 1994). *Renqing* is sourced from ritual behaviours, which means "the proper conduct of social relationships and social events that made possible and preserved the whole social order" (Yang 1994, p. 67). In contemporary China, *renqing* is regarded as the basic ethic and emotion that distinguishes humans from animals; a person who is lacking *renqing* in his/her behaviour is regarded as not knowing how to act like a human being. Moreover, *renqing* is also very important in social relationship activities. For example, people are expected to show gratitude and express thanks through a gift or another favour in return to the one who does them a favour; through such means an emphasis on the emotional attachment between the two parties is expressed, and reciprocity is also expected.

The practice of *guanxi* is cultural, as it puts emphasis on kinship and friendship, (Yang 1994; Kipnis 1997), and the art of *guanxi* combines instrumental motivations with the ethics of Confucian teachings. In contemporary China, *guanxi* networks are of unprecedented importance. The popular discourse on *guanxi*, which has a clear distinction from bribery, is that it uses "human sentiments (*renqing*), friendship, long-term personal relationships and an image of people helping each other" (Yang 1994, p. 63).

In Bourdieu's view, "social capital is a collective asset shared by a defined group, with clear boundaries, obligations of exchange, and mutual recognition" (Lin 2001, p. 22). The volume of a person's social capital depends on "the size of the network connections [s/]he can effectively mobilise and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his[/her] own right by each of those to whom [s/]he is connected" (Bourdieu 2008, p. 286). The use of social capital is usually interest-oriented and often requires reciprocity.

Guanxi is a form of social capital. Chinese society has a long history of emphasis on *guanxi* connections in facilitating exchanges of favours between people (Hwang 1987; Bian 1997). In the early works of Chinese social scientists such as Liang Shuming (1996) and Fei Xiaotong (1983), "*guanxi* is understood as the web of familial obligations and sentiments" (Bian 2004, p. 118). In post-revolutionary China, *guanxi* refers to reciprocal informal ties that are "maintained and mobilised for instrumental purposes" (Bian 2004, p. 118; Gold 1985; Jacobs 1979; Walder 1986; Yang 1994) or as intimate networks of social exchanges, and the range of *guanxi* ties has expanded since then. *Guanxi* was regarded as strong ties by many scholars (Bian 2004; Yang 1994).

Different Types of *Guanxi*

Based on different understandings and perspectives, scholars have divided *guanxi* into different types (Hwang 1987; Fan 2002; Bedford 2011; Kipnis 1997). For example, in his study of everyday *guanxi* production in a north China village, Kipnis (1997) has introduced four basic guanxi relationships: "family members (*benjiaren*),

relatives (*qinqi*), fellow villagers (*xiangqin*) and friends (*pengyou*) (Kipnis 1997, p. 25). Fan (2002) proposed three types of *guanxi* in business: family (or kinship), helper, and business *guanxi*. Family *guanxi* is formulated according to Confucian family values, which place the "interests and value of the family at the apex of the value hierarchy" (Ip 2008, p. 173), and the importance of family *guanxi* also indicates the family-first mentality in Confucian moral principles (Bedford 2011). Helper *guanxi* is "utility driven, temporary, and could be a one-off case" (Fan 2002, p. 551), in which *renqing* (mutual exchange) and *mianzi* (giving face to others) are frequently used in the description of *guanxi*. In this regard, there are two aspects of the meanings of *mianzi*: *lianmian* and *mianzi*. *Lianmian* represents a person's moral status in a society, while *mianzi* refers to a person's prestige, which "is similar to Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital: prestige as a sort of credit that can attract other forms of capital" (Bedford 2011, p. 151; Bourdieu 2008). Fan described business *guanxi* as the intermediary that ties up money and power, but it is also the trigger for corruption. As a further subdivision of business *guanxi*, Bedford (2011) offered a framework for *guanxi* in the workplace: working *guanxi* and backdoor *guanxi*. According to Bedford, working *guanxi* refers to the interactions between coworkers and those outside their organisation in order to get things done at work. While backdoor *guanxi* usually involves "exchange of power or status for money (or other personal benefits)", and it often occurs when "one of the parties has control of a nonsubstitutable resource to the business operation of the other" (Bedford 2011, p. 153)

Family *guanxi* is located by scholars as the root of other *guanxi* types (Kipnis 1997; Fan 2002; Bedford 2011) because the emotional connection between the two parties

is very strong, "the principle of favouring the intimate may kick in with nonfamily members" (Bedford 2011, p. 156), and kinship relations are generative in the "production of strategies (conscious or unconscious) oriented towards the satisfaction of material and symbolic interests and organised by reference to a determinate set of economic and social conditions" (Bourdieu 1977, p. 36).

The deployment of *guanxi* to get things done is by no means just limited to the business sphere (Yeung and Tung 1996), and it is also used in seeking employment. As proposed by Brown, Hesketh and William (2004), in order to gain initial employment, graduates not only depend on their "knowledge, skills and attitudes to meet specific job requirements", but also depend on their relative position in a hierarchy of job seekers and how they deploy their resources to secure an advantageous position in the hierarchy (Wang and Lowe 2011, p. 123). As some studies have shown (Jacobs 1979; Hwang 1987; Bian 1994), *guanxi* is used extensively in job placement and job mobility processes in China (Bian 1994) and in all kinds of other social interactions (Hwang 1987). For the graduates in this study, family *guanxi*, or kinship *guanxi*, constitute the main *guanxi* resources they adopt in their job-hunting experiences. As I shall explain below, besides family *guanxi*, they also used other indirect *guanxi* connections such as friends, teachers and acquaintances in their endeavours to get a good job.

Guanxi and Job Placement

Nowadays, *guanxi* exists almost everywhere in Chinese people's daily lives. *Guanxi* comes in handy to shorten the time length for formal processes of applications, such as for going abroad for visit or study purposes; a patient would enjoy better medical

treatment if he/she has *guanxi* connection in the hospital; and *guanxi* is also very useful in getting a child into a famous school or to select a more desirable major. Even for recreation activities such as going to a movie or a concert, one could have the priority to get special tickets for a limited audience. In contemporary Chinese society, there are gatekeepers in almost every aspect of people's lives. *Guanxi* acts to help people pass through the gates smoothly. Furthermore, "*guanxi* is not only restricted to the social exchange between individuals" (Yang 1994, p. 101), but is also conducted comprehensively among companies and government institutions.

In the 1980s*, guanxi* was very important in getting job assignments for unemployed youth and those who returned to the city from serving in the countryside, since *guanxi* could make the difference between being sent to a desirable work unit with better wages and welfare, or being sent to a work unit where wages and welfare were lower, while the workload was heavier (Yang 1994, p. 92). Moreover, in the early years after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when the *hukou* system restriction was still tight and getting the permission to have one's place of residence changed was very difficult, g*uanxi* played a very important role in enabling geographical mobility. During that time, to have a *hukou* changed was one of the most difficult things that people might encounter in their life. They would have to *la guanxi* (establish social connections) and to send gifts that cost several years of savings in order to shorten the waiting period or to have the process go smoothly (Yang 1994, p. 94).

People exist in *guanxi* networks (*guanxiwang*). As Lin (2001) has stated, upper reachability, heterogeneity extension and network size are the main criteria in

measuring one's network resources. It is a rule that the more *guanxi* one has, "the more diverse one's *guanxi* connections with people of different occupations and positions, the better becomes one's general manoeuverability in society" (Yang 1994, p. 122).

Among all the *guanxi* connections, kinship or family *guanxi* is always used as a way for varying socio-economic associations of extra-kin nature, and it is also the main channel that graduates adopt in looking for a job. Since graduates have spent most of their time in school or university, they have not yet developed many social *guanxi* connections of their own, and the social connections of their family automatically become part of their social connections (Wang 2012). The popular saying that "*xue hao shu li hua, buru youge hao baba (An academically excellent student pales by comparison to someone with a father of good background)*" (Yang 1994, p. 8) vividly reflects the importance of kinship *guanxi* networks in young graduates' job-seeking, it also reveals a patriarchal bias in those connections, since it is only the "father" who is mentioned.

Kinship is a base to establish *guanxi*, but it is not the only basis for *guanxi* exchange in bigger cities (Yang 1994, p. 113). The saying "*yuanqin buru jinlin (distant relatives are not as dear as close neighbours)*", indicates that distance can weaken the kinship bond. Instead neighbours, friends or colleagues who live in the same social sphere become closer and share many mutual obligations, and they establish a helper *guanxi*. Other non-kinship *guanxi* connections such as friendship and teacher-student relationships are other sources of support that graduates adopt in their job-hunting. In the following sections of this chapter, I will look at how *guanxi* connections work for

graduates of different backgrounds in their job-hunting experiences, and how the quality of those *guanxi* connections contribute to their job-hunting outcomes, which in turn reinforce class inequality.

Family *Guanxi* and Gratuates' Job Hunting Experiences

"*Zheshi yige pindie de shidai* (Daddy is the key in this day and age)"

—My interviewee Dong, who comes from a rural family in Central China

Bourdieu's theory of educational reproduction relies on the notion that "class and capital possession are fully relational, gradational and refracted by family dynamics" (Atkinson 2012, p. 735; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). One's network relationships cannot be separated from one's socio-economic background, as "economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital" (Bourdieu 2008, p. 288). Social capital is thus secondary to economic capital because economic capital determines the range and the quality of social capital. Because of this, it is not difficult to understand that even though people draw upon all kinds of resources "in order to maintain and enhance their positions in the social order" (Swartz 1997, p. 73), not all types of activities are equally fruitful given the difference in their social capital due to social class hierarchy.

As discussed above, one's kinship *guanxi* is positively correlated with his/her family background, since the availability of *guanxi* resources is in proportion to a person's wealth and status. Some studies have claimed (Bian 1994; Zang 2003, p. 125) that in the 1980s the higher the bureaucratic rank of one's father, the higher the possibility

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that one would use *guanxi*. Even though thirty years have passed, I found that the same situation still exists in the job-hunting experiences of contemporary university graduates. In fact, given the increasing autonomy of individuals in job seeking, *guanxi* has become a social resource of increasingly importance. According to Guo (2008), "the position or influence of one's social ties will have a direct impact on the outcome of a job search", a graduate whose father has a higher rank in the bureaucracy is more likely to succeed in a job application than one whose father has a lower rank.

Different Father, Different Trajectory: The Rich Second Generation and the Poor Second Generation

The Rich Second Generation (*Fu er dai*) refers to the children who are from families of substantial estate, and who are leading a luxurious life and obtaining social superiority depending on their parents' economic capital. Their parents, the so-called Rich First Generation (*Fu yi dai*), are successful Chinese businessmen or entrepreneurs of the reform and opening-up era (Dou and Huang 2011). By contrast, the Poor Second Generation (*Qiong er dai*), are the children of the Poor First Generation (*Qiong yi dai*). The Poor First Generation refers to the workers and farmers who failed to obtain wealth from the reform. Their children grew up in a poor environment with few opportunities. As they are still struggling to overcome poverty, they are called the Poor Second Generation. Members of the Poor Second Generation are widespread among urban and rural residents (Dou and Huang 2011).

