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Future Aspirations and Life Choices: A Comparison of Young Adults in Urban China and Taiwan

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Abstract

This dissertation compares aspirations and life-choices among highly educated young adults in urban China and Taiwan: places that, at least notionally, share a cultural heritage while having very different political-economic systems. The objective of my research is to assess how the different socioeconomic and political trajectories of China and Taiwan have influenced young people's decision-making and hopes for the future. Drawing upon 18 months of ethnographic research, I analyze young adults' choices in the areas of education, career and marriage under consideration of their individual social backgrounds and economic resources. In this context I also discuss how feelings of hope, doubt and disenchantment are mitigated by the specific societal atmospheres and ideological discourses.

Whereas stable employment and marriage appeared to be universal goals among my informants, I found that young adults in Beijing had much more autonomy in decision-making than those in Taipei. In my research, I consider various factors behind these findings, which are linked inextricably to the specific socioeconomic and political trajectories of China and Taiwan.

Among other things, China's demographic controls and urban migration policies appear to increase the independence of young people. Further, the prevalence of boarding school education in China compared to Taiwan provides an opportunity for earlier autonomy and independent decision-making in China. Due to China's specific socio-political history, parents of informants in Beijing perceived spatial separation from children as a necessity to secure the future well-being of the family, while parents in Taipei appeared to be more likely to interpret a child's prolonged absence as unfilial behaviour. As a consequence, young adults in Beijing arguably have greater autonomy than young adults in Taipei when it comes to issues such as partner choice, premarital cohabitation and job selection. These differences have an important impact on future expectations of family life and the realization of filial obligations.

However, while young Chinese showed more agency and autonomy in the pursuit of personal goals, their Taiwanese peers were more engaged in communal political activism prompted by an economy with lackluster opportunities for the next generation. Due to the political propaganda of the CCP, young Chinese held a positive outlook for the future of their society which made them less prone to engage in communal action against the ruling party, while disenchantment with the government among young Taiwanese ignited unprecedented student protests in 2014.

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Acknowledgments

Introduction

I. Managing Fate and Fortune - Choice and Risk in China and Taiwan

Pushed forward by the relentless stream of people crowding the narrow alley of the night market, I tried to keep track of Ma-ling who zigzagged her way through chatting families and groups of youngsters who were bargaining for clothes and indulging in late-night snacks. It was easy to become disorientated in the array of stalls, especially as I was not yet used to the design of Taiwanese cities. Suddenly, Ma-ling stopped. I then noticed the richly ornamented Daoist temple emerging between the neon signs and nondescript grey houses. I followed her into the dark building, billows of incense snatching my breath away. As we stepped into the silence that was broken only by muted whispers and the occasional sound of fortune blocks falling on the rough, stone floor, it felt like entering another world. Red and golden statues shimmered amidst plastic flowers and fruit offerings, reflecting the glimmer of countless candles. While my eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness, Ma-ling pulled me towards the lavishly decorated shrine of *Mazu*, the patroness of merchants and seafarers. This popular goddess, worshipped originally in the coastal regions of Southern China, had been taken to Taiwan by early immigrants. Today, Taiwanese people of all ages ask for her blessing before going on a journey.

Only a few weeks ago, Ma-ling had come here to ask for *Mazu's* protection for a weekend trip. With a couple of friends, she wanted to go camping at Sun-Moon Lake at the heart of the island to participate in an annual water sports event. She had been very excited about this trip. Recently, Ma-ling had decided to stop trying to conform to her family's expectations and instead pursue her own aspirations. This weekend trip with a few friends was supposed to be one of her first steps towards a more autonomous life. Everything had been prepared but then something happened that made the group worry their plan might be ill-fated.

One of her friends, a young woman, had been scared by a nightmare. She had dreamt that four[1] people had entered her house unbidden. It appeared to her as though one of the visitors had touched her body, leaving her with the feeling of having being bitten. Anxiously she asked an acquaintance, known for her skills at interpreting dreams, about the meaning of this encounter. The woman explained that these were ghosts wandering around during the current "ghost month" (*gui yue*).[2] But there was no cause for alarm, she explained,

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[1] Four (*si*) is considered to be an inauspicious number as it is reminiscent of the verb "to die" (*si*).
[2] The belief that during the seventh lunar month of the year, mostly August according to the Gregorian calendar, wandering ghosts are released from hell to roam among the living is especially prevalent in Southern

as they had only visited her to play. Ma-ling's friend, however, could not be convinced of the good nature of her nocturnal visitors and Ma-ling was also left with uneasy feelings about their forthcoming trip. What if the dream had been a warning not to participate in the competition? Worried about the possible danger, Ma-ling ventured to the temple to ask for *Mazu's* blessing. Feeling reassured, she then went on the trip with her friends. On the night we visited *Mazu*, Ma-ling renewed her divine protection by acquiring a small charm (*fu*) made of folded paper which she was supposed to carry close to her body to shield her from any malicious spirits that might cross her path in the weeks to come.

During my fieldwork in Taipei, I often observed that young Taiwanese regarded the realization of a plan as dependent not only on careful preparation and personal skills but also on benevolent human and supernatural forces as well as "the right timing." Even though Ma-ling was confident about her swimming skills, she feared that factors largely out of her control might endanger her and her friends. During my subsequent research in China, after I left Taiwan, I encountered a very different attitude to risk and uncertainty that pointed to greater self-reliance among young Chinese people. Particularly memorable is the story of a young Chinese woman whose travel plans were also disrupted.

Xiao-xiao waved her hands wildly when she saw me while she was trying to break out of the stream of people pushing out of Dongzhimen Station in central Beijing. It was a windy Sunday afternoon and the grey sky made the high-rise buildings appear even grimmer than usual. Eager to evade the biting wind, we decided to search for something to eat. While walking, we exchanged our latest news. A few weeks before, Xiao-xiao had planned to apply for a working holiday visa in New Zealand. She was bored by her monotonous office job in China and, like Ma-ling, she aspired to a more adventurous, cosmopolitan lifestyle. But she had not foreseen the difficulties involved in her plan. Xiao-xiao recounted angrily that she had tried to apply for a visa through an online process but had failed to secure a place on the programme. She had heard rumours that some people had used specialized software which, although illegal, had provided them with a clear advantage in the race for visas. Later, she had seen quotas for the work-and-travel visa being advertised on *taobao*, a popular shopping website, for a price that was far beyond her means.[3] She thus had to let her dream go - as she earned only a rather small wage, she could not afford to travel overseas without having the opportunity to work. Xiao-xiao was disappointed, but unlike

China and Taiwan; risky activities, in particular water sports, are believed to be especially dangerous during this time (Yang, et al., 2008).

[3] I researched online forums to see whether other people had encountered similar problems; I found several comments by angry applicants who attributed their failure to obtain a place to special software that certain applicants had used illegally (eChinacities.com, 2014).

Ma-ling, she did not ponder long on the underlying reasons for this misfortune. Used to overcoming setbacks, she quickly revised her plans. Tibet was her new destination, the most exotic place she could think of in China.

Unsurprisingly, her mother was not happy about her travelling alone. Knowing that her mother would disapprove of her plan to stay with a male friend who lived in Lhasa even more than of her travelling unaccompanied, Xiao-xiao tried to allay her by pretending that a female friend would be travelling with her. As she lived far away in Henan Province, her mother had little knowledge of the arrangements Xiao-xiao had made in Beijing. Xiao-xiao often told me how easy it was to conceal important details of her life from her mother and how this created much freedom for her. Indeed, a few weeks later, Xiao-xiao set out for Tibet alone; after returning, she gave me an enthusiastic account of her trip. She proclaimed that, from now on, she wanted to see more of the world and planned another trip for the Chinese New Year; this might also require a "cover story" to allay her mother's concerns.

II. Making Life-Choices in China and Taiwan

As the two vignettes above illustrate, decisions whether to follow a plan through and take risks are not made independently of the sociocultural environment in which individuals are embedded. Collective and personal experiences as well as societal norms and ideals define the framework within which individual aspirations emerge and life-choices are made (Liechty, 2003; Long, 2013; Long and Moore, 2013; Rofel, 2007). However, the stories of Ma-ling and Xiao-xiao show that these same factors are also influential in the formation of doubt and can prompt people to amend or abandon the pursuit of a plan. This study compares how aspirations are formed and pursued by young adults in urban China and Taiwan; societies which are deeply connected by a shared cultural heritage but which have very different socioeconomic and political trajectories.

Like Ma-ling, the protagonist of the first vignette, many young Taiwanese leading modern urban lifestyles are used to approaching life-choices with a careful evaluation of the external circumstances that could contribute to their success or failure. During my fieldwork, I noticed that decisions about concerns large and small were contingent on the opinion of family, friends, teachers and a tentative yet common concept of fate and divine intervention. This pluralism of opinions and beliefs imbued young Taiwanese with ambiguous moral guidelines which reflected the conflict between traditional and modern values that is distinctive of modern Taiwanese society. On the one hand, the rather

traditional Confucian-inspired family values and the actively practised folk religion consisting of Daoist and Buddhist elements offer a moral framework on which to model behaviour. On the other hand, young people increasingly strive for self-fulfilment and autonomy in decision-making, aspirations that are often difficult to reconcile with their parents' more traditional expectations.

In Beijing, I observed that although young Chinese people made life-choices with consideration of their families' preferences in mind, they were more confident about making decisions that did not entirely conform to parental expectations or whose outcome was uncertain. Like Xiao-xiao, young adults appeared to be more self-reliant and willing to take risks in pursuing their aspirations. This was surprising in that, in many cases, their socioeconomic status offered them fewer opportunities than their more affluent Taiwanese peers. Even though similar normative expectations based on traditional family and gender ideology influenced my Beijing informants, their more autonomous lifestyle in the capital, often far removed from the parental sphere of influence, granted them more space for autonomous decisions.

The stronger adherence to traditional values observed in Taiwan was also reflected in young people's practising of folk religion. Many of the young Taiwanese I got to know resorted to the guidance of spirit mediums, religious masters and various forms of divination to arrive at decisions or to find a rationale for their own as well as other's behaviour, whereas most of my young Chinese informants distanced themselves from any religious practices. They emphasized their disconnection from folk religious traditions by framing references to temple visits and methods of divination in terms of superstition and "backward" customs which only members of their rural home communities might adhere to but which they claimed not to know much about. A closer look at the connection between young adults' different accounts of their involvement in religious life and the distinct ideological discourses surrounding religion, identity and modernity in China and Taiwan is thus important to gain a deeper understanding of aspirations and decision-making.

Recent research into Chinese youth suggests their growing interest in the pursuit of individual aspirations and autonomy, often accompanied by a yearning for a cosmopolitan lifestyle as expressed by their consumption of Western goods, a foreign education and the attainment of "first world" citizenship (Evans, 2010; Farrer, 2002; 2014; Fong, 2011; Yan, 2009). Whereas parents are immensely supportive of their children's educational goals, different expectations with regard to consumption, premarital relationships and practices of

filial support often cause intergenerational conflict (Evans, 2008; Fong, 2004; Yan, 2003). Yunxiang Yan links such intergenerational disputes to a more complex "value crisis" that started with the state-sponsored social-engineering in the early days of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule, culminating later in the political campaigns of the Cultural Revolution (Yan, 2010 pp. 509-510). He suggests that the individuation of income and the political campaigns targeting elders' authority during the Mao era led to a rise in conjugality and a stronger emphasis on the pursuit of individual material aspirations. These changes were ultimately intensified by the institutional changes during the reform period. Individualization in China, Yan stresses, was thus not a by-product of political liberalization as in the West but was a modernization strategy imposed top-down that was supposed to increase competition and economic self-reliance in the population to spur economic growth. As a consequence, he argues, "new optional, and individualistic ethics of rights and self-development" have replaced the collective ethics of the past (Yan, 2011 p. 40).

Mette H. Hansen and Cuiming Pang challenge this narrative of moral decline and reckless individualism in Chinese youth (Hansen and Pang, 2010). They have found that their rural informants demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility for personal failures, in particular when it came to problems in their educational careers. Moreover, despite pursuing their ideals of an autonomous life, they were highly concerned about their parents' well-being. Yet Hansen also points to an intergenerational rift caused by a growing distance between parents and children (Hansen, 2015). However, unlike Yan, the distance she describes is not of a moral but of a *spatial* nature. While at boarding schools, children are separated from their parents for months at a time. Hansen highlights the detrimental effect that this long separation from families has on children's psychological well-being and questions the future impact of the trauma experienced (pp. 44-45).

Nevertheless, most anthropologists researching Chinese family structure agree on the deep impact that a liberalization of premarital sexual relationships has had on marriage traditions and family relations. In particular, Farrer's observations of the increasing tolerance of premarital sexual relationships and cohabitation in Shanghai convey the complex changes that have occurred in the spheres of courtship and marriage in urban China (Farrer, 2002; 2014).