Most of the Rich Second Generation and the Poor Second Generation are young people born after 1980, facing very different transition trajectories because of their

different family background. With similar educational achievement, members of the Poor Second Generation are struggle with upward mobility due to their lack of social and economic capital, compared with their Rich counterparts. The class hierarchy reproduces the Rich Second Generation at the top, while the Poor Second Generation is at the bottom. However, though I do not suggest that it is impossible for individuals from poor backgrounds to realise upward mobility through education— there being actually many individual successful examples— I do wish to stress the abundance of intergenerational class reproduction of the Poor Second Generation, despite the fact that they all receive higher education. In short, the hierarchy in economic and thus also social capital possession hinders the attempts of young people of lower class origins to realise upward mobility through higher education.

Dong: More Education as a Solution

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Dong decided to pursue postgraduate study after graduation. He attributed this decision to his lack of background or *guanxi* connections in Shanghai. He believed that if he wanted to succeed, he had to depend on himself to gain as much cultural capital as possible through education, and use it as a way to realise upward mobility. As he put it, "If we want to have a better life in the future, we have no other choice but to *pin* (try one's best). This society is so cruel that it is very difficult for poor people to succeed!" Dong continued in this vein:

> Dong: It is impossible to live a pleasant life in Shanghai with the salary we could get now. However, we are reluctant to go to conservative and tight small cities….The only solution is to find opportunities to study abroad. If we can go abroad and settle down there, it will be ideal; but if we cannot stay abroad, it will be easier to find a good job [with high salary] in China with an overseas PhD degree….If the city is bigger, it is more likely to be more Westernized and the competition fairer, so that young people like me will have more opportunities....There are a lot of *guanxi* going on in small cities, and if I want to be successful I have to have *guanxi*. But I am

from the bottom of society, my father is a farmer, he has no *guanxi* connections and no money to help me find a job! (Interview date: 18/03/2011)

As Yang (1994) states, there seems to be a consensus in China that "human relations 'abroad (*zai guowai*)', a vague zone usually understood as 'the West', are impersonal, detached, mechanistic, and devoid of *ganqing* (human feelings)" (p. 121). Due to the large size of the migrant population in metropolitan cities, the kinship *guanxi* networks become less salient, to the extent that Dong referred to the cities as being "more Westernised". Since everyone is far away from home, Dong feels less negatively affected by his poor background and lack of *guanxi* networks. In smaller cities, where it is much easier to establish a "*guanxi* society", people of wealth and influence usually are at a great advantage; complementarily, young graduates like him are put in a disadvantaged position.

Dong believed there were fairer opportunities in Western societies because he believed *guanxi* only existed in the Chinese context. In his view, the more developed and civilised a Chinese city became, the more westernized it would be. However, he was also aware that even in those developed cities, social inequalities still existed and family background was always a determining factor:

> Dong: For example, the rich students can drive a car to university; they have the economic base to establish *guanxi* networks, while for us who are from the rural regions, we have nothing….Have you heard the saying: '*Zheshi yige pindie de shidai* (This is an era in which your daddy's success determines your future)'? It is so true! There are so many Rich Second Generations (*fu er dai*) who are leading such an easy life, and the children of officials (*guan er dai*) who broke the law but can avoid punishment. Haven't you heard of the story '*Wo ba shi Li Gang* (My daddy is Li Gang)'? It is a good example! Your father's success determines your future! (Interview date: 18/03/2011)

Dong attributed his decision to undertake further education to his humble family background and lack of *guanxi* connections. Coming from a rural area, he had

anticipated the difficulties he would face and the efforts he had to make in order to become successful or to live a similar life to urban youths. Just as Dong realised, many non-local graduates in similar situations would also prefer to further their education. Due to their lack of social capital, they try to accumulate more cultural capital through further education, as they believe that the higher their educational achievement, the less they have to rely on *guanxi* networks to succeed (Hanser 2004).

"My Daddy is Li Gang"

The phrase "My daddy is Li Gang (*Wo ba shi Li Gang*)" was coined after a tragic car accident at Hebei University in 2010. College girls Chen Xiaofeng and Zhang Jingjing were both struck by a speeding car driven by an intoxicated twenty-two-year-old male, Li Qiming. Chen Xiaofeng was killed, and Zhang Jingjing seriously injured. The driver attempted to flee, but was intercepted by spectators and a university security guard. Undeterred, Li Qiming yelled, "Sue me if you dare. My father is Li Gang!"

Li Gang was the deputy police chief in Beishi district of Baoding City, in Hebei province. Li Qiming's arrogant speech, which raised great anger among the public, immediately spread throughout China via the Internet. In the end, Li Gang had to apologise through Chinese CCTV (Central Television) to ease public anger; and his son the drunken driver, Li Qiming, was sentenced to six years in prison.

This incident attracted huge public attention, and the saying "My daddy is Li Gang" became the most popular declaration in China in 2010. People used this sentence in

all kinds of expressions to mock the diseased social custom of people with power or wealth taking advantage of their *guanxi* networks to reach certain goals. This act of social sarcasm highlighted the social inequality between the rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless. Some studies have pointed out that "China has become a highly polarised society and that social conflict is on the rise" (Anonymous 2010) . In the pyramid-like hierarchical structure, people with positions closer to the top have greater access to resources and thus have more influential social ties.

Rural graduates like Dong, most of whom are first-generation urban migrants and lack the necessary social capital and urban living experience, are still at a great disadvantage in their drive for upward social mobility, even given their higher-education backgrounds. In most cases, they choose to gain further education to compensate for their economic and social-capital deficiency; their transition experience has a much more tortuous trajectory, and the social-class hierarchy seems to be perpetuated in the young generation of urban and formerly rural dwellers. In the end, those graduates with more economic and social capital will become the winners in the job-hunting race. Just as studies (Fan 2002; Bedford 2011) have discovered, today's key players in the Chinese market economy are those with material wealth.

For university graduates, the main social capital they have is their family *guanxi* networks. Strong family *guanxi* has a great influence in positive job-seeking outcomes. In what follows I provide a number of case studies which examine *guanxi* and job-hunting from different angles.

Family *Guanxi* in Local Graduates' Job-hunting Experiences

In job-hunting experiences, besides local *hukou*, local graduates usually have wider *guanxi* connections compared with non-local graduates. Graduate Ding's job-hunting experience, which I will elaborate below, is a very good example of how *guanxi* works in assisting local graduates to get a desirable job.

Ding: A Job in a Famous Bank

Ding was a local Shanghai graduate majoring in computer science. He decided to find a job in the bank after his summer holiday internship experience in a Shanghai bank in his second year of university. Upon graduation, he started applying for positions in the banking sector in Shanghai.

> Me: When did you start job hunting?
>
> Ding: Last December.
>
> Me: What types of job?
>
> Ding: Positions in the bank.
>
> Me: Why do you want to work in the bank?
>
> Ding: Because the salary and welfare [provisions] are very good, and I like to communicate with people.
>
> Me: Do you think most banks prefer local employees?
>
> Ding: Yes, they say it on the advertisement…eligible candidates need to have a local *hukou*…I think local people have more advantages in terms of the local language and culture, so they are much closer to Shanghai [people]. (Interview date: 16/06/2011)

In Shanghai, positions in banks and government offices are among the most attractive and sought-after jobs among graduates because these jobs are stable and usually come with a high salary and good welfare provisions. However, these

positions are also very competitive, as, apart from the requisite academic qualifications, applicants also need to have a local *hukou* and be able to speak the local dialect. *Guanxi* is often used by applicants to guarantee their success in the selection process. Since December 2011, Ding started to apply online for jobs in the banks in Shanghai. He applied to three banks in total.

> Ding: At the first bank where I applied, there were 30,000 to 40,000 candidates, and in the end only 200 people were selected for the first interview. We were divided into groups of seven to eight people for group interviewing. In the interview, we need to conduct a 3-minute discussion on some hot issues of the society…The people selected were all highly qualified, they were mostly from more prestigious universities than I do…[for example], many were from Tongji University and Shanghai University of Finance Economics and I didn't see many from ECNU [where he studies]… I didn't get a chance to say a word[25]. (Interview date: 16/06/2011)

I happened to know one of the senior managers, who was the girlfriend of one of my best friends in Shanghai, in the first bank to which Ding applied. She told me about the large number of the applicants and the strict interview selection criteria over an informal conversation at a party I hosted. To be selected from the 40,000 or so applications, one needs to meet three main criteria: hold a Shanghai *hukou*, graduate from a "Project 211"[26] or "Project 985"[27] university, and have had related internship

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[25] According to 2011 China University Ranking, Fudan University ranks 4th, ECNU ranks 23rd, Tongji University ranks 24th, Shanghai University of Finance Economics ranks 77th (China Alumni Association Network, 2011). However, because ECNU is mainly a teachers training university, while Shanghai University is specialised in finance and economic, Ding may have regarded it as a higher ranking than ECNU in this aspect.

[26] "Project 211" is a cross-century strategic project for the implementation of the strategy of developing the country through science and education. It focuses on the construction of 100 Universities and a number of key disciplines. Among the 100 universities in China which were in the "Project 211", 9 universities in Shanghai are members of this project, They are: Fudan University, East China Normal University, Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai University, Tongji University, East China University of Science, Donghua University, Shanghai University of Finance Economics and Shanghai Jiaotong University Xinlang (Xinlang Education 2011a).

[27] "Project 985" was established in May 1998 to support key universities in the aim of each creating a world-class university and high level university. Up until 31/03/2011. There were 39 universities that joined "project 985"; 34 universities joined in Phrase 1 and 5 more universities joined in Phrase 2. 4 Shanghai universities joined this project: Fudan University, Tongji University, Shanghai Jiaotong University.and East China Normal University (Phrase 2) (Xinlang Education, 2011b).

experiences. In addition, a previous position as a student leader was also counted as a credit. In Shanghai, there are only nine universities which are members of "Project 211", and four universities which joined "Project 985" (Xinlang Education 2011a; Xinlang Education 2011b). These selection criteria screened out most non-local graduates (who were unable to get a Shanghai *hukou*) and those who studied in less prestigious universities. Ding, being a local Shanghainese (who has a Shanghai *hukou*), and a graduate of a "Project 211" and "Project 985" university (ECNU), with a previous internship experience in a bank, was selected for the first interview. However, he failed to go any further due to his mediocre performance in the group interview.

After failing the first interview, he then applied for another bank, which he managed to pass the written exam and entered the interview. It was also group interview of eight people, and they were asked to divide into two teams to discuss on some hot issue of the society. Again, being inarticulate and rather shy, he did not do well in the interview, and never heard any further news again.

For the third bank to which he applied, which was smaller and less prestigious than the previous two, he managed to pass the written exam and the interview successfully (this time it was not a group interview), and was allocated to a two-month internship. In the end, the bank was quite satisfied with his performance and offered him a position in the bank. However, he turned it down because he considered the salary was too low. "It was only 3500 yuan per month; I don't want to work there."

Me: So what job did you find in the end?

Ding: I found a job in the IT centre of xx bank.

Me: How did you find this job?

Ding: My family knows someone in the bank.

Me: So someone in your family recommend you to the job?"

Ding: Yes, my parents know someone who works there.

Me: When was the interview?

Ding: The interview and recruiting of this bank was in last November, but I missed it[28]. My interview was arranged in February this year.

Me: How is this possible?