While for Taiwanese youth's lifestyle and aspirations there is not as extensive a body of recent anthropological research available, work published in this area in recent years also points to an increased emphasis on the pursuit of individual goals and to changes in family structures and the intergenerational support system (Adrian, 2003; Huang, 2013; Shaw,

1994). However, comparative research has shown that these transformations do not seem as dramatic because current Taiwanese practices within the realms of marriage, residence and filial duties are still more closely aligned with traditional, Confucian-inspired gender and family ideology than in China (Chu and Yu, 2010; Chu et al., 2011; Cornman et al., 2003; Hermelin et al., 2003; Whyte et al., 2003; Whyte, 2004).

Whyte and colleagues argue that the more traditional attitudes that persist in Taiwan despite its more advanced level of economic development have been facilitated by particular institutional arrangements and economic structures which have preserved the traditional patriarchal organization of the family (Cornman et al., 2003; Whyte, 2004). Whyte's findings were complemented by additional research performed in this area. Chu and others also found in their comparative study of Chinese and Taiwanese families that certain aspects pertaining to gender ideology and intergenerational relations were more conservative in Taiwan than in China (Chu and Yu, 2010; Chu et al., 2011). In particular, they highlighted the comparative prevalence of a preference for sons and traditional gender role expectations in marriage in Taiwan, unlike in China (2010 p. 151). Moreover, Yang and Hu have compared different forms of religiosity in China and Taiwan and concluded that the percentage of adherents to folk religion is notably higher in Taiwan and, crucially in the context of my research, young Taiwanese under forty are especially involved in religious activities in their communities. These numbers, they claim, contrast starkly with China where it is mostly people over fifty years of age who practise communal religion (Yang and Hu, 2012).

Data gathered in urban China and Taiwan hence suggests that Taiwan, despite its more advanced level of economic development, is more traditional in terms of gender ideology, kinship, intergenerational support systems and religion. In the context of my research, this apparent paradox seems to prompt several questions: what effects do these ideological and socioeconomic differences have on young adults' aspirations and choices? How are these societal differences reflected in the ways in which young Chinese and Taiwanese perceive their roles within society, make decisions and reason for their choices?

Due to their families' comparatively greater affluence, young Taiwanese are often expected to have greater opportunities to pursue their aspirations - in particular in terms of an international education and career. At the same time, however, they appear to be more restricted by parental expectations of future coresidence and support as well as stricter gender role models in marriage.

Young Chinese also have to respond to parental expectations but they appear to have more room for negotiation due to their greater spatial independence from parents and a less strict adherence to traditional family and gender values. However, their less secure material situation might make pursuing dreams in terms of higher education, an international lifestyle and conspicuous consumption more difficult in comparison with Taiwanese peers.

What impact do these contradictory influences have on the pursuit of personal aspirations that do not comply with traditional expectations? Will young Taiwanese make use of their higher social and economic capital to break out of societal norms or will their sense of obligation towards families trump desires for personal autonomy? Will the pursuit of personal aspirations by young Chinese be stifled by structural obstacles or will their sense of empowerment gained from early independence from parents effectively fuel their striving for the realization of their dreams?

Moreover, the following question arises: what is the influence of these heterogeneous cultural and ideological factors on individuals' perceptions of subjectivity, agency and choice? In China, each generation since the 1950s has grown up with a new set of state-inculcated values, ranging from the collective ideals promoted by the Party during the Mao era, to the emphasis on economic self-reliance in the reform era, to a state-sponsored notion of cultural and moral excellence which, condensed in the concept of population quality (*renkou suzhi*), became integrated as a major educational goal in the 1990s (Woronov, 2009; Yan, 2009).

In Taiwan, no such abrupt breaks in state ideology can be observed; however, the Taiwanese population had also been exposed to diverse ideological and cultural influences. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the Kuomintang (KMT) inculcated the population with traditional Confucian thought via schools and public campaigns to Sinicize the population after fifty years of Japanese colonial rule. At the same time, however, the Taiwanese were exposed to a host of Western cultural values through Taiwan's close political, economic and military affiliations with the US (Chen, 2004 pp. 39-40; Wang, 1999). These at times contradicting values, blended with the Japanese colonial cultural heritage, can be expected to have influenced perceptions of the self and the individual's role in society in very particular ways. How are these different cultural ideas of selfhood reflected in the perception by Taiwanese young people of family obligations and personal freedom?

As I was interested in how young, highly educated people from diverse backgrounds in two culturally related yet different urban locations experience the years in which some of their most important life choices emerge, I deliberately applied rather loose criteria in selecting

my informants. To be eligible, young adults had to have tertiary education, be in their early twenties to early thirties and reside in cities. I interviewed approximately thirty young men and women at each location. The gender ratio, however, is skewed towards women (especially in Taiwan) as it was easier for me to meet young women alone due to gendered norms that attach certain expectations with regard to friendships between the opposite sexes in both societies.

In the following, I will provide a brief outline of the discussions which are important to gain a thorough understanding of the historical, sociocultural and psychological aspects that influence young adults' life goals and choices. I will first present an overview of current anthropological discourses within the areas of aspirations and achievement. This part will lead to a more psychologically oriented discussion of subjectivity, agency and choice that will be linked to anthropological considerations of hope and doubt. This will be followed by a brief historical overview of China's and Taiwan's economic, political and demographic development since the mid-20th century. I will then continue with a short discussion of certain aspects of family ideology and intergenerational relations in China and Taiwan. Finally, I will introduce my field sites and methodology and provide a brief overview of the subsequent chapters.

III. The Anthropology of Aspirations, Achievement and Choice

Before looking at the factors at play how young Chinese and Taiwanese form and pursue their ideals, I will provide a more general overview of recent anthropological research within the areas of aspirations, achievement and choice. Over recent decades, Nicholas Long and Henrietta L. Moore note, local notions of achievement have become closely entangled with globalized ideas of success that are influenced by the pressures of the neoliberal market structures (Long and Moore, 2013). In particular, they draw attention to different cases in which state-imposed concepts of achievement aim at fostering economic progress in order to realize specific visions of modernity; phenomena that could also be observed in China and Taiwan. Long and Moore accentuate that

> "[p]rocesses of self-making and self-stylisation, of which both striving and managing to achieve are a part, […] need to be understood in relation to the specific ways in which subjects at particular historical moments understand themselves, the entities with which they share the world and the relations between them" (p. 4).

Long describes that - in Indonesia - social prestige is generated through state-sponsored competitions that simultaneously serve as a yardstick for assessing citizens' competitiveness in various subject areas on a national and international level. He illustrates how the government's attempts to foster a spirit of success in the population to increase Indonesia's performance on the global market has resulted in large numbers of youths structuring their lives around the pursuit of an abstract notion of achievement (Long, 2013 p. 86). Similarly, Susan Bayly describes how discourses on achievement in late-socialist Vietnam are closely interconnected with notions of the state, the nation and a "cosmopolitan modernity" (Bayly, 2013 p. 158). However, although the competitions supposed to lead to the accumulation of prestige described by Long stretch across various fields of interests, those determining achievement in Vietnam mostly take place within the realm of school education and professional life. This national striving for success in terms of class rankings and knowledge contests also has an impact on family life and gender relations. Parental obligations are closely tied to the civil duty of raising a new generation of achievers who will advance Vietnam's transition to becoming an economic powerhouse. This responsibility places immense pressure on people, especially on women who have to negotiate their personal career aspirations combined with their responsibilities as mothers to their children as well as to the state (2013).

These anthropological considerations of the political nature of achievement and their impact on notions of citizenship and selfhood offer valuable insights for the analysis of young people's aspirations in China and Taiwan. Similar to the young Indonesians and Vietnamese described by Long and Bayly, notions of achievement among the people I met in Beijing and Taipei were closely tied to the yearning for cosmopolitan opportunities and their nation's acknowledgement as a global power. Moreover, from early childhood onwards, rankings in classrooms and in youth groups determine an individual's social status and his or her prospects of success in the future and, in the Chinese case, even the "quality" (*suzhi*) of the individual as a citizen (Anagnost, 2004; Kipnis, 2006).

China's rise in the global economy was accompanied by the deepening of neoliberal discourses of achievement that were additionally reinforced by the party's concern for "population quality"; a concept that emerged in the early 1980s and became widely spread in the course of educational reforms aimed at the cultivation of highly educated citizens loyal to the economic and ideological goals of the party (Kipnis, 2006). As a consequence, the notion that self-improvement in the educational and moral domains is essential in the realisation of one's full potential has become increasingly prevalent over the last decades. Leslie T. Chang describes how young female factory workers in southern China attended

commercial schools in the evening and on weekends to raise their "quality" by learning the English language and computer skills that would qualify them for white collar secretarial jobs (Chang, 2008). Their specialised skills and knowledge of proper etiquette, they hoped, would enable them to stand out from their colleagues and to be promoted into the desired office jobs (p. 174). Likewise, Lisa M. Hoffman notes that the young graduates she worked with in Dalian had adopted a self-enterprising ethos […] that focused in particular on the idea of self-development (*ziwo fazhan*) through their careers" (Hoffman, 2010 p. 82). Reaching one of these popular markers of achievement would not only raise their personal "quality" (*suzhi*) but, at the same time, improve the socioeconomic status of their rural families. This way, they would make an important contribution to the repayment of their filial debt towards parents; a topic that will be discussed in greater detail in one of the following sections of this chapter.

Similarly, Yan mentions that self-improvement has become a central theme in contemporary Chinese society whereas collective values increasingly lose their influence. He accompanied a group of Beijing professionals to their philosophical reading group where they studied ethics and engaged in "soul-searching discussions" (Yan, 2011 p. 38). He notes:

> "Despite the continued insistence on socialist civilization and collective ethics in the official discourse, the most important change in popular discourse and moral practice has been a shift away from authoritarian, collective ethics of responsibilities and self-sacrifice toward a new, optional, and individualistic ethics of rights and self-development" (p. 40).

Achievements in the educational, professional and moral domains in China are, as Chang and Yan show, increasingly perceived as dependent on personal willpower and diligence rather than on socioeconomic factors. This new individualised notion of achievement is also reflected in the aforementioned observations by Hansen and Pang who found that rural youth are increasingly blaming their academic failures on personal shortcomings rather than the socioeconomic circumstances that might have obstructed their successes (Hansen and Pang, 2010).

The above described cases demonstrate the profound influence which the increasingly globalised and often state-sponsored notions of achievement can have on the life aspirations of youths and the paths they pursue to realise them. However, individual factors, like a person's socioeconomic status, individual experience and mental disposition also play a major role in the formation of values and goals as well as in the way decisions are approached (Knight and Gunatilaka, 2012; Long and Moore, 2013 p. 4).

Noteworthy in this context is the work of Asa Boholm and colleagues who draw attention to the close interplay of social and psychological aspects in decision-making (Boholm et al., 2013). They point out that decisions are neither made independent of the socio-cultural environment nor are they unaffected by the life experience and emotional state of the decision-maker. For these reasons, it cannot be expected that decision-makers who share the same information and preferences will make identical choices (p. 100). How decision-making will turn out in each single case, they claim, is thus difficult to predict by the outside observer. Studies in decision-making should hence consider the "emotions, imaginations, and "irrationality" that emanate from experience and memory" (ibid.). For this reason, an individual's personal biography as well as its cultural and socioeconomic environment have to be taken into account in the study of life choices.

Michael Chibnik, applies an "integrative perspective" similar to that suggested by Boholm and colleagues which understands choices as embedded in their socio-cultural context as well as dependent on individual experience and preferences (Boholm et al., 2013 p. 108; Chibnik, 2011). Based on extended field research in a Mexican community, he shows how life choices are determined simultaneously by economic and political discourses on local, national and international levels as well as by individual emotional needs and social relationships. By means of detailed ethnographic examples he demonstrates the relative unpredictability of decision-making in real life situations. Chibnik describes the case of two Mexican brothers who both contemplate migrating to the US to improve the economic prospects of their young families. However, due to their different educational levels, attachment to their home place and, most importantly, different mental dispositions that affect their ability to cope with the stress the uncertain status of being an illegal migrant in the US implies, only one of the brothers left the community to work abroad. The other brother decided that the advantages of living within the emotional comfort of his local community and the opportunity to provide assistance to his aging parents would outweigh the potential material success he could achieve in the US (Chibnik, 2011, pp. 9-13).

Likewise, my Chinese and Taiwanese informants placed different emphases on the relative importance of normative life goals. Academic success as well a cosmopolitan lifestyle and, especially in China, "flexible citizenship" as described by Fong in her study of Chinese students abroad, were major aspirations (Fong, 2011). However, not all young Chinese and Taiwanese subscribed to the full set of popular ideals and, as the following chapters will discuss, even those who did would often eventually choose other biographical paths due to unforeseen complications or changing priorities as they entered new life stages. Further, it

is important to note that even those young adults who appeared to aspire to popular goals may have done so due to very different motivational factors.

Samuli Schielke shows in his study of cosmopolitan aspirations among Egyptian young people that although aspirations to migrate to Western countries are ubiquitous in young men, their reasons for contemplating leaving their homes were highly diverse. Whereas "money and freedom" were commonly regarded as the main motivations for young people to migrate, these two terms encompassed diverse aspirations that ranged from a yearning for sexual or political freedom; from the hope of creating a material basis for family foundation in Egypt to dreams of permanently staying in the destination country (Schielke, 2012 pp. 182-183). Schielke's observations resonate with the ones I made among young adults in Beijing and Taipei; aspirations to attain certain academic goals could be driven by a desire to please parents, to accumulate prestige in order to rise within the ranks of the CCP's youth league or by intentions to leave the country by way of academic scholarships. Likewise, a yearning for a cosmopolitan lifestyle and flexible citizenship was encouraged by aspirations for freedom from parental pressures, plans for professional self-realization as well as the hope of finding fulfilment in romantic love. An analysis of youths' aspirations and efforts to realize them thus has to be conducted based on a nuanced understanding of societal structures as well as on the various factors that influence the individual perception of societal rules and norms.

IV. Subjectivity, Agency and Decision-Making in Cross-Cultural Comparison

In the following, I will take a closer look at various theoretical discussions of subjectivity and decision-making. Despite structural and institutional differences, China and Taiwan share a common cultural heritage which is not limited to family traditions but also extends to more abstract notions of selfhood, agency and choice that underlie social expectations. I will briefly outline these different discussions not only by drawing on anthropological studies but also by including research from social psychology.

One dominant discussion across different disciplines in the social sciences proposes that the emphasis on collectively oriented values observed in many societies of East Asia has a significant impact on notions of selfhood which, in turn, may also influence perceptions of personal capability and responsibilities towards others. Mayfair M. Yang, who examines the issue from an anthropological perspective, stresses that unlike the Western notion of the self as a self-contained autonomous entity, the Chinese notion of personhood is relational

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and thus in constant flux as it responds to the multitude of social relations in which it is embedded (Yang, 1994 p. 192). Hazel R. Markus and Shinobu Kitayama put forward a similar argument; however, they analyze perceptions of selfhood in East Asian societies through a psychological lens. They note that "different construals of the self […] can influence, and in many cases determine, the very nature of individual experience, including cognition, emotion, and motivation" (Markus and Kitayama, 1991 p. 224). The specific understanding of individuality in East Asian cultures, they argue, puts emphasis on the relatedness of individuals and the importance of attending to other's needs to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships (ibid.).

While anthropologists and social psychologists agree that the binary opposition between a supposed Western individualism versus an Eastern collectivism is a simplistic construction that does not reflect the complexity of social relationships in societies pooled under these terms, a more nuanced understanding of the impact that cultural models of sociality have on notions of subjectivity might offer important contributions to cross-cultural studies of decision-making (Kipnis, 1997; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Nisbett, 2003; Yan, 1996; Yang, 1994).

Richard E. Nisbett's experiment-based comparisons of cognitive processes between individuals from diverse Western and East Asian cultural backgrounds offer additional interesting insights into the impact that epistemological beliefs, social organization and cultural practices have on the perception of the social and spatial environment as well as on reasoning and decision-making. He concludes that individuals from East Asian cultural backgrounds tend to focus more on the context within which certain phenomena occur and make decisions based on holistic contemplation. Individuals from Western cultural backgrounds, however, exhibit a more analytical approach by trying to isolate the object in question from its context and thus make decisions based on logical reasoning (Nisbett, 2004 [2003]; Nisbett et al., 2001). Nisbett attributes these differences partly to distinct traditions of thought that affect how selfhood and personal agency are perceived. He notes that Western philosophical traditions stress a strong sense of individual identity and agency whereas philosophical theories and religious beliefs originating in East Asian societies put more emphasis on interconnectedness and complex interactions between the physical and metaphysical realms as well as on collective agency (2004 [2003] pp. 3-12). Nisbett's work is important to this study as it offers important insights into the underlying cognitive concepts that govern decision-making in different cultural environments. Following his train of thought, potential differences in the importance placed on cultural traditions that

value the well-being of the family over individual preferences in China and Taiwan could have a distinct impact on young people's decision-making.

Nisbett notes that numerous studies have shown that, in comparison to individuals from Western cultural background, East Asians are more acceptant of the complexities and changes in life. He suggests this might be due to a less strong belief in the controllability of events and a higher willingness to adjust to situations rather than trying to change them (pp. 79-109). Albert Bandura, who has studied the subject of self-efficacy in great detail, however argues that the degree to which people believe that their actions will yield results in the world is not only strongly dependent on societal background but also on personal experience. He suggests that perceived self-efficacy is likely to change over a life course. Whereas successfully overcoming obstacles might strengthen a person's belief in his or her causative abilities, failures have a detrimental effect (Bandura, [1995] 1999 p. 3). Bandura notes that "after people become convinced they have what it takes to succeed, they persevere in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks. By sticking it out through tough times, they emerge stronger from adversity" (ibid.). A resilient sense of personal efficacy thus enables one to have a confident approach to decision-making and risk-taking based on a confidence in one's abilities to deal with challenges and a reliable estimation of possible consequences (pp. 3-6). In the context of my comparative study, a close analysis of individual case studies will thus be important to distinguish between those factors affecting aspirations and life-choices that may be related to sociocultural background and those that originate in personal experience. Furthermore, Bandura also suggests that the responsiveness of the environment to individual action plays an important part not only in individuals' sense of self-efficacy but also in the way collective action can emerge and unfold (1982 p. 143).

I have demonstrated so far that the influence that sociocultural factors play in decision-making can hardly be understated. It might thus not be surprising that the way in which individuals reason for their choices - to themselves and others - is also highly influenced by social norms and expectations. Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber note that people defend their choices less with arguments that are in line with premises of logic and rationality and instead put forward explanations that can be expected to be most acceptable by their social environment (Mercier and Sperber, 2011). Reasoning, they suggest, must thus not be logical to be considered persuasive but has to conform to the sociocultural norms of the respective environment. Consequently, decision-making in itself might be influenced more by aspects of social acceptability that make the justification of one's choices less complicated than by criteria of rationality (pp. 69-70). The concept of reason-based choice

is especially valuable in the comparative analysis of decision-making as the arguments people choose to explain their choices might reveal interesting clues as to differences and similarities in social norms and ideals.

In sum, one of the most important insights generated by these studies is that the ways in which people conceive of themselves and of others in society has a decisive impact on their perception of the results their actions might yield, the choices available to them and the acceptability of certain decisions as opposed to others. Due to their shared cultural heritage yet different economic and political historical trajectories, China and Taiwan offer an exceptional opportunity to examine the impact that economic and political factors have on individual and collective perceptions of agency and choice in societies that traditionally stress communal values.

V. Mapping Hope in Uncertain Times - the Impact of Political and Economic Transitions on Perceptions of the Future

Feelings of doubt, uncertainty and hope are closely connected to an individual's perception of agency and the choices available yet, at the same time, they reveal an underlying set of values and ideals shared by the social group the individual is embedded in. Mathijs Pelkmans notes that doubt need not necessarily be triggered by ontological and epistemological problems but is more often centred on the more pragmatic concern of "what to do?" (Pelkmans, 2013 p. 2).

He continues:

> "[q]uestions of being, of truth, and of action should always be seen in relation to each other: both in the banal sense that a sense of 'what is' provides direction (but not unilinear direction) to action, and also in the more profound sense that when nothing is worth fighting for […] apathy and hopelessness may set in" (ibid.).

Questions of being and action relating to the private and public spheres will be at the heart of my analysis. The questions of "what is" and "what is possible" were indeed less ontological but highly pragmatic concerns among my young informants. Locating their positions in society and exploring the opportunities available to them, doubts about their decisions as well as anxious uncertainty, were constant companions.

Doubt and uncertainty, according to Pelkmans, are associated mental states but doubt has a more active orientation that is directed toward solving a problem (p. 3). Doubt arises

within a context of uncertainty yet implies more agency as it is focused on the "questioned object" as well as on an alternative to the current situation (ibid.). Young Chinese and Taiwanese people often seemed to be floating back and forth between those states, often combined with periods of hope that were soon replaced by ambivalence and anxiousness. Yet doubt and uncertainty did not only pertain to personal matters but were simultaneously related to the political sphere. Their sense of hope and security seemed to be inextricably connected to their visions of the future of their home communities.

Pelkmans notes that a "lack of clarity and absence of certainty tend to trigger doubt" (p. 17). Periods of political and economic restructuring and social unrest might thus be especially prone to creating doubt. Esther Bartha has observed that the economic uncertainties that were brought about by the 1989 regime change in Hungary planted doubt in workers at a former state factory who had relied on the securities the socialist system provided them with (Bartha, 2013). The transition from socialism to capitalism had not only been accompanied by the loss of their workplaces and material benefits but also by uncertainty about their place in a post-industrial society. Having hoped that circumstances would improve for them thanks to the new freedoms the introduction of capitalism promised, they were bitterly disappointed when their status as workers was downgraded under the new regime. The resignation the workers felt afterwards dampened their outlook on the future and gave rise to extremist political views (pp. 212-214).

Whereas Hungarian workers reacted largely with "passivity and apathy" to their failed hopes, doubts about the future can also generate renewed interest in traditional practices to restore certainty (p. 220). In North India, Caterina Guenzi has found that increased economic uncertainty resulted in a growing interest in divinatory practices to mitigate doubt. She observed in Banaras that after the liberalization of the Indian market, concerns about material security became more distinct among families of the urban upper and middle classes. The transformation of the economy sparked a proliferation of fortune-tellers that specialized in making predictions about investment and wealth management through the determination of one's personal fate (Guenzi, 2012).

The cases from Hungary and India illustrate how societal transformations can trigger doubt and uncertainty. Individual and group efforts to overcome fears about the future often involve the evoking of supernatural assistance or an orientation towards political alternatives to reinstall security. At the same time, however, political and economic restructuring can also spark hopes for a better future. Post-socialist societies are exceptionally interesting in this regard, as economic transformations are often accompanied

by an ideological reorientation which can be expected to bring about a shift in values and aspirations. Morten Axel Pedersen has conducted research among unemployed Mongolian men who tried to improve their unfavourable status by taking advantage of the new opportunities of the free market. He illustrates how their hopes for material success and status improvement persist despite continuous setbacks. While actual conditions may look unpromising, "stubborn optimism" and a "seemingly presentist attitude" enabled them to maintain their confidence in a better future (Pedersen, 2012 p. 145). Jarrett Zigon has made similar observations among young Russians in Moscow. Despite rather grim prospects of a better life, they exhibit a high degree of agency in achieving their goals and do not lower their aspirations (Zigon, 2009 p. 260). Hope, Zigon asserts, allowed his informants to persevere in difficult times and provided them with ethical directions in morally challenging situations (p. 267).

Likewise, in China, the economic restructurings of the recent decades have given rise to a more hopeful outlook into the future. However, the memories of political instability and terror have not completely faded yet among the older generations. Arthur Kleinman, who has researched the psychological effects of the traumatic events of the Cultural Revolution on Chinese individuals over the last decades, claims that he could observe an overall optimistic trend in Chinese society. Having overcome long times of adversity, he claims, especially the elderly regard the economic progress and political stability of the recent decades with favour and hold a hopeful stance for the future (Kleinman, 2011). Despite the grave resentments and grievances many of them still hold for the communist past, Kleinman notes, these appear "to be increasingly balanced by hope for the next generation" (p. 272). At the same time, however, many Chinese appear to be of a "divided self"; that is, hopeful for a better future, yet at the same time watchful of the volatility of the state. Not being able to forget past trauma, their hope for a better future remains tainted by the perceived arbitrariness of the ruling elite (p. 285). Kleinman explains: "The moral context created by the party-state is as much a place of collusion and collaboration with ruthlessly pragmatic power as it is a place of aspiration for and achievement of a better life for many of its citizens" (pp. 285-286).

However, most of my Chinese informants, born in the reform era, appeared to be less concerned about the impact that the ideological whims of the party could have on their personal life than members of the older generations. Much like Pedersen and Zigon's informants, they were full of hope for the future and confident about reaching their ambitious goals even though many among them faced a not insignificant degree of uncertainty due to their lack of financial resources and restrictive family connections

(Pedersen, 2012; Zigon, 2009). Many of my Taiwanese informants, by contrast, appeared to be gloomy and full of despair due to the high expectations of them, even though most could rely on financial support and their parents' powerful social networks on the island and abroad. Detached from their actual socioeconomic situation, my young informants' feelings of hope and doubt thus seemed to be informed by their personal assessment of the likelihood of achieving their preconceived notions of success. In the following chapters, this study will try to uncover the different factors that underlie the phenomena of uncertainty and hope and their interconnection with notions of achievement among young urbanites in China and Taiwan.