Ding: Because of that person my parents know… he said it is OK, so I got the interview opportunity…I was 80%-90% confident that I would get the job even before I went to the interview.

Me: What is that person's position in the bank?

Ding: He was the general manager of the bank headquarters.

Me: Was there anyone else having an interview?

Ding: No, just me. I didn't see anyone except for some people [new employees] who came to hand in documents and contracts.

Me: So they held the interview just for you?

Ding: Yes.

Ding: I had four interviews in total. The first and the fourth were mainly self-introduction and casual chat in Shanghainese, the second interview they asked me about my internship experiences, the third interview they asked me some questions about finance.

Me: Did he/she [the head of IT department] ask you any question related to your position [IT]?

Ding: No, not at all.

Me: Since your major is IT, did you read any finance book or study finance in your own time?

Ding: No, I only play computer games in my own time [laugh]… I didn't learn finance, but the questions were very subjective; I just answered them based on my internship experiences.

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[28] As mentioned before, Ding did not start job hunting until December 2010.

Me: Do you think *guanxi* is important?

Ding: I think *guanxi* and your own ability are equally important. (Interview date: 16/06/2011)

Ding managed to get the job mainly because of his parents' *guanxi* connection with the general manager, who is probably one of the most powerful people in the bank. According to Bian, "the higher rank the helper, the greater the helper's influence" (Bian 1997, p. 381). The general manager had great influence in both the organisation and the outcome of Ding's interview. Even though the recruitment had already finished, the general manager was able to arrange a special interview for him. Ding had four interviews all together, he was not asked any expert questions related to the position, and except for during his self-introduction no one asked about his major. In the end he was allocated to the IT support department of that bank. As Lin (1999) has argued, the influence of persons of high-status will lead to job attainment for job seekers "because of their positional advantage in…influencing the hiring process" (Zang 2003, p. 117). Due to the great influence of his helper, both the interviewers and Ding himself knew that he would be granted the job, the interviews were mere formality. As Coleman notes, "social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible" (1988, p. 91). It is undeniable that Ding's educational achievement and his internship experiences are important factors allowing him to stand out in the initial selection of the previous job interviews. However, without his parents' *guanxi* connection with the general manager, I imagine that Ding could not get his job in the bank.

Chen: A Job in a Five-Star Hotel or a Bank?

Chen was a female local Shanghai graduate majoring in business administration. When I interviewed her, she had just finished her half-year internship at Disneyland in the United States. She regarded this internship experience as her rebellion against her father's arrangement to make her work in the bank where he worked as the manager.

> Chen: He just does not believe that I can find a good job by myself. I was so against this idea [to work by means of my father's arrangement] that I decided to go overseas to escape the interview in his bank. I do not want to care about his teachings any more. (Interview date: 13/04/2011)

Because she was overseas, she missed the recruitment exam, which made her father very upset. Chen really enjoyed her internship experience at Disneyland and had decided to look for a management job in a five-star hotel after she returned to Shanghai. She submitted job applications to all the five-star hotels in Shanghai, but unfortunately heard nothing from them. Still, she was reluctant to lower her expectations to work in a hotel of lower standards. Her parents, who regarded working in the hotel industry as both humble and a position that would make them look bad (*mei mianzi*), refused to give her any help in her job-searching and were hoping that she would change her mind after a few setbacks.

> Me: What will you do if you fail to find a job in a five-star hotel?
>
> Chen: If I still could not find a job in three months, I probably would have to work in my dad's bank. (Interview date: 13/04/2011)

Overall, I did not see much job-seeking stress from Chen. She was strongly against her parents' attempt to arrange her future and was very eager to work in the hotel

service industry, but her insistence to only work in five-star hotels also indicated that her desire to work in this sector was not so strong. To some extent it was because she had a backup option to work in her father's bank, which was a much-desired job for most graduates with high salary, good welfare provisions, as well as high social status. The reason why she did not want to lower her expectations in applying for hotel jobs may also have been because she could not accept a job which paid less and had a much lower social status than the one her father had offered her. However, it may be possible to interpret her insistence as follows: because she had strong social capital upon which she could fall back, she could consider other aspects in looking for a job, such as her hobbies and interests, rather than merely economic rewards.

Gong: A Job as a Civil Servant

Another good example to show the positive effects of *guanxi* is through the recruiting of civil servants. To become a civil servant, one needs to pass a two-stage test. First, one needs to pass the civil-service written examination. After the written examination, applicants still need to succeed in a highly competitive face-to-face interview situation. If there is one vacant position, it is usually the top three the applicants in the written examination who will be granted an interview opportunity at the second stage. The interview is usually where *guanxi* could be deployed, especially in competition for positions at lower than municipal level.

Gong was a male graduate who also majored in administration management. He was from Chongming Island, a distant suburb of Shanghai. He explained that he had decided to become a civil servant ever since he entered university:

Gong: My hometown is in Chongming District, there are no good companies, and the only good *danwei* are the government offices, banks and state-owned enterprises. My parents and my grandfather all work in a bank in Chongming, but they do not want me to work in the banking system. They said that even though the salary is high, the working hours are too long and the social relationships within the system are very complicated. Quite a few of my relatives work as civil servants and they all told me that it was the best job in my hometown, so I decided to become a civil servant. (Interview date: 13/04/2011)

He also conducted a search on the internet about civil servant positions and found the comments were consistent with what his relatives had told him: "The civil servant position is an iron rice bowl"[29]. Thus, Gong determined to join the army of civil servants. In the last year of university, he decided to apply for a government position in the rural part of Chongming, because he regarded it as less competitive in the suburban areas than in central Shanghai, and he had family *guanxi* connections there that could help him in the interview stage:

Gong: There are preferential policies toward local people in selecting civil servants, because a lot of *Chongming* people don't understand *Putonghua* [Mandarin Chinese]. I am from the local area, and I can speak the local dialect, so that I have a great advantage…. Moreover, one of my relatives is a cadre in the department I applied for. So as long as I pass the written examination, I will definitely be admitted because of the strong *guanxi* connections I have. (Interview date: 13/04/2011)

Being a local, Gong has much wider and stronger *guanxi* connections compared with his non-local competitors; his strong kinship *guanxi* connections with the local government official also made him stand out even among other local graduates. Even though he still needed to pass the written exam, considering that it was the only thing for which he needed to prepare, his job-seeking experiences were made much

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[29] This refers to a permanent income which employees would never lose whether they worked hard or not.

smoother and easier because of his strong *guanxi* connections. It was not a level playing field for his peers without such advantages.

Family *Guanxi* Networks in Non-local Graduates' Job-hunting Experiences

Meng: A Job in a Shanghai Company

I became acquainted with my interviewee Meng through a phone call from my mother-in-law, who asked me to help the daughter of a friend's friend (Meng) who had been trying to look for a job in Shanghai for months without success. Meng's parents were very upset about their daughter's situation and were contacting people who know someone in Shanghai to *la guanxi* for her. They had asked all the possible contacts they knew in order to find someone who could help in Shanghai. Even though I knew nothing about Meng or what kind of job she was looking for, to save my mother-in-law's *mianzi* (face) in front of her friend, I called Meng and asked her out to discuss her situation over a meal.

Meng was very embarrassed to meet me and apologised for the trouble caused by her parents. She told me that her parents were desperately looking for as many *guanxi* connections as possible to help her find a job in Shanghai, and I was one of the many who called her but were at the very edge of her parents' *guanxi* networks.

> Meng: They told all their friends and relatives that I am looking for a job in Shanghai, and asked them to spread the word for me. As soon as they hear someone has a connection in Shanghai, they will try to build up some *guanxi* and ask for a favour. (Interview date: 24/05/2011)

In the end, Meng successfully established a *guanxi* connection with a very famous professor thanks to her parents' effort, and was recommended to a company for a job interview:

> The professor has a very strong *guanxi* connection with the company: he regularly gives free lectures to the management-level officers of that company. In return, the company took the professor's words very seriously and saw it as a good opportunity to repay his kindness…. Instead of giving me an interview, they actually asked me what kind of job I wanted to do, and tried to find me a similar position in the company….Knowing that I was not quite interested in the position they offered, they asked me to think about what I wanted to do so that they could try to make a position tailored to my interest, which made me feel very awkward. (Interview date: 24/05/2011)

As Yang (1994) contends, *guanxi* connections are usually based on mutual interest and benefit, and are often reciprocal, "Once the *guanxi* is established between two people, each can ask a favour of the other with the expectation that the debt incurred will be repaid sometime in the future". Since the professor has done many favours to the company, people in the management-level would have felt the obligation to do something to repay him. Meng benefited from this *guanxi* relationship by getting a job through the recommendation of the professor. Meng and/or her family would also be expected to do something to repay the professor, either in material terms or a favour in the future.

Ran: A Job in a Shanghai Special Education School

Ran is a female graduate from ECNU majoring in special education psychology. Her hometown is in Shandong province. Unlike most non-local graduates I interviewed, who either came to Shanghai to study at university or just to look for jobs after graduation, Ran studied in Shanghai since high school. According to Ran, at that time, a few Shanghai high schools were open to other provinces for selecting

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excellent students to study in Shanghai and to take the Shanghai College Entrance Examination (CEE) later on. Rong passed the selective examination with an outstanding score and was admitted to a high school in Shanghai. After three years of study, Rong took the Shanghai CEE and was admitted by ECNU. Upon graduation, she had experienced many setbacks before she finally found a job.

She had excellent academic records at university: she had been rewarded two first class and one second class university scholarships and her GPA was ranked the second highest in her major. In the beginning, she planned to pursue a postgraduate degree and applied for admission to graduate waived of exams at ECNU. However, her application was not admitted by the School.

> Ran: I feel that I am just so unlucky…My parents told me it was because I did not open up the *guanxi* (*datong guanxi*) with my teachers …Otherwise I cannot think of another reason, as my GPA was much higher than the student at third place, I also did some research with the teachers… I am also in the class committee…I do not understand why I was not admitted. (Interview date: 16/06/2011)

After knowing the results, she and her boyfriend applied for universities in Canada together, and neither was successful. In the end, her boyfriend was accepted by a university in Hong Kong, and she started to look for a job in Shanghai.

Ran: So I started job hunting quite late, plus I am non-local, I went to the major job fairs and applied for schools in Shanghai, and none of them accept someone without a local *hukou,* and I only have a bachelor's degree…and I could not find a job by myself…

> Ran: In the end, it was less than one month before my graduation [I found this job]… Actually it was luck and I got the job using some *guanxi*…Otherwise, I would not be offered the job…because I am a non-local student…

Me: Is it through your parents' *guanxi*?

Ran: Yes, it is my boyfriend's parents'[30] *guanxi*… I do not really know how they managed the *guanxi* with the school…but this school is not really a good school, [as] it is a special school… The principal knows my teachers… I feel that if I am a local student, I would not need to use any *guanxi*, because one of my classmates is like that, she is local and she got a job in the school without using any *guanxi*. (Interview date: 16/06/2011)

Ran's non-local identity has made it difficult for her to find a teaching job without the assistance of *guanxi* networks. But even with *guanxi* connections, the job was not very desirable for her. The school was in Jiading district and she had a two-week internship before signing the contract.

Me: Do you like the job?

Ran: Not really. I am not saying that I dislike the kids in the school. I do not dislike the kids, I just do not like a job without any sense of achievement… I will work as a classroom teacher, not a psychologist in that school…I felt that I have learnt so much but they won't need it, because they won't be able to learn a lot…

Me: What do your parents think about this job?

Ran: My parents do not want me to work in this kind of school either, they think it is a waste of talent… but they still think I should accept the job, because it is subject to the Shanghai education system and it will enable me to apply for a local *hukou*… *hukou* discrimination is very serious in Shanghai… But I still feel I am at a much lower starting point (*qidian cha henduo*) compared with the locals, [because] someone like me, I could not even find a job in such a place and have to use *guanxi*. If I am a local, I will not be overly anxious about looking for a job if I could not find an ideal one. I can absolutely stay at home for a year to make preparation for postgraduate study. But, [since I am non-local], if my files were sent back to my hometown after graduation, it would become very complicated. (Interview date: 16/06/2011)

As mentioned in Chapter 2, after graduation, all students' personnel files will either be sent from the university they studied to their work units or back to their hometown. If Ran's personnel file were sent back to Shandong, it would be more complicated for her to find a job and apply for a Shanghai *hukou*, and to have her

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[30] Ran and her boyfriend had been in a seven year long relationship and were talking about marriage, so I attribute to the *guanxi* connections of her future in-laws as family *guanxi*.

files transferred again from her hometown to Shanghai. Even though she did not consider the job to be of high value, she decided to work in this special school, which would allow her to keep her personnel file in Shanghai and also to apply for a Shanghai *hukou*. However, staying in Shanghai was not her ultimate plan.

> Ran: My boyfriend is going to Hong Kong to study for his Master's [degree]. After that he will apply for a PhD overseas. I might apply for a postgraduate degree after one or two years.
>
> Me: Your ultimate plan is to go overseas?
>
> Ran: [Laugh] Yes, Chinese society has many social problems, *guanxi* networks, unequal competition… I think it went too far in China. (Interview date: 16/06/2011)

Ran, like Dong earlier in this chapter, believed there were fairer opportunities in Western societies and believed that *guanxi* only existed in the Chinese context. However, compared with other non-local graduates who had no family *guanxi* at all in Shanghai, Ran is lucky to have obtained a teaching job in Shanghai. Following Bian (1997), I found that strong *guanxi* networks (such as family *guanxi*) are very influential and helpful when the graduates failed to find a job through the formal channels.

Weak Ties or Indirect *Guanxi* in Non-local Graduates' Job-hunting

Granovetter's (1973; 1983) theory of weak ties suggests that networks of weak ties are wide-ranging and can help individuals to gain non-redundant job information. Moreover, Lin (1999; 2001) has also argued that weak ties bridge information and social resources of different hierarchical ranks. Since non-local graduates usually do not have family or kinship *guanxi* in Shanghai, indirect *guanxi* connections are often adopted in one's looking for a job. Indirect *guanxi* connections are usually accessed

through relatives, colleagues, teachers and students, friends or acquaintances (Hwang 1987, p. 952). Here I refer to indirect *guanxi* as indirect ties that the first link is not through parents or somebody with whom one has a multi-stranded tie (e.g. a boyfriend).

Dan: Using Alumni *Guanxi*

Alumni *guanxi* and teacher-student *guanxi* can also be effective in graduates' job-hunting experiences. Alumni, who are of the same major and working in corresponding areas, can give very accurate recruiting information and can also be very helpful if they can recommend the graduate as a potential candidate. Teacher-student *guanxi* can have a similar effect: most teachers would be willing to help their students in their job search by referring them to those potential employers with whom they have relationships.

Dan was a girl from far western Xinjiang Province. She received her Bachelor's degree in urban planning from Zhejiang University. In order to join her boyfriend in Shanghai, she applied for a Master's course at Tongji University, but unfortunately she did not pass the entrance exam. After that, she started to look for a job in urban planning institutions in Shanghai.

Since she was focusing on her preparation for the Master's course entrance exam, she did not pay much attention to recruiting information. When she found out her exam results and started job-seeking, most of the urban planning institutions and companies had finished their recruitment for new employees. Fortunately, her

teachers and alumni at Zhejiang University were all very helpful in recommending her to some institutions and companies in Shanghai. Dan explained:

> Dan: *Guanxi* plays a very important role in getting employment opportunities in our major…. I tried to contact some institutions by myself through email, but I did not receive any reply. Then, through my teachers at Zhejiang University, I contacted a few alumni who are doing very well at their job and asked them to refer me to their employers. The employers seemed to trust the person that they had recommended, and they suppose I am of similar quality since we graduated from the same university. (Interview date: 04/04/2011)

Even though Dan was late to start job-seeking, she still managed to get a few interview opportunities with the help of her teachers and alumni, and was successfully recruited by an urban planning institution in Shanghai. As has discussed by Bian (2004), "*guanxi* connections [can] help employers to know the job seekers better and increase their trust in the latter". In Dan's case, *guanxi* connections acted as a basis for bridging trust between Dan and her employer.

Xu: Using Weak-tie *Guanxi*

Besides using family connections and helper connections such as friends and teachers, graduates also tried to establish *guanxi* resources in their job-hunting. As I have stated in the previous sections, the wider one's *guanxi* networks, the higher the chances of deriving useful employment information. Even though previous studies have found that strong ties (such as kinship and friends) are more effective than weak ties in finding a job in China (Bian 1994), weak-tie *guanxi* (such as acquaintances) can also be helpful for graduates to overcome some thresholds (filtering of CVs, for example) and to simplify the interview process. During my interviews with the graduates, apart from sharing their job-hunting experiences with me, a few interviewees also tried to ask for help with job interview opportunities. Since we only met once or twice, I attribute our relationship to a weak-tie *guanxi*.

Xu was a graduate majoring in agronomy at Jiaotong University. He was very shy and introverted: in the beginning, he was reluctant to tell me anything regarding his job-hunting experiences, and he was the only one among my interviewees who refused me permission to record the interview. He had been to quite a few job fairs and found that there were not many positions in his major. He said that with his major it was impossible to find a good job and he did not want to work in a pesticide factory. Most of his classmates chose jobs in sales or another service industry. He had no connections in Shanghai, and he was too introverted to take a very active approach in his job-hunt. After a few attempts, he already felt very frustrated and started to attribute his bad luck to his major and even more to his humble background. I totally understood his hopeless feelings and I felt pity for his situation. In return for his taking part in my interview, I offered to create some job interview opportunities through my own connections.

I managed to organise two interviews for him: one in a real-estate consulting company for which he previously tried to apply without *guanxi*, but had had his resume rejected, and the other in the sales department of a software development company. Unfortunately, for the second time around, he did not pass the interview at the real-estate consulting company, while in the case of the second company, he was not satisfied with the salary offered, and so he did not accept the job. After these two interview experiences, however, he realised the potential employment opportunities afforded by weak-tie *guanxi*, and he became more active in communicating with people from his hometown and alumni of his university in Shanghai so as to get

more job information. In the end, he found a job in an agricultural products trading company in a suburb of Shanghai.

Another graduate whom I have already introduced in the previous chapter, Luo, achieved her Master's degree majoring in Geography. She was from Zhejiang province, south of Shanghai. She had always wanted to work as a high-school teacher in Shanghai, but was not able to get an interview opportunity. Reluctant to leave Shanghai, she changed her target to positions related to urban planning. Knowing that my husband worked in a real-estate consulting company, she asked me to forward her resume to the human resources department in his company. In addition, Luo said that even before applying for a position in a good company, she would try to use her connections to find someone within such a company to ask for some constructive information and try to ask that person to put in a good word on her behalf to the interviewers. Luo did not get an interview opportunity for the real-estate consulting company, and in the end, she found a job in an tourist consulting company where she used to do an internship before.

As argued by Granovertter (1973; 1983), weak ties usually can provide job-related information. However, it may or may not produce the desired result (Hanser 2004). By using weak tie *guanxi*, graduates sometimes can get interview opportunities or can simplify the interview procedures, but weak-tie *guanxi* are often not influential enough to help them to secure a job.

Conclusion

In the transition from education to work, a graduates' ability is very important in their job-hunting experiences, but *guanxi* are like a catalyst in helping graduates to stand out from their many well-matched competitors. Participation in extensive networks will enable people to have more diverse and richer social resources (Zang 2003, p. 116), and job-seekers who have *guanxi* networks tend to end up with better jobs (Zang 2003). As Nan Lin argues, "the higher a person's niche in the socioeconomic hierarchy in a society, the more social resources he or she commands" (cited in Guo 2008, p. 40). In this research, I found that for bureaucratic jobs such as civil servants, teachers, or management positions in state-owned enterprises, strong *guanxi* connections—especially family *guanxi* networks— effectively stimulate graduates' chances of being hired.

It is generally accepted that the more *guanxi* connections a person has, the more resources are at his/her disposal for mutual privilege (Bian 1994, p. 103). All of my participants acknowledged the importance of having wide *guanxi* networks in enhancing the outcomes of their job-seeking: they either used *guanxi* to secure a job or else they did not get a job due to lack of *guanxi* connections. For graduates, family *guanxi* are the most dependable and are most frequently used in their job-searching activities in Shanghai, in which local graduates have a greater advantage over non-local graduates. Non-local graduates who have weak family *guanxi* networks in Shanghai are more likely to seek and expand their indirect *guanxi* and weak ties such as those involving teachers, friends and acquaintances so as to gain job recruitment information and seek for interview opportunities. In the final analysis, the quality of

guanxi connections, as social capital, are determined by one's socio-economic origin, as I have elaborated in Chapter 4, one's socio-economic background determines the amount of capital one can mobilise in their job hunting, which also affect the degree of their upward social mobility. In the next chapter, I discuss the transition experiences of a special group of graduates, those who participated in the Free Teachers Training Education, and examine how the main factors discussed in the previous chapters (class, *hukou*, gender and *guanxi*) as well as the Free Education Policy affect their education-to-work transition.

Chapter 8: A Case Study: The Job-Hunting Experiences of Teacher-Training Graduates in China

In Chapters Four to Seven I discussed the effect of social factors (class, *hukou*, gender and *guanxi* networks) on graduates' job-hunting experiences. In this chapter I will examine the transition experiences of a special group of graduates who received free higher education (teachers training) in Shanghai. I explore how the social factors discussed in previous chapters, as well as the free education policy, have affected their transition experiences. Most of the graduates were from socio-economically less developed backgrounds and were supposed to return to their home towns to become school teachers after graduation. However, in 2011, when the first Free Teacher-Training students were about to graduate from university, many problems began to become obvious.

The Free Teacher-Training Policy

China's Tuition-Free Teacher-Training Policy was announced by Premier Wen Jiabao at the National People's Congress (NPC) and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in 2007. It aimed to train and increase the number of qualified teachers across China, in order to improve overall teaching quality among primary- and high-school teachers, as well as to promote equality among different regions in the process of educational development (Ministry of Education 2007).

Actually, this policy was released at a critical juncture of massive graduate unemployment and severe economic crisis (Anderlini 2008; Bai 2006). In my opinion, this policy was a government strategy aiming to achieve two things at one stroke. By effectively pushing graduates to work in the less popular regions of western China, it could not only help to improve the teaching quality of the western provinces, but also could alleviate the problem of graduate unemployment on the east coast.