VI. The Political and Economic Systems of China and Taiwan

Although demographic, socioeconomic and political differences between China and Taiwan started to unfold during the late Imperial and Republican era when Taiwan was under Japanese colonial rule, such differences were additionally consolidated in the decades after 1949. Since then, China has been under the autocratic rule of the CCP while Taiwan's political system has evolved from authoritarian one-party rule under the KMT to democracy in the late 1980s. China and Taiwan have also followed very different paths of economic development. During the latter half of the twentieth century, the Chinese government first implemented a planned economy that was reformed into state capitalism in the late 1970s. Meanwhile, with US assistance, the KMT introduced a free market economy in Taiwan from the mid-1950s. These different modernization strategies have had a decisive impact on China's and Taiwan's economic and demographic structures. Although a rapidly increasing wealth gap coupled with a rural-urban divide can be observed in China, Taiwan is highly urbanized with a well-established infrastructure that even reaches remote parts of the island (Lieberthal, 2004 [1995]; Roy, 2003; Rubinstein, 1999). Moreover, with a Gini index of 33.8 in 2012, the distribution of family income in Taiwan is more equal than in China, which ranks with an estimated value of 46.9 in 2014 significantly higher on the index (CIA). This means that opportunities for upward social mobility in Taiwan are greater than in China; this is an aspect which, combined with the different demographic structures, might have a decisive impact on young people's expectations of the future.

After the CCP defeated the KMT and took over power in 1949, it introduced many reforms targeting the social and the corporate structure (Lieberthal, 2004 [1995] pp. 52-56; 66-67). During the land reform of the early 1950s, property was redistributed from

landowners to peasants and social hierarchies of prestige were reversed thanks to the introduction of a class system that favoured the formerly poor rural population. Likewise, in the cities, powerful networks connecting businessmen and officials were dissolved to allow state power to take hold (Harrison, 2001 p. 233). However, with the introduction of the household registration system (*hukou*), movement of the rural population was restricted to the countryside while resources were channelled into the development of urban industries (Jacka et al., 2013 p. 17).

By the end of the 1950s, the CCP had mainly centralized the planning of the economy. In the cities, the party created work units (*danwei*) that employed most of the urban workforce while the rural population was assigned work in agricultural collectives (Jacka et al., 2013 pp. 17-18; Lieberthal, 2004 [1995] pp. 109-110). In 1966, Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution that would last a decade up to his death in 1976. In order to strengthen his waning power, he called upon the support of the young population to root out "bourgeois culture" and attack political enemies (Jacka et al., 2013 p. 18; Lieberthal, 2004 [1995] pp. 112-116). Due to the persecution of academics and intellectuals critical of the Party and the launch of the rustication movement when urban students were sent to work in the countryside, schools were closed and university entrance exams were deferred for several years (Jacka et al., 2013 p. 18; Meng and Gregory, 2002).

After Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping claimed leadership of the party and introduced reforms that spurred industrialization and economic growth, first in rural areas and then in the cities (Goodman, 1994 pp. 90-91; Lieberthal, 2004 [1995] pp. 140-142). The decollectivization of the countryside which lasted until the mid-1980s was followed by the privatization of former state-owned companies. During these restructurings, the urban work unit system and, with it, the comprehensive social welfare programme granting cradle-to-grave benefits, known as the "iron rice bowl" (*tie fan wan*), were gradually abolished (Gallagher et al., 2011 pp. 3-5). Moreover, in order to control the population growth that had skyrocketed following pronatalist policies during the Mao era, the government implemented a one-child policy in 1979 that would dramatically transform family life in the following decades (Fong, 2004 pp. 73-74; Lieberthal, 2004 [1995] p. 279). The opening of the market created new career opportunities but also increased the pressure on the individual who could no longer fall back on the assistance of the state. Simultaneously, conspicuous consumption was on the rise and produced new demands and expectations. Due to the accelerating race for a high education, prestigious jobs and ever more expensive housing, pressure on the new generation of singletons born after the introduction of the family planning law has risen enormously over recent decades (Fong, 2004; Jun, 2000; Mak et al., 2007; Yan, 2009).

At the same time, Taiwan has followed a very different developmental path. In 1945, after Japan's surrender in the Second World War, Taiwan was returned to the Republic of China after fifty years of colonial rule. In the same year, the KMT started to consolidate its rule on the island (Roy, 2003 pp. 56-67). Although the Taiwanese population had initially welcomed the arrival of the KMT, hoping they would be elevated from their low status as colonial subjects, this initial confidence was soon destroyed when Chiang's troops started to plunder public and private property and favoured mainlanders in the assignment of official positions (Hsiung, 1996 p. 25; Roy, 2003 pp. 56-67).

After Chiang Kai-shek's ultimate defeat by the Communists in the Chinese Civil War in 1949, he and his troops retreated to Taiwan where he planned to prepare for the reconquering of the mainland. In the same year, claiming that Taiwan would be threatened by an attack by CCP forces, Chiang announced a state of martial law that involved a range of restrictions on the population and concentrated all political power in the hands of the KMT (Fetzer and Soper, 2013 pp. 58-59; Kao, 2007 p. 195; Roy, 2003 p. 78). The one-party rule that Chiang installed in Taiwan was modelled on the Leninist principle of democratic centralism; yet despite its authoritarian rule, the KMT was never able to create "a strong and efficient party apparatus based on discipline" that is key to attaining a high degree of social control essential to the Leninist state system (Singh, 2007 pp. 44-45).

With the onset of the Korean War in 1950, Taiwan became a strategically important military base for the US army. To prevent the economically weakened island from being overtaken by the communist powers in the region, the US government subsidized its industrial development (Ngo and Chen, 2009 pp. 16-17). Within two decades, Taiwan had developed from an agricultural society into a modern, industrial economy (Hsiung, 1996 p. 27). The biggest asset of Taiwan at that time was its cheap workforce that could complete the labour-intensive work that the increasingly export-led economy needed. Especially during the 1960s and 1970s, small- and medium-sized enterprises, most of them family businesses, flourished as their flexibility to cater to foreign investors made them highly competitive (Hsiung, 1996 pp. 1-4; 26-31; Rubinstein, 1999 pp. 367-370).

After Chiang's death, his son and successor, Chiang Ching-kuo, gradually loosened the restrictions of martial law until it was lifted entirely in 1987. During the following years, Taiwan transformed into a democracy with a multi-party system and public elections on all levels. During the 1990s, Taiwan's economy experienced another shift with the decline of manufacturing industries and a rapid growth in a knowledge-based economy that benefited from the substantial improvement in Taiwan's educational sector ever since the late 1960s

(Greene, 2007 pp. 134-135). During the last three decades, "an already prosperous society became affluent" by moving industrial production to the shores of its neighbouring countries to enter the stage of a post-industrial service economy (Yu and Liu, 2014: 239). However, due to the stagnating economy and rising real estate prices, graduates now face a precarious situation on the job market which poses new challenges to families and the government (Chen et al., 2007; Rowen, 2015).

VII. Intergenerational Relations and Filial Piety (*xiao*) in China and Taiwan

I will now take a closer look at the aspects China and Taiwan have in common. Despite the major changes that have affected both societies over the last seventy years, one can still find many shared characteristics, in particular in terms of family ideology and intergenerational obligations which may impact on young people's approach to life choices. One of the most significant shared traits can be found in the way intergenerational obligations of support connect parents and children in China and Taiwan. The concept of filial piety (*xiao*) is at the centre of the parent-child relationship and has been a key aspect of Chinese ethics since the pre-imperial era (Chan and Tan., 2004 pp. 1-2; Fei, 1992 [1948] pp. 43-44). Although the notion of *xiao* connotes a host of moral and ethical interpretations, it is commonly understood as parents' obligations to provide their offspring with material and emotional care during childhood as well as their children's duty to assist their parents in old age. Traditionally, the eldest son was responsible for his parents' well-being in old age; however, the reality was often different, with the main burden of care falling on daughters-in-law (Chan and Tan, 2004; Stafford, 2000 a pp. 60-62; Tan, 2004 pp. 226-227). The concept of filial piety has been subject to reinterpretation throughout the centuries, responding to the specific concerns of each era. Whereas its core value of filial respect for elders remained largely unchanged, the expression of care and support has altered in tandem with new demands that have emerged in modern society. Hence, in urban China and Taiwan the practice of *xiao* has taken on new forms to respond to major societal changes that have occurred over the last century (Ikels, 2004).

Henrietta Harris describes how during the May Fourth Movement (1919-25), young activists harshly criticised Confucian values of obedience to parents as well as to political authorities (Harris, 2001 pp. 170-75). The movement had been induced by a reformation of the education system by Western educated Chinese academics who stressed social equality instead of submission to traditional hierarchies in the beginning of the 20th century (pp. 89-104). After the Communist Party had taken over power from the Kuomintang in 1949,

Confucian values experienced another attack as the CCP introduced political reforms that aimed at dissolving family ties and intergenerational obligations to strengthen their rule (Yan, 2003). Yan describes that rural youths who had formerly helped on their parents' farms now had to work in the collective fields which opened up a new space free from parental supervision (Yan, 2003 p. 52). In the Chinese cities, where people had been assigned to work units (*danwei*), both men and women were now engaged in formal full-time employment while children were sent to day care facilities provided by the *danweis* (Evans, 2010; Liu, 2007). Shift work and communal obligations that were common in the *danweis* and collectives additionally limited children's time spent with parents (Liu, 2007 pp. 65-86).

However, the abolition of state welfare measures through work units and their transfer to municipal neighbourhoods and to households' responsibilities in the reform era gradually reversed the dissolution of intra-family dependencies created under Mao. From the early 1980s onwards, Vanessa Fong notes, parent-child dependencies increased again as the importance of higher education as well as the need to provide for material security in old age rose (Fong, 2004). Fong, who researched parent-child relationships in the late 1990s and early 2000s in a northern Chinese coastal city, observed that the relationship between her adolescent informants and their parents had become closer than had been common in the previous generations. Yet, she also found that parent-child relationships were riddled with tensions as the pressure to excel in school had risen exponentially. Due to the one-child policy, most urban children were now raised as singletons. Hence they received the concentrated attention and care from grandparents and parents. At the same time, concerns that the family's future well-being was now entirely dependent on their academic achievement created severe pressure in her adolescent informants. In some cases these tensions raised intense doubt and anger that led them to question the tenets of filial piety (pp. 143-148.).

Hence, due to the increasing stress on parents' responsibility for their children's academic performance, raising children now implies duties that go far beyond what was conceived of as traditional parental obligations (Beckert et al. 2004; Fong, 2004; Kuan, 2015). Shortly after having introduced the one-child policy in 1979, the CCP introduced a concept of human quality (*suzhi*) that set standards against which the degree of a citizen's moral cultivation and educational attainment was measured and which should add substantially to parental duties in the future (Fong 2007; Kipnis 2006; 2011, pp. 65). Hence, while during the Mao-era, parents had been expected to foster children's revolutionary spirit and ideological adherence to party morals, expectations were altered in the reform era when the

Chinese government recognised the need for highly educated professionals in order to advance the modernisation of China's economy (Chan, 1985 pp. 68; Kipnis, 2011).

Elizabeth Croll points out that in order to form model citizens, the parents now had to contribute to the state's endeavour by the domestic formation of their children's academic excellence, moral integrity, and willingness to obey superiors in early childhood (Croll, 1990). In Taiwan, by contrast, filial values were never contested by the state. Here, the KMT instrumentalized Confucian ideology to legitimize their rule and to reinforce Taiwan's role as the repository of authentic Chinese culture (Fetzer and Soper, 2013 p. 20). During the movement, the KMT introduced "a conservative, moralistic Confucianism" to the curriculum in order to instil obedience to superiors in the Taiwanese from an early age (ibid.). Yet, despite the government's adherence to traditional family values, a naturally decreasing birth rate and a growing trend for neolocal post-marital residence and female full-time employment complicated the continuation of traditional care practices in old age in Taiwan (Hsu, 2007; Lee et al., 1994). These problems have become aggravated in recent years as Taiwan's economic progress came to a halt and it became increasingly difficult for the younger generation to accumulate enough resources to fulfil all aspects of filial obligations to their ageing parents.

The insecurity that the decline in state benefits in China and economic stagnation in Taiwan brought about reinforced the importance of filial care obligations. The continuing value placed on children's duties towards aging parents is demonstrated not least by recurrent studies and reports in both China and Taiwan debating the fatal consequences of filial neglect (Chen, 2015; Hsu, 2007; Liu, 2013 pp. 219-248; Yan, 2003). Young Chinese and Taiwanese thus grow up with the awareness that not only their personal but also their family's well-being is dependent on their academic and professional achievements. For this reason, it is not surprising that considerations of future care obligations have a major impact on both Chinese and Taiwanese young people's life-choices.