Six "normal" universities (that is, universities focusing on teacher training and pedagogy) were chosen for the pilot project: Beijing Normal University, East China Normal University, Northeast Normal University, Shaanxi Normal University, Huazhong Normal University, and Southwest University (Ministry of Education 2007).

Table 2: Number of Free Teacher-Training students and recruiting regions among universities, 2007

University	Number of Free Teacher-Training students (2007)	Recruited area
Beijing Normal University	466	100% from western China
East China Normal University	1000	95% from western and central China; 5% from Shanghai
Northeast China Normal University	1352	Focus on central and western China
Shaanxi Normal University	2600	90% from central and western China
Huazhong Normal University	2200	40% from Hubei province; the remainder mainly from western China
Southwest University	2945	Mainly western China
Total	10563	

Source: www.china.com.cn/info/zhuanti/08jylps/200805/06/content_15086273_2.htm

From 2007 to 2009, the six universities recruited 34,000 Free Teacher-Training students. Most of the students recruited by the six universities were from the western provinces, as illustrated in Table 1 for 2007, above. Free Teacher-Training students do not have to pay tuition fees. The universities' funding comes directly from government financial allocation; the universities provide free accommodation, and a small amount of living allowance is allocated from the central government (400 *yuan* per month, about AU$64 per month). However, as a condition, the students have to sign a contract to work as a teacher in their home province for at least ten years after graduation. If they break their contract, they will be recorded as having no credibility, which will adversely affect their search for new jobs, and they will have to pay a fine of 150 per cent of the total tuition fee, which could add up to 75,000 Chinese *yuan*[31] (about AU$11,400) (Ministry of Education 2007).

In China, the east-west economic development disparity is very obvious, with the east coast being far more developed than the inland west.[32] As a result, people's social status is strongly shaped by region, since different regions affect opportunities differently. To most of the Free Teacher-Training graduates, joining the Free Teacher-Training Programme was probably the only way that they could have afforded a tertiary education. Although it was claimed that the Free Teacher-Training Policy would support poor students to gain higher education (Ministry of Education 2007; Zhang 2007), it actually restricted their geographic mobility, by restricting the

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[31] Note:1 Chinese yuan=0.2 Australian Dollars

[32] In 2011, for example, the GDP of Shanghai, Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province of the Yangtze Delta in the east coast was 1.25 trillion *yuan*, 2.6 trillion *yuan* and 1.8 trillion *yuan* respectively; while in western China, the GDP of Gansu Province, Qinghai Province and Xinjiang Province was only 0.27 trillion *yuan*, 0.08 trillion *yuan*, and 0.35 trillion *yuan*, respectively. The per capita disposable income for East, West, Middle, and Northeast parts of China in 2011 was 29,226 *yuan*, 19,868.03 *yuan*, 19,868.19 *yuan* and 20163.20 *yuan*, respectively (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2012).

choice of workplace of all Free Teacher-Training graduates and forcing them to return to their home province upon graduation to teach for at least ten years.

Backgrounds

Existing research on the Free Teacher-Training Programme mainly explores the issue by focusing either on the policy of free education for education students (Zhang 2007; Hu 2009; Hu and Zhang 2011), or on the professional commitment of such students (Gao and He 2011). There is scant research that focuses on the transition experiences of the graduates in question, particularly their struggles and the challenges they face. Through this chapter I wish to explore their lives, to better understand how this policy benefits their education, how it enables them to have big dreams but at the same time constrains them within a framework, and how this influences their careers, further education and relationships, and to a deeper extent, supports the social status reproduction of the graduates.

In a review of youth transitions studies, Du Bois-Reymond (1998) argued that modern young people in Europe no longer grow up "within a framework", to follow the life course of a "normal biography", like their parents did, because everything changes so quickly nowadays. The predictability of actions and developments is reduced, which in turn affects youth transition experiences. A draft or blue-print for a desired future will never become reality in the way it was planned due to the constantly changing circumstances (Du Bois-Reymond 1998, p. 63).

The same situation is happening in China, that is, young people are experiencing a prolonged period of youth and they are experiencing more uncertainty in the transition to adulthood, while at the same time they require more freedom to choose their future careers, life-styles, and so forth. They may also choose a totally different working area from that for which they have been trained in universities. The transition experience of Free Teacher-Training graduates shows the conflicts between a "normal biography" and a "choice biography". Those graduates were expected to stay within the linear "normal" biography to finish their education and then return to their home town to become teachers. However, due to their changing circumstances (that is, four years' experience of living and studying in big cities), they developed the desire for a "choice" biography which was open and constructed personally, and would enable them to make their own decisions on education, profession, job, place of residence, spouse, and the like (Beck 1992).

Swartz (1997) notes that "[i]ndividuals and groups draw upon a variety of cultural, social, and symbolic resources in order to maintain and enhance their positions in the social order" (p. 73). Bourdieu (1985) refers to these resources as forms of capital. In social space, people are distributed based on both the overall volume of the capital that they possess and the types of capital they possess. People's 'sense of place' in social space is based on the amount and type of capital held. In the case of the Free Teacher-Training graduates, they have been restricted to a social (and geographic) space where the cultural capital they accumulated through higher education is not enough for significant social mobility. They do enjoy some social mobility, as most of their parents are farmers and they now become teachers. However, higher

education has not enabled full social transformation due to the graduates' (or their parents') limited economic and social capital.

Reasons for Applying to the Programme

Before I discuss their transition experiences, I want to look at who the participants in this programme are. As we can see from Table 1, most students were recruited from the less-developed areas in mid-to-western China, where the per-capita disposable income is much lower than that of the east coast regions. It is easy to understand that the east coast is far more attractive to intelligent young people because it has a higher level of socio-economic development, offers higher salaries and has more mature infrastructure. Shanghai, among the most developed Chinese cities with the fame of modern culture and fashion, is one of the most attractive higher education destinations.

ECNU is the only university in Shanghai which has the Free Teacher Training Programme, and all the data from interviewees in this chapter were elicited from Free Teacher-Training graduates at ECNU. The data was obtained through nine semi-structured interviews with Programme graduates between April and June 2011.

Table 2, below, summarizes the profiles of the interviewees. Interview times were chosen at the convenience of the interviewees, and were all conducted on the ECNU campus. Interviewees' names are all pseudonyms to keep their identities confidential.

Table 3: Profile of Graduate Interviewees

Name	Age	Gender	Home Province	Employment Area
Lan	24	Female	Heilongjiang	Heilongjiang
Zhao	23	Female	Gansu	Jiangsu[33]
Wang	23	Male	Guizhou	Guizhou
Yi	23	Male	Hunan	Hunan
Ying	23	Female	Xinjiang	Xinjiang
Pan	23	Male	Jiangsu	Xinjiang
Lu	23	Female	Jiangsu	Jiangsu
Xia	23	Female	Xinjiang	Xinjiang

Above all, we should not assume that young people plan out their life trajectories self-consciously. Their "act of choosing is circumscribed by the specific socioeconomic and cultural conditions in which they are located" (Nilan 2011, p. 24). The parents of Free Teacher-Training students usually did not go on to tertiary education, and they could not actually give their children any constructive suggestions as to which university or major they should choose. Sometimes there was someone in the family who had been to university, and both the parents and the students were likely to ask for their suggestions and take their advice. Most of the time, it was high-school teachers who were considered more worldly-wise and more authentic as advisors, and the students would usually turn to their high school teachers for suggestions. There was a lot of propaganda from high school teachers to persuade the students to apply for the Free Teacher-Training Education Programme,

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[33] Zhao is the only one among my interviews who managed to find a job in the east coast. But she also needed to pay a huge fine for not fulfilling the duty of the Free Teachers Training policy.

while the information about the obligation to return and teach for ten years was minimised in the propaganda, as my interviewee Zhao recollected.

Established in 1951, ECNU is the first and the top national normal university of China (Lin 2011). Originally founded to train school teachers, the university is now a comprehensive research university sponsored by the national programmes "Project 211"and "Project 985" It is famous in the areas of humanities, social sciences, technology innovation and education. With its (inter)national fame, two beautiful campuses[34] and excellent location (in Shanghai), ECNU is a much-desired university for students all over the nation. It requires very high college entrance examination scores, especially for non-local students. The Free Teacher-Training graduates are no exception, all of them having been admitted to that university after having achieved excellent results in the college entrance examination.

Entry to Tuition-Free Teacher Training is through early admission, which is an additional university application choice for the students. If aspirants fail early admission, this still does not affect their choices for regular admission. As such, their school teachers would often suggest the students apply in order to "try their luck", as there would have been no harm in trying. However, once admitted, such students cannot go to their other first-choice universities. Most of the Free Teacher-Training students were encouraged to apply for early admission, but did not actually expect to win a place, since the admission score was usually very high, and they had been made to believe that they would not be so "lucky".

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[34] ECNU was used as a filming location for many television series on young people and school lives, and it is famed as having the most beautiful campus in China.

Lan, for one, a girl from Heilongjiang Province in the northeast of China, near the border with Russia, had dreamed of studying at ECNU since she was in high school. When she applied to various universities after the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), she found that in Heilongjiang, ECNU only recruited Free Teacher-Training students. She thought the admission score would be so high that she would not be accepted, which would not affect her first choice, so she applied without paying much attention to the restrictions of this policy.

Furthermore, students from impoverished families regarded this programme as a respectable choice to lighten the burden on their family. My interviewee Zhao, a girl from a farming family in Gansu Province in the northwest of China, said that she was quite motivated by the fact that she did not have to pay for tuition. Since Zhao was young, her parents were poor and had had to leave the family behind to look for casual manual work so they could send money back to the family. Zhao grew up with her grandparents, and even as an adult, she only had the opportunity to meet her parents once a year. She applied for the Free Teacher-Training Programme in order to reduce the heavy financial burden on her parents. She explained:

> When I was in high school I had never thought of coming to Shanghai. In my last semester of high school, the Free Teacher-Training Policy came out, and our teacher produced a lot of propaganda on how good this policy was, and, as well, about how good ECNU in Shanghai is; and, especially if we could be admitted [to the programme], the education would be totally free. I am from a farming family, so I was quite motivated by the free education…. It wasn't really that I liked teaching very much. (Interview date: 8/3/2011)

Some students chose this programme because they or their family thought of teaching as a promising career with a secure income and stable position. They

exemplify how selected occupations are also "outcomes of family negotiations and local cultural influences" (Nilan 2011, p. 21). Zhao elaborates:

> My parents went to another province to '*da gong* (find casual jobs)' after I was born, so when I applied for universities, I was all by myself, and I had no idea [about to which university to apply], so I listened to whatever the teacher said….I applied to the Free Teacher-Training Programme because our teacher said it was good. I nominated geography also because our teacher said there was a lack of geography teachers in our province and if I studied geography I could find a job back home easily after graduation…. Personally I prefer biology and chemistry….I feel quite regretful [about having chosen geography]. (Interview date: 8/3/2011)

Wang, a boy from Guizhou Province in southwest China, said he chose ECNU based on a discussion with his parents. He said that, as he had an introverted personality, he did not want to learn business or commerce, which would involve a lot of public relations, and so finally they reached agreement that being a teacher would be the most suitable career for him. He applied for ECNU because he had a second cousin who went to university at ECNU and settled in Shanghai afterwards. The only trouble he had was that he had planned to further his education and did not expect to return to Guizhou after graduation, but ECNU only recruited Free Teacher-Training students in his province. "ECNU is a very good university", he said. It was just that he had to give up his initial plan, which made him quite sorry.

As we can see from the above, most students who join the Free Teacher-Training Programme do not voluntarily acquiesce in the condition to go back to their hometown to work as school teachers for ten years. They apply to this project due to their particular situations—either that they are in economic difficulty, or because it is the only option they are given in order to attend their ideal university. It is not difficult to imagine that when such students are about to graduate, they are going to face a lot of challenges and dilemmas in their transition experiences.

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Challenges in Graduates' Job-Hunting Experiences

There are always some challenges and difficulties in the transition from education to work. However, some of the challenges and dilemmas the Free Teacher-Training graduates face are due to the restrictions of the policy. They feel they are "pawns" in government policy. Here I will talk about their problems regarding their relationships, further education and educational credentials during their transition from education to work.

Relationships

An article in the *Yangtze Daily* once reported that two lovers who had received Free Teacher Training at Huazhong Normal University shed tears at a job fair because they could not work in the same city (Qu 2011). From my interviews, I found that such examples are quite common: Free Teacher-Training graduates either break up with their partners after they find a job, or insist on being together, but with little hope that they will stay together. The path where one person in the couple quits a good job opportunity and follows his/her partner to that partner's province is very rarely taken. When talking about her effort to try to find a job in her boyfriend's city—Nanjing, capital city of Jiangsu Province on the Yangtze River Delta – one study participant said:

> [A] lot of my classmates have broken up with their boyfriend or girlfriend because they were not able to work in the same city….I myself am struggling, too, but at least I haven't given up….I am still hoping that they [(the Education Bureau of her province)] would allow me to break the contract. (Interview date: 7/3/2011)

In her final semester of university, Lan found a job in a high school in her boyfriend's city, Nanjing, but the Jiangsu Education Bureau refused to accept her because she was a Free Teacher-Training graduate from another province. According to the policy, in some exceptional cases graduates can apply for trans-provincial jobs, but there is no definition of what constitutes an exceptional case.

Lan went to the Bureau of Education in her province many times to inquire about quitting the programme, and her parents even supported her in paying the fine in order to be set free from the restriction, but the only reply she received was that there was as yet no policy on quitting the programme and the Bureau of Education had not made a decision on how to deal with such cases, and merely asked her to talk to her university. "I just have to submit to the policy. There is no way to quit, no way, even if I want to pay the fine", Lan complained. The university's attitude towards her case, according to Lan, was: "They do not accept such applications while we are still at university, and then when we graduate, it is not their business any more, and we have to negotiate with the Education Bureau of our province". Lan felt very disappointed and angry that no one would care about her appeal. The mass media only talked about the benefits of the programme while the government was reluctant to set those Teacher-Training graduates free from the restriction.

Lan's boyfriend was an officer in the army, and she explained: "He cannot transfer his job in the army to my province. In that case, we will have to be separated, and I don't know for how long we could carry on." They had been boyfriend and girlfriend for three years, and every time they talked about Lan's job, the conversation ended up in a desperate quarrel:

I have to work in Heilongjiang for ten years….In ten years everything will be so settled…. I have a feeling of being cheated [by the policy]….I was so young when I applied for this programme. I never imagined that one day things would work out this way, and that one day I would find that this programme is not suitable for me. (Interview date: 7/3/2011)

Subsequently, Lan has been working as a geography teacher in a high school in her hometown, having broken up with her boyfriend in June 2012.

Another graduate, Wang, told me that most Free Teacher-Training students deliberately try to find a boyfriend or girlfriend from their home province. His girlfriend is also a Free Teacher-Training student from Guizhou province, which means they will both return to their home town to work as high school teachers. He said that he had already anticipated the difficulties of the situation if he had a girlfriend from another province, so he tried consciously to avoid it happening. According to Wang, in the first or second year of university, there were quite a few couples who were from different provinces in his class, but from the third year on, this situation changed dramatically, and now most of his classmates had boyfriends or girlfriends from the same province.

According to the policy, graduates from the more developed provinces can work in less- developed provinces without paying any fine, and students can move between less- developed provinces without a fine; but graduates from the less-developed provinces cannot work in more developed ones. This shows the government's intention vis-à-vis this policy: to improve the teaching resources in the less-developed areas.

Thus, it is very common to see Free Teacher-Training graduates break up with their lovers upon graduation if they are not from the same province, as they are all supposed to go back to their hometowns. Yi is a young man from Hunan Province in inland China. He broke up with his girlfriend and returned to his home town to be a high school chemistry teacher. "There is little chance that we can be together", he said. "She doesn't want to leave her home town since she is the only child and has to take care of her parents, and my parents won't allow me to leave them, either". Yi had twin younger sisters who were at pre-primary school, and he had to help his mother take care of them, since his father worked in a construction patrol and was always moving from place to place. Heavy family responsibilities made it impossible for him to follow his girlfriend to her home town.

By contrast, exceptions do exist. During my interview, I met one couple—Pan and Ying—and was told that Pan, the boyfriend, chose to follow his girlfriend Ying to work in her home town. Pan and Ying fell in love with each other at university. Pan was from Anhui province near the Yangtze River Delta, not far from Shanghai, and Ying was a girl from Xinjiang province on the far north-western border of China. Before I interviewed them, I heard that they were having a difficult time because they had both found jobs in their respective home towns. I was quite reluctant to ask about their future plans for their relationship in front of both of them, so I asked for permission to interview them separately. To my surprise, at the very beginning of the interview, Pan told me he had decided to go to Xinjiang with Ying, even though he had already found a job in the best high school in Hefei, the capital city of Anhui.

"I would love my girlfriend to join me in Anhui, but her province would not let her go", said Pan. As a result, Pan gave up his job in Anhui province and joined his girlfriend to teach in a small town in Xinjiang. "I will only work there for ten years," he said. "After ten years we will return to the east coast. We will settle down in Qingdao [in Shandong Province] or Hangzhou [in Zhejiang Province (both cities being on the east coast)], and I would like to try some other career— maybe I can start my own business." After hearing of his plan, his parents were quite relieved and supported Pan's decision. To be able to work in the same city as their boy- or girlfriend is perhaps not so difficult for ordinary university graduates, but it is a big decision for Free Teacher-Training graduates because it could cost them ten years of time together and would probably change their whole life trajectory.

Further Education

All graduates in the Free Teacher Training Programme can apply for entry to a summer school course to earn a Master's degree in education. However, that qualification is not as valuable as the commonly acknowledged or recognised Master's degree. Even though this seems to be a favourable policy for the Free Teacher-Training graduates, all my interviewees had some complaints and worries about their further education.

Graduates like Wang and Lan dreamed of going to ECNU, but, unfortunately, ECNU only recruited Free Teacher-Training students from their provinces (Guizhou and Heilongjiang), so they had to give in and join the Free Teacher-Training Programme in order to attend ECNU. "I wasn't happy with this policy, because I planned to study for a postgraduate degree and work in Shanghai for a few more years, and even

though I will have to go back to Guizhou eventually, I didn't want to go back so early", said Wang. Thus, some graduates who are talented in their discipline might be better served by becoming researchers than high-school teachers, but the policy restricts them from pursuing further education.

One of Pan's roommates is very talented in mathematics, but, according to Pan, the young man in question was

> more suitable to do research than to become a high-school teacher. I think this policy should change in some circumstances. It should allow a certain per centage of students, for example, the top students, to further their education, rather than to become a high-school teacher. (Interview date: 23/03/2011)

Pan also shared a story of a female classmate who had been awarded an ECNU first-class scholarship and a national scholarship for four years. She was an excellent student, but was too introverted to talk in front of students, and was of course experiencing a difficult time in job-hunting. In Pan's eyes, to force such students to become high school teachers rather than letting them do research was a waste of talent: "They are not suitable for teaching in high school, but they can be good researchers. Unfortunately, due to the restrictions of the Free Teacher-Training Policy, they have no choice" (Interview date: 23/3/2011).

Not being able to further their education through postgraduate study also greatly affects graduates' job opportunities, since nowadays more and more high schools require teachers to hold at least a Master's degree. Another graduate, Yi, talked about his interview experiences in several high schools in Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province. He found that Free Teacher-Training graduates were not very

competitive in the job market since they only had a Bachelor's degree. "If you only have a Bachelor's degree, your chance of getting a job is very slim", he explained. At one job interview, in order to give the principal a good impression, he and his friend went to the Principal's office and tried to introduce themselves. However, the Principal said that there were already too many applicants with a Master's degree, and the school would not recruit a graduate with only a Bachelor's degree. The Principal explained that the only reason why the school had allowed Yang and his friend to apply for the position was that the Education Bureau stipulated that high schools should give every Free Teacher-Training graduate an opportunity to compete for the job.

> However, that doesn't mean every graduate really has equal opportunity. They will not tell you directly. Most graduates like me can only take part in the first-round written examination, while only postgraduates and experienced high school teachers can present a trial lecture in the second round. (Interview date: 24/6/2011)

Such incidents are commonly seen, especially in good schools or in more developed cities. Despite the fact that Free Teacher-Training graduates were successful in high school and were doing very well at university, they are less competitive in the job market due to their lack of sufficient cultural capital (in this case, Master's credentials), which results from the restrictions of the Free Teacher-Training Policy.

How Social Factors Affect Free Teacher-Training Graduates' Job-hunting Experiences

Hukou

As I discussed in Chapter Five, the *hukou* system was designed not only to provide population statistics and identify personal status, but also to link people to state-provided benefits and opportunities. *Hukou* helps preserve regional labour market segregation, which has a tremendous impact on university graduates' employment opportunities. Because all the free education graduates are sent back to their home province to work, one would presume that there would be no problem with the *hukou*. However, even within a province, graduates from less-developed cities who want to find a job in the capital city are also faced with *hukou* obstacles, as my interviewee Xia remarked:

> I have a friend who graduated from Huazhong Normal University and found a job in a high school in Ürümqi, but she couldn't sign the contract with the school because the Education Bureau found out that she doesn't have a local *hukou*. (Interview date: 8/3/2011)

Take Xinjiang Autonomous Region for example: all the Free Teacher-Training graduates from there compete to find a job in the capital city, Ürümqi, which is far more developed than other cities or areas of the province. Graduates with a local *hukou* are given priority by the Ürümqi Education Bureau, and those who do not have a local *hukou* have to wait until all the local students are allocated jobs, after which the non-locals can apply for a vacant position.