Beyond that, the need for close intergenerational communication has increasingly taken a central position in new ideals of parenthood that emerged in both societies in recent decades. Harriet Evans, who conducted studies of mother-daughter relationships in Beijing, noticed that communication between mothers and their daughters had improved compared to previous generations and that daughters were profiting from their mothers' more open minded attitudes towards gender roles and filiality (Evans, 2008; 2010). From her in-depth conversations with women who became mothers in the 1980s, Evans resumes that rising self-reflection during the reform era initiated a new consciousness of parenting. Women

developed "an explicit antipathy to the model of gendered conduct their mothers represented" and aimed at conveying more emancipatory values to their own daughters (Evans, 2010 p. 990). However, in spite of these resolutions, they were not able to prevent any intergenerational rift from occurring. Many of these daughters criticised their mothers in their interviews with Evans for not acknowledging the novel demands that the contemporary urban environment had on them and wished for more emotional intimacy and understanding (p. 994). Evans concludes,

> "The anticipation of "communication" as a mode of emotional expressivity in contemporary urban subjectivities is in general terms an effect of the exchange between individual subjects and China's changing economic and cultural climate. In part also encouraged by the intersections between local Chinese and global discourses about relationships and parenting, the language of communication operates as a channel for new expectations of personal relationships, including those between parents and children" (Evans, 2008 p. 94).

These new discourses about parenting have not only had an effect on post-Mao China, but also started to dominate discourses on parenting in Taiwan. Richard Wilson argues that traditionally, Taiwanese father's occupied their role as a distant authority figure who did not establish close emotional bonds to his children. Mother's in contrast, were often perceived as closer, especially as they had the role of main caregiver for the children in everyday life (Wilson, 1970 pp. 63-64). Yet, Wilson observed an important change of these parental roles in the 1960s when he conducted his research in Taiwan. This "divergence from the more traditional and probably idealized model" of parenting was mainly expressed through fathers' closer emotional bonds to children that were a concomitant of the main restructurings in traditional families brought about by Taiwan's increasing industrialisation (p. 64).

During my field research in Beijing and Taipei, these different concepts of mutual obligations and the expectations and tensions that arose from them figured dominantly in conversations with my informants and their families. Especially in the context of important life choices, the willingness to openly communicate personal hopes and wishes in order to achieve a mutual understanding between parents and children became an important part of the intergenerational contract.

VIII. Setting the Scenes: Fieldwork in Taipei and Beijing

Before starting my fieldwork in 2012, I spent 12 months in Taipei preparing for my research by studying Chinese at a local university from 2009 till 2010. Upon my return to Taipei for my fieldwork in February 2012, my established friendships as well as the opportunity to move back into my previous flat-share with Taiwanese friends eased my entry into my research. As my criteria for the selection of informants allowed for a wide pool of people, I mostly used the snowball system to find young people who wanted to participate in the research. In the following weeks, my friends introduced me to their families and social circles and invited me to activities around Taipei. Popular leisure activities in the bustling, lively city included strolls around the night markets to grab snacks and buy bargain clothes, visits to restaurants and coffee shops dotted all over the city, as well as window-shopping sprees in Taipei's countless glitzy shopping malls. At weekends, I accompanied them on outings to scenic spots around the island, going surfing or visiting their families and relatives in Taipei and other parts of Taiwan. My fieldwork in Taiwan was eased by the relatively small size of the island and its well established public transport system that enabled me to accompany my informants on their visits to their hometowns and villages.

The capital, Taipei, the main location of my research, is situated at the northern tip of the island and is, with a population of roughly 2.7 million, Taiwan's largest city (Taipei City Government, 2014). The low-lying terrain of the Taipei Basin is surrounded by mountains to the south, east and north while the area in the west slopes down towards the mouth of the Danshui River. The subtropical climate influenced by the monsoon causes hot and humid summers with frequent torrential rainstorms and typhoons from June to October. The short winters in Taipei are notorious for their grey skies and fog that cover the valley in a layer of all-pervasive humidity. For this reason, Taipei winters can feel cold despite the relatively mild temperatures that rarely fall below ten degree Celsius. Because of the rather unstable weather conditions and the intense heat during the summers, my meetings with informants were mostly at air-conditioned venues like coffee shops and tea houses, restaurants, malls and night markets where little shops and roofed stalls offered some protection.

While adverse climatic and weather conditions restricted the choice of meeting locations in Taipei, it was environmental hazards that prevented my Chinese informants from venturing outside on many days during my fieldwork in Beijing. In 2013, the air pollution in the

Chinese capital reached record highs and a thick covering of grey smog veiled the city on many days, making it difficult to breathe outside.

I had never been to Beijing before I started my fieldwork in February 2013 and thus my first days were rather stressful. I felt lost in this city that had almost ten times the population of Taipei. Arriving in mid-February, Beijing looked rather bleak to me. The icy winds that blew through the grey streets made me miss the warm temperatures and colourful markets of Taipei. Moreover, with the omnipresent police surveillance and the crowds shoving in stores and subway stations, the atmosphere in the Chinese capital appeared to be tense. With a population of almost 20 million, Beijing is China's second largest city and its political and cultural centre (World Population Review, 2015). Many of China's most highly renowned universities as well as the headquarters of the biggest state-owned companies are located in Beijing, attracting students and young professionals from all over the country to the city (Forbes, 2015).

Situated on the northern rim of the North China Plain, Beijing is surrounded by mountains to the north and west behind which the desert steppe extends. The continental climate is characterized by hot humid summers and cold dry winters. Spring often brings sandstorms from the Gobi Desert which, added to the environmental pollution, cause a deterioration in the air quality. Getting around in Beijing was more difficult than in Taipei. The vastness of the city as well as its notorious traffic jams and crowded public transport made spontaneous meetings difficult. Due to my three-month visas, I struggled to find suitable accommodation and moved between international student housing and private flat shares with expatriates. Like my Taiwanese informants, young people in Beijing worked extremely long hours and were granted only a few days' vacation each year. After work, they had long commutes home which further restricted their availability. Faced with the sheer impossibility of building any meaningful relationships without having any point of contact in this foreign city, I had to design my fieldwork slightly differently from that in Taipei.

From February till April 2013 I worked as an unpaid intern at the Beijing branch office of an Austrian consultancy firm. Most of the office staff were Chinese graduates in their mid to late twenties. Although the workplace offered me the opportunity to get to know young professionals, I was conscious that these highly educated men and women who had studied at top institutions in China and abroad were representative of only a small layer of Beijing's educated elite. To extend my circle of informants, I met students for language exchange sessions and re-established contact with former Chinese classmates I had got to know

during my previous studies in England and Germany. However, as I worked full-time at the consultancy, most of my observations during these first months were of my colleagues.

In September 2013 I returned to Beijing for three months, this time as a visiting research associate at a local university; this provided me with the opportunity to gain a deeper insight into students' lives. There I met a group of PhD students who showed me around the campus and introduced me to their friends. During the following months I got to know a rather broad spectrum of students and young professionals whom I met regularly. However, although many of my Taiwanese informants had introduced me to their family members, this was rarely the case in China. My Chinese informants told me that their parents would not feel comfortable about talking about their private lives with a foreign researcher. In one case, a young woman even had to withdraw from participating in my study, acquiescing to the concerns of her mother. However, the main reason for the fewer family members in my research in Beijing was the long distances to my informants' home places. Due to my limited time and resources it was not possible to visit their hometowns during my stay. I was, nevertheless, invited to a few Chinese households in Beijing which offered me valuable insights into my informants' lives and relationships with their parents.

While making contact with family members proved to be difficult in Beijing, arranging meetings with my young informants was surprisingly easy despite their busy work schedules. In Taiwan, I often struggled to arrange regular meetings with young people who were deeply involved with their responsibilities to partners, parents and grandparents; this was not as problematic in Beijing. Most of them lived on their own, whether their parents resided in Beijing or elsewhere. Living in university dorms, private flat shares or cohabiting with partners, they could manage their time relatively independently and did not have to conform to parental curfews or family engagements at weekends. This freedom facilitated my research immensely and enabled me to deepen new friendships quickly.

After we had got to know each other better, I also shared in my Chinese informants' weekend activities like drives into the mountains, walk in parks, hot-pot meals and - highly popular among my female informants - shopping strolls around the Zoo Market, an underground clothing market famous for its bargains and chaotic jumble of stalls. Due to my Chinese informants' less binding family obligations in their daily lives, I was able to spend more time with each person over a short timespan than I often had been able to do in Taipei. This contributed to the comparability of the data from the two field sites.

IX. Discussion of Methodology, Positionality and Research Ethics

Multi-sited urban research poses a host of challenges which, for a novice fieldworker, might at times be overwhelming. Ulf Hannerz argues that many problems emerging during multi-sited field research are due to the fixation on classical fieldwork methods that require the researcher's immersion in his or her field for several years as well as a methodological emphasis on participant observation (Hannerz, 2003). I arrived at my first field site, Taipei, expecting to conduct rather classical, if time-compressed, ethnographic research that focused on family life with a heavy emphasis on participant observation. Even though I was prepared that my research question as well as my highly urban setting would not allow for casually walking around the neighbourhood and striking up conversations with potential informants, I did not expect the difficulties I encountered in establishing stable contacts in the first weeks. I quickly realized that in the fast paced environment of urban Taiwan, I would have to work with a highly structured schedule that made best use of my informants' free time at night and weekends. In the next months, my mobile phone and online social networks became the most important media through which to arrange meetings and handle invitations. My informants' busy work schedules often meant that we had to arrange appointments days, if not weeks, in advance. Meeting people at set dates instead of conducting participant observation made me feel inadequate as an ethnographer at first.

Hannerz notes that "settings of modernity" where informants "spend hours alone at a desk, perhaps concentrating on a computer screen" force the urban researcher to create a new set of methodological tools that involve more foresight and planning (p. 211). Consequently, instead of following the flow of life, I had to be highly organized and persistent, adjusting my methods to this urban lifestyle. These particular circumstances also had an impact on the kind of data I gathered in the field. Most of the encounters with my Chinese and Taiwanese informants were one-to-one meetings that took place in the rather anonymous environments of tea shops, restaurants and trips to malls and night markets. These places were typical venues at which they also met up with their friends and for romantic dates. Although these meetings provided me with a valuable insight into Chinese and Taiwanese youth culture, they did not offer me many opportunities to observe my informants' family lives. However, conducting numerous in-depth interviews with informants in environments where they felt at ease talking about their hopes and worries also offered several advantages for my study. First, I could establish relationships of deep trust with my informants that enabled them to talk openly about topics that concerned them, uninhibited by the presence of family members or romantic partners. Second, by

conducting several in-depth interviews with each informant over a timespan of six to eleven months, followed up by Skype interviews, I could not only track the decisions they made but also observe whether their rationales had changed. The strong emphasis on interviews coupled with the tracing of the choices they made over a long timespan emerged as an effective method with which to examine the contemplations that accompany decision-making. Third, I also gained insight into how my informants dealt with the consequences of their choices; how they coped with disappointment and doubt if things did not turn out as they had hoped, as well as the strategies with which they tried to overcome disillusion.

Nevertheless, I was concerned about the rather interview-based nature of my fieldwork and also wondered how to begin studying the locals; in both Taipei and Beijing, my informants appeared to be all over the place, changing locations constantly not only within the city but across the globe to pursue their aspirations. Hannerz points out that "the local" is becoming an illusion in a globalizing world in which migration and displacement are becoming increasingly shared experiences (p. 210). In many field sites, he argues, "[t]here are more people who are, like the anthropologist, more like strangers" (ibid.). This was certainly an experience of mine in both locations. I often set out to discover the city with my informants who, like me, had only recently arrived to work or study. Often they had not yet grown accustomed to the different manners or dialect. Curiously, I bonded with them through our experience of being outsiders. Later, some of my Chinese and Taiwanese informants visited me in Germany and England - delineating a field site thus became increasingly difficult.

Many of my informants were students too, whereas others connected with me via their personal experiences of missing their family and friends while following career paths that might not lead them back home. They were concerned about the progress of my research and often introduced me to friends while briefing me beforehand that this person was an extremely "representative" or "interesting" case. Having similar educational backgrounds, sometimes within the humanities, I often found it difficult to distinguish between the roles of research assistant and informant.

Maryl C. Lawlor and Cheryl E. Mattingly point out the difficulties researchers encounter in drawing adequate boundaries in relationships with informants and being conscious of the responsibilities that an involvement in their lives implies (Lawlor and Mattingly, 2001). They stress that "[p]rolongued engagement contributes to the complexity as relationships deepen and shift over time and participants accumulate a substantial reservoir of shared

experiences" (p. 147). Although time spent together did contribute to the formation of trust, personal experiences first and foremost enabled us to connect. Although we had different cultural backgrounds, my Taiwanese informants and I shared in the more "universal experience" of being urban twenty-somethings in the developed world who had successfully navigated through institutions of higher education; however, we also felt confused and disoriented when degrees did not deliver the promised jobs. The experiences coming of age of young Chinese people appeared to be more removed from my own, but as we were of approximately the same age and we had similar educational backgrounds, our current worries and concerns about the future connected us.

Joanne Passaro criticizes what she perceives of as an imperative of "otherness" in anthropology (Passaro, 1997 p. 152). It is commonly assumed, she argues, that a socioeconomic or cultural distance between the fieldworker and informants liberates the researcher from any "ideological filter" and thus renders his or her findings more "objective" (ibid.). I wondered how I should deal with this, at times, unexpected lack of otherness vis-à-vis certain informants and worried that I was lacking this "ideological filter" as their questions and concerns resembled mine too much (ibid.). Was my difficulty in drawing boundaries, being able to see an "other" where I saw sameness, a symptom of "having surrendered to the field" and having been "absorbed by it", as Hannerz puts it (Hannerz, 2003 p. 209)? Or was this the consequence of tracing processes linked to sentiments and emotions that are part of a more general human experience?

In the first months of my research, I was confronted with the more practical problem of adjusting my methods to fit the restricted timeframe. In Taiwan, where my main research consisted of eleven months, I conducted mostly informal interviews with my young informants during which we discussed their personal biographies, current issues and plans for the future. After several weeks, I drew a kinship diagram with each of them during which we reviewed their relationship to each of their relatives. Towards the end of the research I conducted life-history interviews with parents or grandparents. In Taiwan, I met about eleven men and eighteen women regularly and conducted life-history interviews with thirteen parents and grandparents, most of which I recorded. At the end of my research, I asked them to fill out a survey with questions pertaining to household finances. I returned to Taiwan for follow-up interviews for three weeks in September 2013. In 2014 I conducted structured life-history interviews with my Taiwanese key informants via skype which I recorded. I did this in order to improve the comparability of the Taiwanese data to the interview data collected in Beijing.

Due to my tighter schedule in Beijing, I first recorded a life-history interview with each key informant; twenty-six in total. During a second meeting, I drew a kinship diagram and recorded our conversation while working on the diagram. During the third meeting, I let them fill out my survey. My experience was that it was difficult to motivate people to return the survey to me and it turned out to be helpful to discuss the survey together. I found that these three "research" meetings were helpful so as to provide a platform on which to develop a relationship during the short time available to me in Beijing. I interviewed eleven young men and fifteen women in Beijing.

Restricting my analysis to highly educated young urban residents, my work describes the aspirations and choices of those young Chinese and Taiwanese who, compared to their less educated peers, might have a relatively wide range of options available to them. While their concerns about their families and marital future might have been similar to those felt by young adults whose academic and professional options were more restricted, their hopes and aspirations might be typical only for this particular highly educated group of young urbanites. My analysis is thus not aiming to make claims about the whole of the young urban Chinese and Taiwanese population, but only about members of the university educated, internationally oriented and aspiring middle class youths from among whom I collected my case studies.

All in all I have to mention that it was easier for me to build up close relationships with women in both field sites, yet especially in Taiwan. This was because it appeared that it was rather unusual for an unmarried woman to meet single men repeatedly without any intention to date them.

Throughout my research, I was open about my work as an anthropologist as well as my research topic. Informants gave me their consent and were informed that their data would be treated confidentially. To protect my informants and their families, I use pseudonyms and have changed certain details that could reveal their identity. As I had to sign a confidentiality agreement with the consultancy in Beijing, I will talk about my relationships with my colleagues but will not provide any further details about the content of my work.

I analysed my data applying a thematic approach. That is, I structured the data gathered in formal and informal interviews and observations by identifying the main themes that would form the basis for my comparison. I then designed an index to order the selected data segments according to these themes (Guest et al., 2012 pp. 49-79).

The interviews were conducted in English, Chinese and German, according to the preferences of each informant. Most informants were deeply engaged in their studies or early careers and thus only reluctantly took time off for leisure activities. I found that many of them felt more at ease with meeting me if they had the opportunity to improve their language skills at the same time. I thus decided to offer the option for language exchange despite the obvious difficulties which would ensue from this in terms of the comparability of the data. As a consequence, I was not able to conduct a quantitative analysis of key terms, however, the thematic analysis still allowed me to determine the major concerns and problems surrounding my informants' key decisions.

Immediately after each informal meeting I wrote a summary of it in either English or German. The interviews I recorded I either transcribed entirely or partially, depending on how useful the information appeared to be for my project. I also made notes during the structured life-history interviews, except for those I conducted in Chinese, which I used for my later summaries and transcriptions. Interviews conducted in Chinese I translated into German before analysing them. Back from fieldwork, I analysed the material in order to identify major themes and designed an index of important topics (such as marriage, religion, conflicts with parents, romantic relationships etc.) for each field site. I then segmented the interview and observation data according to these themes. I thus designed two indexes with largely identical themes, one for China and one for Taiwan. With the help of these indexes, I first compared the material I gathered within each fieldsite and then, after delineating commonalities, I compared the findings of the two fieldsites with each other. At this early point of the analysis some major commonalities and differences already became apparent by the volume of material I had gathered for each theme. Thus, the topic of religion took more space in the index for Taiwan whereas the theme of early childhood separation from parents took considerably more space in the China index. However, topics like romantic relationships and achievement pressure seemed to be equally important at both locales. From this, I continued with a more detailed analysis of the data and also selected my case studies with the help of the index. After having designed a rough outline of the chapters and the cases I wanted to present, I returned to the original data and interviews for a deeper analysis of each case. Further, I transcribed more recorded interviews that had now gained importance to flesh out my case studies. At the same time, I also contacted several of my key informants with skype or email to ask about missing details or to receive updates about their current situation which I then added to the index before starting with the actual writing process of the thesis.

X. Outline of Chapters

The following chapters will elucidate different domains of decision-making and shed light on the underlying dynamics that affect aspirations and life choices. I will take a closer look at those aspects of young adults' lives that are mostly concerned with the integration of personal aspirations and normative expectations. Having to integrate traditional values with new ideals that have emerged under the influence of increasing access to higher education, a globalized market and the growing influence of international media proves to be increasingly difficult for young Chinese and Taiwanese. Decisions in the realms of higher education, careers and marriages affect a person's immediate social environment and can thus be expected to be ideal parameters to determine societal change.

Chapter one will discuss how the content of filial obligation has changed due to societal transformations that have caused a reconceptualization of childhood and the parent-child relationship, accompanied by increased intergenerational conflicts. Childhood accounts of mothers and their grown-up children will provide greater insight into the transformation of parental authority, emotional intimacy and filial obligation that impact on future decision-making in terms of autonomy. Chapter two elucidates how the specific demographics of China and Taiwan have given rise to different education systems that have resulted in diverging degrees of independence from parents. Moreover, it will be shown how parental ambitions as well as early experiences of success and failure in schools affect aspirations and perceptions of personal agency differently among young Chinese and Taiwanese people. Chapter three examines how those early ambitions came to be realized in professional careers. Conflicts with parents often surface when young people gain the material independence to break away from parental authority and pursue their own plans. The strategies young Chinese and Taiwanese people apply to mitigate arguments with family members are dependent on the degree of autonomy they have reached at that time. However, issues pertaining to one's choice of partner and marriage (chapter four) also cause much controversy. As with schooling and careers, the intrinsic structural conditions of China and Taiwan do not impact only on parents' authority over the choice of their offspring's spouses but also affect expectations in terms of family life and residence which have undergone enormous changes in the urban environments of Beijing and Taipei. After shedding light on aspirations and choices revolving around major biographical milestones, chapter five will look at the aspects that inform decisions and trigger doubt. Young Chinese and Taiwanese people both have to overcome ambiguities in decision-making that are resolved by way of strategies that respond to the different realities of the localities. Taking into account anthropological and psychological theories about decision-making, an

examination will be conducted showing how different cultural beliefs, socioeconomic environments and political ideologies impact on young people's life choices and rationales. Chapter six will look at young adults who have not succeeded in finding a satisfying compromise between their personal aspirations and normative expectations. Feeling disenchanted and frustrated with their current situation, they presume that escaping abroad is the only way to avoid societal pressures. On their way to reaching this goal, some feel reinvigorated by occasional successes while others encounter even more setbacks that only exacerbate their unfortunate situation. In the last chapter my analysis will be summed up by connecting young people's pursuit of an independent life with emancipatory struggles in the political domain. Hope for a better future is a major theme in Chinese and Taiwanese nationalism and the way political and economic autonomy is pursued in both countries is closely connected with the personal hopes and aspirations of young Chinese and Taiwanese people.

Chapter One - Growing Up under Different Regimes - Childhood Memories of Mothers and their Children

1.1. Introduction

After spending several weeks at my first field site in Taipei, I realized that in order to understand the hopes and aspirations of young Taiwanese, I would need to form a better understanding of the social and spatial environments in which they grew up. Initially, I found it puzzling that conversations with these aspiring professionals, who seemed to excel in their lives in most ways, came more often than not to be dominated by their fears of not meeting their parents' high expectations and the problems they encountered in communicating their personal aspirations to parents. Slowly I noticed that these problems were based not only on their parents' uncompromisingly ambitious plans for their children's future but also on increasingly diverging ideals of the parent-child relationship. Many of my young Chinese and Taiwanese informants criticized the fact that instead of offering space for emotional closeness and communication, their parents appeared distant and neglectful of their individual needs; they also felt that they had been raised not so much to be happy as to be *successful*. As they reached adulthood, it became increasingly difficult to bridge the rifts that had emerged between them and their parents. Others, however, could identify to a greater extent with their parents' rather traditional expectations and worked hard to meet them. Yet the sacrifices this implied in terms of their personal life goals were immense and often threatened to complicate relationships with romantic partners and future career plans.

When talking to the parents of my informants, I noted that although they often understood that their children's aspirations might be different from their own, not least because they remembered similar conflicts from their own youths, they regarded it as their responsibility to ensure that the children would not fall behind on the competitive education market. Acknowledging a child's individual wishes, while ensuring his or her future competitiveness in the world of work, thus often implied a balancing act.

Particularly memorable in this context were the childhood memories of Shu-fen, a young woman I met in Taipei in the summer of 2012. Due to her flawless British English, I initially assumed that she had grown up in the UK but in fact had studied the language diligently since her early childhood, pushed by her extraordinarily ambitious mother. From a very early age, her mother had imbued her with the importance of a higher education and had expressed her hopes that, one day, Shu-fen would be accepted by a renowned

university. Shu-fen's mother proudly told me that her daughter had learnt to read characters and speak English before she had started primary school. With a sense of pride, Shu-fen recalled how she had communicated in English with foreign missionaries in Taipei as a young child. Now, as she drew close to being accepted by a top European university, she had surpassed even the ambitious hopes of her mother.

In our conversations, Shu-fen often stressed her admiration for her mother's strength and assertiveness. Yet she also recalled stressful moments when she felt overwhelmed by her mother's ambitions for her future:

> "[Striving for the best schools] is the norm of the whole of Taiwanese society. In my case, it's also because my mum has received higher education […]. Also, she is smart and she says that she can feel that I am smart, too. She asked me to always do my best and doing the best by her standards means going to the best school. […] In my mum's generation, going to university was a very prestigious thing because that means that you are smart, that you are successful. You can definitely get a job after your studies. So they passed on that concept to our generation. […] I never really argued with her because arguing with my mum is a bit meaningless. She is quite stubborn. Mostly, I was just talking to my friends. […] After my second year of study at senior high school, I found out that I really don't like [my subject choice] and that I don't want to be a [medical] doctor, so apparently my interest is not there. I talked to my mum, but my mum thought that it was just an excuse because I was doing really badly […] so I could not change [subjects]. I was pretty mad. In my family, my mother is this all-powerful figure who controls everyone's decisions, I think I was in the habit of just obeying her."

Despite her mother's seemingly controlling attitude, Shu-fen had managed to push through her goal of studying for a degree in history. She was able to convince her mother of this plan by being accepted on a programme at one of Taiwan's most renowned universities. However, while studying in Taipei, Shu-fen did not move out of her family home so her mother continued to wield influence over her life. This remained unchanged even after her graduation when she started working as an assistant at a publishing house in Taipei; this job, due to its proximity to her home, forced her to continue living with her mother and sister.

Her mother's presence was almost "tangible" in many of our meetings. Shu-fen, anxious not to worry her, frequently sent text messages about her whereabouts and confirmed when she would be home. Her mother did not allow her to go out to dance clubs at weekends and, usually, Shu-fen had to be home by ten each night. Pretending to be stressed by her job, she could nevertheless find some time for herself sometimes. Her younger

sister, however, had not found a way of distancing herself from their mother's demands. She spent most of her time running errands for their mother and assisting her at home. The atmosphere at home was often tense.