Gender

Generally speaking, female graduates have more tortuous job-hunting experiences than their male counterparts, even though sometimes their GPAs (Grade Point Averages) are much higher than those of males. Researchers on youth transitions in Western countries have found that "[d]espite the faith invested in education as a means of social mobility and the increasing emphasis on personal choice, young people's transition remains strongly influenced by the social divisions of gender and class" (Dwyer and Wyn 2001, p. 123). I assert that this equally applies to the situation in China. Gender is a strong factor that employers usually consider when recruiting new teachers, as one male interviewee stated:

> It is very obvious that high schools do not want to recruit female graduates. For us boys, we only need one interview. The principals ask the boys to sign a contract right after their trial lecture, regardless of their performance, but most girls will be eliminated. A girl in my class had to go back and forth more than six times between Shanghai and her home town for interviews with a school. (Interview date: 24/6/2011)

Ying, the girlfriend of interviewee Pan, mentioned above, applied for a position in a famous high school in Ürümqi. After an online interview, she was asked to go to Ürümqi for a face-to-face interview, with the intimation that they would hire her. She was very satisfied and immediately booked the ticket to fly all the way from Shanghai to Ürümqi—a distance of about 4,500 kilometres. She was well prepared and was very confident in answering all the questions, and the interviewers seemed quite pleased with her performance. Everything went so smoothly that she was quite convinced that she would get the job. However, on the following day she was informed that the school was not going to employ her. The Principal admitted that she performed very well at the interview and everyone was impressed, but another

male graduate had also applied for this position and the school decided to employ him instead. "It was so unfair! I was so angry, but I couldn't refute it because the reason they gave was that I was not a boy", said Ying. "Why did they ask me to travel such a long distance if they did not want a girl?" (Interview date: 23/3/2011). It was minus thirty-six degrees Celsius and had snowed heavily on that day, and Ying felt she was on the brink of collapse.

Another interviewee, Liu, was a Free Teacher-Training graduate majoring in Chinese language. She found a job in Hefei Number X High School. However, when she was about to sign the contract, the Hefei Education Bureau assigned a male graduate to that school. Due to the limited number of vacant positions, the school decided to give both of them another interview. In the end, the male graduate won and took Liu's place. "The interview was just a formality: they just prefer boys", Liu commented after her second interview (Interview date: 23/3/2011).

As I discussed in Chapter Four, women's dual responsibilities for both career and family roles, in addition to the expected significant interruptions (such as maternity leave) in their careers for the accommodation of their family responsibilities, disadvantage their competitiveness in the job market. As scholars have argued, despite women's increasing participation in higher education, "women have not transformed their educational achievements into labour-force advantage" (Dwyer and Wyn 2001, p. 131), due to gender discrimination in the job market.

Guanxi Connections

As I discussed in Chapter Seven, *guanxi* networks, as a form of social capital, play a significant role in helping to secure a good job. Even though Free Teacher-Training graduates are guaranteed a job by the policy, *guanxi* networks still play a very significant role in their job-hunting experiences. Positions in the good schools are usually competitive and very difficult to get, and *guanxi* is almost a prerequisite for a good job in a good school.

The abovementioned Zhao was the only one in her class who succeeded in quitting the programme. She paid the fine by borrowing money from her parents and relatives, though the fine was equal to two years' salary for her. She attributed part of the reason she quit the programme to corruption in the education system in her home town, saying: "I didn't want to quit the programme until the last semester". However, she was discouraged from going back to her home town because of her job-seeking experiences in Lanzhou:

> Last December I went back to Lanzhou to try to find a job, but most schools are not recruiting teachers, especially the ones that I wanted to join. I only had one interview with a high school, a very ordinary school. I taught two trial lectures then the head of school said he couldn't make a decision right away and would contact me later. (Interview date: 8/3/2011)

One of her high-school teachers suggested she needed to find some "connections (*guanxi*)", or maybe that she needed to send some money (meaning to bribe the school principal). She was very disappointed to hear that, and said: "If I have to bribe the Principal in order to get that job [in Lanzhou], I'd rather pay the fine to stay on the east coast". After that interview, she went back to Shanghai and was recruited

by a school from neighbouring Jiangsu Province right after the interview. She explained:

> I discussed this with my parents. They both thought it was a good opportunity for me, and they said it was worth the money [(that is, the fine that she had to pay)] to be able to stay in the east. They borrowed the money from some relatives, and I signed the contract....Even though the fine is as much as two years' salary for me, I think it is worth the money. (Interview date: 08/03/2011)

However, even though Zhao did pay the fine and should have been set free from the policy, she still had to work as a teacher for at least ten years in Jiangsu Province before she could study for a Master's degree or change to work in other areas.

There were a few graduates who chose to quit the programme as Zhao did, but only graduates from certain provinces were allowed to do this. For example, in some provinces the teaching positions were all filled and they did not need new recruits. Even so, the quitting process in those provinces is still not very clear: universities and education bureaus are always shifting their responsibilities onto each other.

It is paradoxical that the lack of social capital such as *guanxi* connections again puts these Free Teacher-Training graduates in a rather disadvantaged position. These students hoped that through higher education they could gain enough cultural capital to find a better job than their parents had done, and even to lead a modern life in a big city. However, because of their lower-class origin, their job-hunting experiences are filled with obstacles due to their lack of social capital. Thus, although this programme clearly enables young people to begin to climb the social ladder, the

experiences of these young graduates show how education reproduces social inequality.

Conclusion

China's Free Teacher-Training Policy does have some positive effects: it has helped students from impoverished backgrounds receive higher education and has sent those graduates back to improve educational quality in those areas; it also has helped to relieve university graduate unemployment in urban China. However, the students' goals and life expectations change as they became more mature during their four years of higher education. Their vision broadens along with their experiences of living in Shanghai. The lower salaries in the western provinces, which contrast with the higher salaries in east coast cities[35], plus the experience of modern living in the big cities, makes it difficult for the students to accept work in poor regions, as my interviewees' remarks have shown.

Most Free Teacher-Training graduates are from backgrounds with little economic and social capital, and education is regarded as the only way to gain cultural capital in order to realise upward social mobility. However, the restrictions of this policy have strongly affected the outcome of higher education. The educational returns of those graduates are largely reduced. Their careers as teachers are very different from the jobs available to their parents' generation, but they cannot go further to realise geographical mobility to the big cities to enjoy a modern urban life. Upward social

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[35] The average monthly salary in Shanghai in 2011 was 4331 Chinese *yuan*, while that in Gansu Province was 2742 *yuan* (Shanghai Statistical Bureau 2012; Gansu Statistical Bureau 2012).

mobility through the medium of higher education is limited for those graduates, which is a combined effect of their poor socio-economic backgrounds as well as the Free Teacher-Training Policies.

Other studies of youth transitions have pointed out that other, non-educational or work aspects of young people's lives should be taken seriously so as to bridge the gap between policy and practice in education (Dwyer and Wyn 2001). To this end, the young generation's voice should be heard (Dwyer and Wyn 2001). I argue that policy-makers should take the Free Teacher-Training graduates' voice into consideration and make adjustments to the Free Training Policy, to allow students to pursue trans-provincial jobs and to further their education, in order to make it more beneficial to those students.

In contrast to the ten-year contract which binds graduates to their jobs, I assert that there should be a sophisticated policy regarding quitting the programme, prolonging education, trans-provincial employment, and so forth. Preferably, students should be consulted in the design of the policies in which they are expected to participate. As a study by the European Group for Integrated Social Research (EGRIS) argues, "a broader view of the changes in the transition to adulthood needs to be taken, since the loss of predictability, the increased risks and the emergence of new biographical options have turned transition into a reality of its own" (European Group for Integrated Social Research 2001, p. 101). Students, universities and education bureaus are all responsible for contributing to the refinement of China's Free Teacher-Training Policy, in order to realise the programme's goal of improving the average teaching quality among school teachers.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This dissertation explores the education-to-work transition experiences of university graduates in Shanghai, China. I have examined the struggles and challenges that these young people have faced in their job-hunting experiences upon graduation, and have explored the factors of great influence on their transition experiences. In order to examine the struggles and challenges, I conducted six months of fieldwork in Shanghai to conduct interviews with graduates, and I then analysed the way different groups of graduates engaged with these transitions in the context of economic and social changes in contemporary China.

This study illustrated that despite the fact that higher education empowers graduates through providing them with cultural capital, other factors such as class, the household registration system (*hukou* system), gender and government policies also greatly affect the outcomes of their education-to-work transition and their eventual upward social mobility. In later chapters I showed how those factors affect graduates' job-hunting experiences, which in turn affect the possibilities for social mobility. In concluding, I review my main arguments and findings, draw attention to the contributions this thesis has made to the literature, while acknowledging the limitations of this study by suggesting possible areas for future research.

Main Findings of the Thesis

I chose to conduct my fieldwork in Shanghai not only because it is one of the most developed metropolitan cities in China, but also because it enabled me to interact with a wide range of young graduates from all over China, and to situate their experiences within the present socio-economic context. Moreover, it is also the city where I have had my own transition difficulties and struggles, which allows a reflective perspective in my study.

In the education-to-work transition of graduates, social class origin plays an influential role in upward social mobility. The uneven nature of socio-economic development in China, both in terms of the urban-rural difference and east-west disparity, has had a serious impact on the educational opportunities of students of different class origins. For students from underprivileged backgrounds, education is often considered to be the only way to realise upward social mobility. However, the poor quality of education in the rural areas, the skewed higher education entrance scores that favour urban students, and the increasing higher education tuition fees all put students of rural or poorer backgrounds, especially those from western regions of China, at a disadvantage. Due to their lack of economic, social and symbolic capital, the returns from higher education for such individuals are much lower than for graduates of urban or upper-class backgrounds. The ability of higher education to promote upward social mobility is moderated by socio-economic origin.

The existing *hukou* system divides Chinese society according to a rural-urban dichotomy with different entitlements to welfare and privileges, which set the roots

of class difference. This study of graduates' transition experiences has shown how the *hukou* system creates dual categories of economic status between local and non-local graduates in Shanghai. Graduates who have a local *hukou* have more opportunities in the job market and are more competitive for well-paid and high status jobs such as civil servants, bank staff or positions in state-owned enterprises. Non-local graduates, if they fail to gain a local *hukou*, are like second-class citizens in Shanghai. They are deprived of equal rights for welfare and benefits, such as medical care, the housing subsidy and education rights for the next generation. For non-local graduates, higher education enables them to move temporarily to Shanghai to realise geographic mobility, but the *hukou* system sets up a barrier to prevent them reaching full citizenship and hinders their upward social mobility in Shanghai.

Both Chinese men and women are better educated now than ever before, and women's education has greatly improved, with increasing numbers of women receiving higher education. Women's social status has improved significantly over the last three decades, and women now play an important role in the Chinese workforce. However, gender is still a strong factor in graduates' transition expectations and experiences; the traditional Chinese gender ideology still greatly affects graduates' decisions towards further education.

Chinese women now can have high achievement in education; however, the higher their academic degree, the more influential other factors such as age and marital status become. Female graduates can have a job and be economically independent, but the most important virtue for women according to persisting patriarchal value orientations is to be family-oriented after marriage, and to make sacrifices for their

husband's success. In this research, women have been found to limit their ambitions by being reluctant to pursue a higher degree such as a doctorate of philosophy, because they fear the harsh social judgment that they have lost their femininity. Those women who pursue career success are often suspected of compromising their family responsibilities in the self-interested pursuit of a successful career.

Social attitudes are much more tolerant of male graduates who want to further their education, and job opportunities for men are in proportion to their academic achievement. However, men experience more pressure to have a successful career, since they are expected to support the whole family.