After Shu-fen finished work, we often met for dinner at one of the little restaurants close to her office. During one of these meetings, she told me about her recent application for a postgraduate programme in France. Our conversation that evening thus revolved around the pros and cons of her future plans. Picking at her noodles, Shu-fen seemed indecisive. Her chances of winning a funded place to study in Paris looked good yet she appeared almost fearful of receiving an offer. She had always dreamt of studying at the University of Cambridge in England, she sighed. She did not know whether she should accept the potential offer to study in Paris. She did not know whether she could give up on her dream. Yet, should she risk not being able to leave Taipei at all?

Like Shu-fen, most of my young Taiwanese informants either lived with their families or were surrounded by other family members resident in Taipei. They were thus closely monitored in their everyday lives and any transgressions of parental rules were immediately noticed and criticized. I often heard accounts of parents who, like Shu-fen's mother, controlled their children's educational or professional performances or who interfered with their romantic relationships. Many young Taiwanese thus appeared stressed by having to keep important parts of their lives hidden from their parents while living in the same household.

In China, I could observe the same trend - parents pushing their children to achieve high scores in exams to secure places at national or international first-tier universities and trying to influence their choice of partner. However, I soon noticed that young Chinese people in Beijing responded to the pressures of their families differently and seemed to have found ways to pursue their goals more autonomously. There were several obvious factors that contributed to these differences in personal independence.

My Chinese informants' everyday lives were usually not as dominated by their family relationships. Most of them lived independently, either because their parents did not reside in Beijing or because they had moved into their own flat after starting work; this was more common among young, unmarried informants in Beijing than in Taipei (Farrer, 2014). Moreover, Chinese parents were not only too far removed spatially to interfere with their children's lives, often they also lacked the educational background to provide useful advice on the educational or career choices of their children. Many parents had missed out on parts of their education due to the turbulence of the Cultural Revolution. They thus often

did not have a clear concept of the way in which their children's university degrees could translate into a professional job on the urban labour market. This educational gap was often perceived as irreconcilable and was a major cause for conflict and misunderstanding. However, it also protected my Chinese informants from too much parental interference.

In Taiwan, by contrast, the educational system had already been modernized at the onset of major economic transformations in the 1960s (Rubinstein, 1999 pp. 377-384). Even if the authoritarian classroom structure and the heavily politicized curriculum of the martial law era had largely been remodelled in recent decades, Taiwanese parents' experiences of the educational system in the 1960s and 1970s were, compared to their Chinese counterparts, not as removed from the ones their children made in the 1990s and 2000s.

Although demographic and socioeconomic factors can help to explain some of the important differences I observed in the family relationships of my Chinese and Taiwanese informants, they cannot wholly account for parents' different degrees of acceptance of their children's independence. Why did Chinese parents appear to have accepted a sense of autonomy in their children that was not as obvious among the young Taiwanese?

I hoped that a closer examination of the distinct ideological programmes of the CCP and the KMT during the 1960s and 1970s and their effects on family life might reveal underlying trends that influenced parent-child relations in subsequent generations. When listening to the accounts of my young informants and their mothers, I soon noticed that their childhood experiences reflected the different ideological trends that had occurred in China and Taiwan since the 1950s. It also transpired that the values parents conveyed to their children bore the imprint of the intense inculcation of the different political ideologies they had been exposed to during their childhood.

Harriet Evans has examined the impact that changing politico-ideological discourses and the associated parenting methods have had on mother-daughter relationships in urban China (Evans, 2008; 2010). She describes how women who came of age during the Cultural Revolution often experienced long periods of separation from their parents due to the latter's work assignments or political activism. Deeply influenced by these early experiences of alienation from parents, these women later encountered difficulties in establishing close relationships of trust with their own daughters born in the early reform era. Evans also interviewed these women's daughters who were then in their early twenties. They criticized their mothers' lack of emotional warmth and understanding as well as their apparent neglect of their individual hopes and aspirations. Yet their yearning for closer communication with their mothers and the latter's acknowledgment of their personal

hopes and dreams often remained unfulfilled (ibid.).

Teresa Kuan's recent research in Kunming discusses in greater detail the difficulties parents face in integrating the educational demands dictated by the competitive schooling system with recognition of their child's autonomy and individual needs (Kuan, 2015). She focuses especially on the negative impact that the growing pressure to achieve has had on children's psychological well-being and parent-child relationships. She describes the case of a third-grader who, overburdened by her tight schedule of schoolwork and extra-curricular activities, needed treatment at a psychiatric clinic. In the aftermath of the girl's illness, her mother was torn between her feelings of guilt for not having realized earlier the amount of stress her daughter was under and worries that any relaxation of her schedule would compromise her competitiveness within the education system (pp. 1-7).

Although these studies above both discuss issues which have emerged due to the particularities of the political ideology, economic system and discourses on child-raising in China, Taiwanese parent-child relationships were strained by similar conflicts. It will be shown below that an explanation of the intergenerational communication problems and the value conflicts evident in both societies cannot be reduced to rapid economic changes. Moreover, they are also related to shared notions of parental and filial obligations that are not always easily integrated with modern discourses on parenting and personal autonomy.

In the first part of the chapter, I will discuss how the different political and socioeconomic environments have laid the foundation for the emergence of different ideas about a child's autonomy and how these concepts were perceived by my informants. In the second part, I will discuss the different strategies my Chinese and Taiwanese informants apply to solve or circumvent communication problems and value conflicts with their parents. I will demonstrate that despite ideological differences, traditional ideas of intergenerational support are still influential in both societies and complicate parents' and children's mutual expectations. I hope to give the reader an impression of the underlying reasons for intergenerational conflicts to facilitate an understanding of young people's varying strategies to mitigate arguments and realize their aspirations.

1.2. Ideological Inculcation and its Impact on Parent-Child Relationships

It soon crystallized from Shu-fen's accounts of her mother's high expectations of her that meeting all of her demands was rather difficult. On the one hand, Shu-fen was encouraged to pursue an elite education at international institutions of higher education. On the other

hand, she was expected not only to assist her mother at home and keep her company but also to be present in her old age. Shu-fen was eventually offered a place at the university in Paris which she decided to accept. However, she told me that her mother expected her to return to Taipei immediately after she had completed her studies and move back into the family home.

Shortly before Shu-fen had to leave Taipei, she agreed to introduce her mother to me. She suggested meeting at a high-end Western-style coffee shop close to their flat in Xinyi Qu, Taipei's modern business district. On our introduction, Shu-fen's mother, Mrs Fan, appeared impatient and vivacious, almost the polar opposite of her calm and collected daughter who accompanied her. She told me that she was meeting me "between appointments" and had not had time to change clothes. She was dressed rather casually, wearing jeans covered with ink stains that her little nephew had carelessly caused. After our meeting, she had to rush to pick up her mother-in-law who was visiting Taipei. She clearly expected a structured interview instead of the relaxed conversation about her childhood memories that I had planned. While I was introducing my research to her, she rushed me in English to "start with question one." Yet as we started talking about her past, she seemed to forget about her pressing appointments. Reflecting on her tumultuous life, she became thoughtful and, as the interview progressed, increasingly assertive in stating her wish that Shu-fen, who was listening to her account, might learn from her story and not make the same mistakes.

Mrs Fan told me that she had grown up with strict parents who spoilt her brother while she, as the eldest daughter, had to take care of the household chores. The daily beatings and verbal mistreatment administered by her mother when she was a young teenager added to her despair. Whereas a significant proportion of the family's resources was invested in the education of her brother, she and her younger sister received little care and support. She asked me if I knew the idiom: "A married-out daughter is like spilt water" (*Jia chuqu de nü'er shi pochu de shui*). This, Mrs Fan explained, summed up her mother's attitude to her. Expecting her daughter to soon marry and thus be her husband's responsibility, her mother was not willing to invest in her future.

She explained her mother's mistreatment of her by telling me about certain unfortunate signs surrounding her birth. As a teenager, she had learnt that her mother had tried to abort her twice. A female acquaintance suggested to her mother that these unsuccessful attempts could only be explained by a spiritual debt she owed to the unborn child. Hence, she was destined to carry it to term. It added to her mother's suspicion that she was born at

a rather inauspicious time. Her mother believed profoundly in the typical character attributes associated with each Chinese sign of the zodiac (*dizhi*). She thus resented having given birth to a baby girl in the year of the tiger. This zodiac sign is associated with stubbornness and independence, character traits that were deemed to be unsuitable for a woman. Moreover, due to certain taboos that those born under this sign traditionally have to observe, Mrs Fan was barred from participating in certain community rituals and celebrations which added to her feeling of rejection.

Aged thirteen, Mrs Fan felt so desperate about her status in the family that she tried to commit suicide by drowning herself in a river. At the last minute, however, she decided to live and swam to the banks. From then on, she concentrated on her studies, determined to get into one of Taiwan's best schools. Despite her household obligations, she had always been a good student. Her marks were promising and a place at the National Taiwan University (NTU) seemed to be within reach.

Shortly before her final exams at senior high school, however, she fell in love with a classmate and her marks dropped. She remembered with regret that her exam scores only allowed her to be accepted by a private university. Mrs Fan, though at that time still shattered by this failure, tried to make the best of her degree in English and started working as an analyst for a Japanese company after graduation.

After breaking up with her high school sweetheart, she got to know her husband at her workplace. She could no longer remember what attracted her to him. Shu-fen entered into the conversation at this point and remarked that her mother had always seemed to be rather indifferent to her father. Mrs Fan confirmed this, arguing that she did not find him very intelligent but liked his good temper. However, her father warned her against her future husband. Believing that facial features reveal an individual's character traits (*mian xiang*), he believed to have read in the face of his daughter's fiancé that he would turn physically aggressive to his future wife and would not be a very responsible person. At the same time, the father of her fiancé was pushing for them to get married. His son was about to turn twenty-nine, an age regarded as inauspicious for marriage. He thus wanted them to complete the ceremony before this thirtieth birthday.

Even though the topic of our conversation was quite sad at this point, Mrs Fan told her story in a rather stoic, almost humoristic way; most likely assuming that her daughter and I would find it difficult to relate to her experiences. Indeed, listening to her mother's account Shu-fen had to suppress her amusement. While Mrs Fan was answering a phone call, she uttered: "Why did they marry? [...] That sounds so weird, he? [...] I don't think my mum

made a decision." Her mother, having overheard her daughter, added that other people had indeed always been pushing her to make decisions, whether in terms of her career or marriage. She never had a real opinion of her own about these things (*mei you xiangfa*).

Unsurprisingly to Mrs Fan's family, their marriage was soon placed under pressure by her husband's multiple affairs. Mrs Fan thus decided to divorce her husband after her eldest daughter had finished high school. Despite having to raise her three children alone from then on, she could not expect much support from her natal family. She thus focused on her career and, as she soon earned more than her ex-husband, she was indeed able to care for her children alone.

Mrs Fan told me that she felt lucky that her education had allowed her to stay financially independent throughout her marriage and divorce. For this reason, she also inculcated the value of higher education into her children: "In your career, you can work hard and you will get good feedback. Unfortunately, this does not work the same way in marriage." She confessed that when Shu-fen was offered a place at NTU, she had fulfilled her long-held wish and she proudly thought to herself: "This is my daughter." Looking at her daughter, Mrs Fan beamed with pride. Even though she had not managed to be accepted by the NTU, which she called "her" university, when she was young, she had been able to set an example of determination and perseverance for her daughter.

The lack of understanding with which Shu-fen listened to her mother's account parallels the attitude with which the young Chinese women interviewed by Evans looked back on their mother's life choices (Evans, 2008). Evans describes that in China, notions of personal agency in decisions about marriage and childbirth have changed. While women born in the Mao era still conceived of these events as "naturalized obligations," their daughters had more autonomy in such decisions (p. 186). Now, with marriage considered to be more an "individual matter" than before, it was difficult for young women to comprehend their mother's choices (ibid.). Similarly, Shu-fen found it hard to grasp that her seemingly emancipated, headstrong mother had given in to the demands of her partner and in-laws instead of pursuing her personal goals beyond the traditional path of childbirth and marriage. To Shu-fen, this seemed especially inconceivable as her mother had conferred upon her the importance of a higher education and a successful career since early childhood.

Like Mrs Fan, most parents I talked to in China and Taiwan referred to their own childhoods to explain which values they tried to impart to their children. Often, the stress they placed on formal education originated in their regret of having been deprived of their

personal educational choices as young people. In Taiwan, a common theme among mothers was often that, during their youths in the 1960s and 1970s, women were encouraged to work in professions that could be combined with motherhood after marriage. Many Taiwanese women of this generation had a university education or did an apprenticeship but they were unable to pursue a career due to their obligations in the home or family business. They now wanted their children to realize the professional careers their education could allow for.