In general, the gender discourses among the graduates did not diverge far from the traditional patriarchal gender ideology: both female and male graduates plan their future according to the social norms, women to be family-oriented and men to be the breadwinners. However, these attitudes are actually contrary to the Chinese government's policy of educating more people for the benefit of the whole country, since if highly-trained female graduates do not want careers and only want low-level jobs, it does not constitute a good return upon the investment in higher education for the whole country and is a waste of female talent for the workforce. Adherence to Chinese traditional gender ideology means that education is not empowering women to further their education or seek ambitious jobs in line with their higher education, nor is it giving them more autonomy compared with their male counterparts. The persisting patriarchal ideology puts limits not just on the other types of capital, but also on the symbolic capital that women can accumulate and deploy. Patriarchal ideology does not allow women to accrue the same prestige as men, which affects

not only women's job prospects, but also evaluations in job interviews. It also means that the fields (in Bourdieu's terminology) in which women can operate successfully are more limited.

The *guanxi* network also plays a critical role in shaping graduates' transitions. *Guanxi* is widely used in graduates' job-hunting. Some scholars, such as Zang (2003), have claimed that job seekers who are able to assemble and deploy strong *guanxi* connections tend to end up with better jobs. I can confirm this claim, as this study also found that strong *guanxi* connections effectively help the graduates to stand out from the many well-qualified and well-matched competitors, and enhance their chances of getting jobs. Among the different types of *guanxi*, I found that family *guanxi* is most commonly used among graduates in their job-hunting; other *guanxi* types include connections exploiting networks among friends, acquaintances, and teachers as well as university lecturers. However, the quality of one's *guanxi* networks is closely related to one's social class background. Even though graduates all gain cultural capital through higher education, those with numerous and high quality *guanxi* connections have greater chances of getting better jobs compared with those without *guanxi* or with lesser or inferior *guanxi*. The way *guanxi* works for graduates is very similar to the way social capital works according to Bourdieu's theory of capital and social reproduction: the yield of educational investment depends on the social capital held. Graduates of humble social class origins, due to their lack of social capital, often have to gain further education in order to realise upward social mobility.

The eighth chapter of this thesis was a case study in which I explored how the social factors discussed in previous chapters (class, *hukou*, gender and *guanxi*) and a particular government policy affect graduates' transition experiences. It explored the job-hunting experiences of a group of graduates who received free education through the Free Teacher Training Policy.

This policy offers students from the less developed regions free higher education in six of the most prestigious teacher-training universities in China, but it requires those graduates to return to their home town to work for 10 years or even longer after they graduate. This policy allows students of impoverished backgrounds to receive higher education and it contributes to the alleviation of graduate unemployment in the big cities in China simply by sending those graduates back to their home provinces. However, the educational and social mobility of those graduates is strongly restricted due to their poor socio-economic backgrounds. Their jobs as teachers are much better than the jobs available to their parents, but they cannot go further to realise their dreams of geographical mobility and a modern urban life. Besides the restrictions in the policy, the factors discussed in previous chapters are also obvious in those graduates' job-hunting experiences. Just as Apple (1982) has argued, education is only part of the overall economic and ideological configuration. Educational mobility interacts with many factors which, in this study of Chinese graduates, include class, the *hukou* system, gender, *guanxi* connections and government policies.

Contributions to the Literature

As discussed by Bourdieu, education is a field in which one struggles for cultural capital (Bourdieu 1973; 1974). Educational mobility is a strategy which sees education as a pathway to social advancement. Nonetheless, Bourdieu also acknowledged that social practices are the result of the multiple forces of one's position in a field and the social arena in which the practices take place (Grenfell 2008). The amount of cultural capital one can accumulate through education is limited by one's social and economic background: social mobility depends on the total amount of capital, which includes economic, social, symbolic and cultural capital. For example, graduates from poor socio-economic backgrounds are placed in a disadvantaged position in the field of education: the way in which the habitus of rural people, such as ways of walking and talking they have absorbed unconsciously as children, also affects their job prospects, as these constitute facets of self-presentation in interviews. Such characteristics are also related to symbolic capital – the amount of prestige that one has been able to accrue. Moreover, graduates' socio-economic backgrounds also determine the range and quality of the strong and weak ties that they can mobilise in job-hunting. Graduates with little economic, social and symbolic capital are thus at great disadvantage, and they usually experience more tortuous transition journeys with limited upward mobility. Attempts at upward mobility through education are thus thwarted, and class distinctions perpetuated.

I wish to make very clear that I am not suggesting that education has had no positive effect for poor graduates. In fact, education has empowered them to have a louder voice in the job market and to improve the relative position of their families in the

social ladder, and, compared to their peers in their home regions, they certainly have achieved a higher social status and potential for further economic mobility. However, I do wish to draw attention to the unequally distributed social, cultural, symbolic and economic capital among graduates of various socio-economic backgrounds, as well as to its important role in mediating the differential upward social mobility of young people of different backgrounds in contemporary China.

In this thesis, rather than analysing the transition issue based upon economic or employment statistics, I have used graduates' personal stories to discuss their experience of this transition, and to show the combined effects of higher education and other social factors on their transition experiences. I have discussed stories about such facets of their transition as: how self-images are redefined due to the lack of a local *hukou*; how the transition struggles lead to the break-up of relationships; how higher education makes way for traditional gender roles; how *guanxi* connections and weak ties affect job hunting; how graduates had high aspirations to become successful, but their dreams and ambitions are diminished due to government policies and lack of social and economic capital. Just as Bourdieu argued, "the trajectory is a consequence of the amount of capital held" (cited in Harker 1990, p. 97), and so their amount of social capital greatly affects graduates' transition experiences.

Implications for Future Research

This research has had some limitations. I was not able to go to the interviewees' hometowns to see their childhood environments and compare these with the

environments of their higher education experience and their early job-seeking efforts. Neither was I able to interview the graduates' parents, which would have helped me to understand the social backgrounds of my interviewees and why they made such transition choices. Moreover, as I have discussed earlier, in some sense Shanghai represents an extreme context for fostering aspirations of life-style that are not as pronounced elsewhere. Thus my research results in Shanghai may have limitations in generalisability as they do not necessarily reflect experiences in the rest of China.

Looking into the future, I wish to do a longitudinal study to further explore my interviewees' lives as they enter the workplace and get married, have children and careers. I would like to study how having a baby affects women's careers and their married lives, how the education they received and this job-hunting experience have affected their attitudes towards the Chinese education system and formed their views about the education prospects of the next generation. I would also like to pursue a longitudinal study of the graduates who received Free Teacher Training Education, to explore their life trajectories and trace the impact of this government policy.

Conclusion: Social Mobility Remains Constrained

This thesis is based on my fieldwork conducted in Shanghai, China. It is a qualitative study of Chinese university graduates' transition experiences as they move out of the world of education to work; it is also a study of the relationship between socio-economic background, education and mobility. My focus has been on how social factors of class, the household registration system (*hukou*), gender ideology and

network connections (*guanxi* networks) have limited the extent of educational mobility among university graduates. It is undeniable that education does lead to social mobility, even for the disadvantaged from rural contexts, as their prospects are much better than those of their parents. However, I wish to point out that the wider access to education does not necessary overturn existing social inequalities, as those at the top remain better able to work the system even when they fail in their education. For the disadvantaged graduates, what education does not lead to is being able to realise their aspirations in Shanghai. In part, it is a matter of how life in Shanghai has raised their aspirations and they have not been able to achieve those. In that sense, social mobility is always relative, and the goalposts keep changing.

Education is believed to be the key to national development and individual advancement, and it is expected to provide a corrective measure for socio-economic inequalities. Much of the debate surrounding education in developing countries and policies for implementing educational reform is based on these assumptions. However, my research shows that the reality of educational mobility is much more complex. There are many factors such as class, gender, social networks and government policies which mediate the effect of education on social mobility. Understanding the complexity of the factors impacting the effects of education is important in formulating better-informed policies on education reform. Educational mobility, as an ideology, maintains the privilege of those who are already privileged; in other words, as a strategy for overcoming inherited inequality, it is very limited in its effectiveness and tends to preserve social difference.

Appendix 1 Human Research Ethics Approval (Reference No. RA/4/1/4491)

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Achieving International Excellence

Research Ethics and Biosafety Office
Research Services
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MBDP: M459

Our Ref: RA/4/1/4491   01 December 2010

Professor Gary Sigley
Social and Cultural Studies (School of)
MBDP: M211

Dear Professor Sigley

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL - THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Transition from University to Work: Dilemmas and Challenges Faced by Graduate Unemployed Youth in Shanghai, China

Student(s): Wen Wen Zhang

Ethics approval for the above project has been granted from 01 December 2010 to 01 December 2011 in accordance with the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (National Statement) and the policies and procedures of The University of Western Australia.

You are reminded of the following requirements:

1. The application and all supporting documentation form the basis of the ethics approval and you must not depart from the research protocol that has been approved.
2. The Human Research Ethics Office must be approached for approval in advance for any requested amendments to the approved research protocol.
3. The Chief Investigator is required to report immediately to the Human Research Ethics Office any adverse or unexpected event or any other event that may impact on the ethics approval for the project.
4. The Chief Investigator must inform the Human Research Ethics Office as soon as practicable if a research project is discontinued before the expected date of completion, providing reasons.

Any conditions of ethics approval that have been imposed are listed below:

Special Conditions

> *None specified*

The University of Western Australia is bound by the National Statement to monitor the progress of all approved projects until completion to ensure continued compliance with ethical standards and requirements.

Please note that the maximum period of ethics approval for this project is five (5) years from the date of this notification. However, ethics approval is conditional upon satisfactory progress reports being received by the designated renewal date for continuation of ethics approval.

The Human Research Ethics Office will forward a request for a Progress Report approximately 60 days before the due date. A further reminder will be forwarded approximately 30 days before the due date.

If your progress report is not received by the due date for renewal of ethics approval, **your ethics approval will expire**, requiring that all research activities involving human participants cease immediately.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Office (HREO) at hreo-

research@uwa.edu.au on (08) 6488 3703.

Please ensure that you quote the file reference – RA/4/1/4491 – and the associated project title in all future correspondence.

Yours sincerely

Peter Johnstone
Manager
Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

1. Please tell me your life story: year and place of birth, education (where and what type of school), how many siblings and what order, occupation of parents.

2. What sort of job did you want when you were at school?

3. Tell me your university experience. (Probe: which unis did you apply for? What majors? What was your first choice? What did you think about the university you ended up at – is it a good university? Is it the major you wanted?)

4. Tell me your job hunting experiences. (E.g. how many interviews have you been to? Did you experience any discrimination regarding gender, *hukou*, and your major?) How do you think of this job hunting period?

5. Did you start applying for jobs when you were still at university? Please tell me about these early job-hunting experiences.

6. Please talk about your (initial) career ambitions when you first entered university.

7. What do you think of your current job? Are you still looking for a job?

8. What do you think of the life in Shanghai? (E.g. the cost of living and wage levels, living pressure, etc.) Is staying in Shanghai you top

priority?

9. When looking for a job, do you consider your partner/boy/girlfriend/families? Does your relationship/s affect your job-hunting?

10. How do you think this job hunting period will affect your relationships?

11. What are the main concerns you have when thinking of getting married? E.g. owning an apartment, having a stable income, etc.

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