In China, a common regret of parents was that their education and early career had been interrupted by the Cultural Revolution. Some parents of my Chinese informants had only little education and worked as farmers or did low-skilled migrant work in the cities. They were thus eager for their children to succeed in the educational system in order to secure a better future and, as was often stressed, have "an easier life." Other parents who ran successful businesses in the cities were ashamed by their low education that led them to have the status of the "nouveau riche" (*xinfu*/*tuhao*) and hoped to gain face by virtue of their children's elite education.

In both societies, especially those parents who felt their own education and career had been curtailed were understandably proud of their offspring's early academic achievements. Not only Mrs Fan, who openly praised how her daughter's educational successes had been forecasted by her early showing of language skills, drew pride from her children's academic excellence. Relatives of another highly successful Taiwanese woman still remembered how she had scored exceptionally highly in an IQ test at primary school and taught her younger siblings of kindergarten age to read the newspaper. In the same way, the science or speech competitions that some of my Chinese informants had won as children still filled their parents with a sense of pride today. These stories of childhood achievements were cherished and often recalled as early manifestations of children's intelligence which, at the same time, placed parents under the obligation to foster these talents in their children.

Yet, it should be noted that Chinese parents' responsibilities have been highly politicised and contested for decades and underwent important shifts with each ideological change in the political sphere (Croll, 1990; Kipnis, 2006). Although Confucian values of obedience to parents had been called into question by the May Fourth Movement as early as 1919-1925, they were much more fiercely attacked from the early 1950s as the CCP introduced political reforms aimed at dissolving family ties and intergenerational obligations to strengthen Party rule (Harrison, 2001 pp. 170-175; Yan, 2003). During the Cultural Revolution many young people joint activist groups which let parents' authority over them diminish significantly

(Chan, 1985 pp. 68-79). Moreover, the new working conditions in the communes and work units further isolated youths from their parents. Yan describes that collectivization opened up a new space free from parental supervision for rural youth who previously had to work on family farms (Yan, 2003 p. 52). In the Chinese cities, where people were assigned to work units (*danwei*), the distance between parents and children was increased by the introduction of day care facilities provided by the *danwei* and social welfare measures that supported early economic independence from parents (Liu, 2007; Evans, 2010). Further, the rustication programme which assigned urban youths to agricultural work in rural areas played a key role in increasing their independence from parents. As Helena Rene emphasises:

> "If the rustication programme was irrational in normal economic terms and from the perspective of maintaining equilibrium, it certainly made sense in terms of emancipating sent-down youth from traditional 'exploitative' family structures" (Rene, 2013 p. 90).

Whereas during the Mao era, efforts were made to isolate parents from child-rearing tasks to guarantee the party's full impact on their ideological development, from the reform era onwards, parents were obliged to bear the main responsibility for encouraging their children's academic excellence and ideological integrity (Croll, 1990). Yet to guarantee their competitiveness on the education market, children are now often sent to boarding institutions or have to participate in time-consuming extra-curricular activities that further reduce their contact with their parents (Fong, 2004; Hansen, 2015; Kuan, 2015).

Unlike in Taiwan, the theme of separation from natal families caused by the direct and indirect factors of these party-induced transformations ran through the life stories of my young Chinese informants and their parents alike. Mrs Xi, the mother of a young man called Liang - a colleague at the Beijing consultancy I worked at for several months - was one of them. I was often assigned to assist Liang with projects and we quickly became friends. When he heard about my research, he was eager to introduce his mother to me who, he expected, would be willing to talk openly about her past.

Mrs Xi appeared indeed happy to have the opportunity to talk about her childhood memories. I met her one evening in her small flat in an old apartment building that had once belonged to her work unit. Born in Guangzhou in the mid-1940s, she still seemed to long for her southern home town whose houses and people she described vibrantly. Due to her father's military relocation, her family had to move to the capital where she was admitted to a music conservatory. At that time, family life was already strained by her mother's mental illness and Mrs Xi spent most of the year at boarding school. She was a

remarkably ambitious violin student but during the Great Leap Forward hunger and exhaustion started to overshadow her carefree life. The shortage of food made it hard for students to follow lessons. She remembered vividly the hunger that accompanied them everywhere. Returning to her family home had not been possible as the conditions there were even worse than at school (*shenghuo hen jianku*). Hence, she was more or less self-reliant during these difficult years.

Mrs Xi graduated from the conservatory despite these poor conditions and was soon assigned a workplace as a music teacher at a vocational college. She was also allocated a flat by her *danwei* and, during these years, Mrs Xi enjoyed the independent life she led in the capital. However, with the onset of the Cultural Revolution and the disruption it caused to the education system, her work was also affected. When the school was eventually closed down, she was sent to the countryside around Beijing to help farmers fertilize the fields, work she detested not only due to physical exhaustion but also because the harsh chemicals caused her headaches. With a tone of regret in her voice, she remarked that today's youth would be oblivious to this part of Chinese history.

Mrs Xi's parents raised her very independently and encouraged her interest in the arts so she had never felt the urge to marry. Having passed the age of thirty, however, the social pressure on her to find a husband increased. When a former classmate who had recently divorced his wife proposed to her, she gave in. Laughing, she explained that their characters did not match at all (*bu heshi*) but that she had been blind to this when they married. Two years later, her son Liang was born. She had to leave the child with a nanny because she had to return to work immediately. Like Mrs Fan, she told me that in retrospect, she would have been happy to completely immerse herself in her work without having to carry out the duties of a wife and mother.

Mrs Xi's life story illustrates how the education and workplace systems of the PRC during the communist era enabled her to lead a relatively independent life. In attending boarding school, she lived independently from her family even as an adolescent, whereas Mrs Fan had more difficulty negotiating her desire for a higher education with her parents. Both women eventually separated from their husbands and concluded that marriage should be carefully considered. However, even though Mrs Fan encouraged her daughters to pursue a higher education, she imparted to them a filial ideology that was strikingly traditional. Mrs Xi applied a similar liberal approach in raising her only son, Liang, as she had experienced with her parents. These different parenting styles resulted in distinct forms of resentment in their children. Whereas Shu-fen lamented her mother's pressure to achieve and the

limited range of choice she had in childhood and adolescence, Liang complained that he lacked his parents' attention and guidance during his difficult formative years at boarding school.

Due to the long periods of separation from his parents in his childhood, Liang felt a distance from his mother that he found difficult to overcome. He returned to Beijing from his studies in Austria only shortly before I got to know him at work. Mrs Xi had suffered from poor health and when she needed major surgery, he felt obliged to return to Beijing to care for her. Now that she was in relatively good health again, he was unsure of how to plan his future. Liang often spent his evenings with Wei-xin, our female colleague, and me because he did not want to return home too early where his mother would be waiting for him.

From early on, Liang felt neglected by his parents who both invested most of their time in their work. After having lived mostly with his grandparents, he was sent to boarding kindergarten when he was just three years old. He still remembered his tears each Monday morning when his mother left him with the teachers and how he anxiously waited for her to pick him up on Friday afternoon. One time, after they had left him at the kindergarten for a month due to a work commitment in the south, he refused to recognize his parents and hid behind his teacher on their return. Liang often wet the bed at kindergarten and was regularly scolded by the teachers. After he started school, he spent most days with his classmates as his parents worked late. Nevertheless, he found it difficult to adjust to his peers and felt like an outsider. He considered himself a bad student and found it difficult to keep up with the curriculum. However, he rarely talked about his problems with his parents. Liang attributed this to a general lack of communication between his family members. Later, he moved into a university dormitory in Beijing while his parents resided in a house in the suburbs. He was critical of the fact that he had been expected to follow the instructions of his parents and teachers without objection. Proper communication had thus not been possible and, in many ways, his parents had been blind to his needs. His parents now lived separately from one another and, to his astonishment, they were now suddenly trying to win his affections and wanted him to spend time with them. Moreover, his mother had started to exert subtle pressure on him to marry his girlfriend and have a family. He appeared quite disconcerted by these sudden claims on his filial love and, overwhelmed by their expectations, he hoped to be able to leave the country soon to continue his career abroad. Recounting his childhood memories, Liang still appeared bitter. He could not understand why his parents had not cared more about the well-being of their only child.

Liang's feelings of parental neglect and of being misunderstood are reflected in many of the childhood accounts of my Chinese informants. Liang grew up in the urban environment of Beijing and was born to highly educated parents. He mostly criticized their focus on their careers that prevented them from taking sufficient care of him. By comparison, rural students and those from a less educated background often complained about their parents' lack of understanding of the pressures they faced within the highly competitive education system. For all of them, the long periods of separation from parents, due to parental work commitments or their education at boarding schools, appeared to be defining moments in their childhoods. Whereas the Taiwanese mothers I talked to appeared to be eager to keep such separations from their children as short as possible as they were worried about facing old age alone, Chinese mothers seemed to be more accepting of their children's absence if it benefitted their academic or professional careers. One factor that may have facilitated the more traditional mindset of Taiwanese parents may be the importance placed on Confucian family ideals within the KMT party ideology.

Unlike the CCP, the KMT in Taiwan used the image of the family as an instrument to instil its population with a sense of duty towards the nation. Stafford points out that, blurring family relationships with political affiliations, Sun Yat-sen was portrayed as the father of the nation; similarly, his biologically unrelated successor, Chiang Kai-shek, was portrayed as his "dutiful son" working towards the completion of his father's nationalist vision (Stafford, 1995 p. 117). In an effort to Sinicize the population, the KMT also introduced the reading of the Confucian classics in Taiwanese classrooms, especially emphasizing those works that stressed filial virtues and the recognition of natural hierarchies (Fetzer and Soper, 2013 pp. 21-25). Wilson states that "[s]upport by the family for education and for the teacher is echoed by the support given the home in school. In education, much of this support revolves around the concept of filial piety as the root of all proper relations to authority" (Wilson, 1970 p. 62). The KMT thus drew on powerful family idioms in their political imagery.

It is difficult to determine to what extent the ideological inculcation of filial piety had a lasting impact on parenting, or whether the more conservative attitude towards filial obligations in Taiwan was preserved to a greater extent by other factors such as the structures of the labour market, especially the greater prevalence of women employed in the informal sector. Either way, the KMT's endorsement of the concept did not imply any strict break with Taiwanese family life but instead highlighted the Confucian roots of existing practices in order to foster an identification with Chinese culture in the population (Fetzer and Soper, 2013 pp. 47-48). As illustrated by the childhood memories of Mrs Fan

and her daughter, rather traditional notions of intergenerational obligations were conveyed to children from early childhood onwards. Meanwhile, the story of Mrs Chung and her son, Pei-chun, shows how a family tragedy can intensify children's feelings of obligation to their parents. I had met Pei-chun at a group gathering of young backpackers in Taipei. He appeared eager to practice his English; while most other attendants of the meeting behaved rather shyly, he immediately offered to translate difficult vocabulary to me and introduced me to the different group members. Afterwards we exchanged mobile numbers and started to meet regularly. Over the months, he became one of my closest male informants in Taipei.

Mrs Chung lived with her two adult children and mother-in-law in a spacious house in a suburb of Taipei. Originally from a rural area, she had come to the city as a young woman to seek work. Unlike Shu-fen's mother, Mrs Chung appeared gentle and quiet and seemed surprised that anyone was interested in recording her life-story. The inside of the family's house was very modest; only a large ebony shrine underneath a colourful triptych at the back of the living room attracted one's attention. In the middle of the shrine sat the white statue of *Guanyin* (*Pusa*)[4] amid white, porcelain lotus flowers and fruit offerings. To *Guanyin's* right, there was a smaller, more delicate shrine which bore the name plaques of Mrs Chung's deceased husband's ancestors. The whole family, Pei-chun told me as he guided me around the house, prayed in front of each shrine every day.

Although Mrs Chung appeared slightly overwhelmed by the sudden attention she was being given by me, she felt ready to start the interview after serving tea and fruit. Seated in the middle of the sofa, surrounded by her two children, she started to tell her story in a low voice.

Mrs Chung had spent her childhood at her family's farm with four siblings. The family had always been poor but, after her paternal uncle had incurred a debt that all his brothers had to help repay, their living conditions worsened. After the division of the family estate, the brothers also split the debt; for as long as Mrs Chung could remember, her parents had struggled to get by. From early childhood onwards, she had been aware that she would have to earn money as soon as possible to support her family.

After Mrs Chung finished primary school, she left her rural home and moved to Taipei. A former neighbour had referred her to a family in the city that was looking for a nanny. Only fourteen years old, Mrs Chung was soon supporting herself in Taiwan's capital. She

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[4] Buddhist deity of mercy and compassion.

kept her promise to send her wage home each month and did her bit to pay off her father's debt. Mrs Chung did not know why her father's brother had borrowed the money but this did not diminish her sense of obligation to help repay it. When I asked her how she felt about sacrificing her financial freedom for her parents, she thought long and hard about her answer. At that time, it had not crossed her mind *not* to send her parents the money she saved from work. She did not have any aspirations at that time apart from supporting her family in the countryside.

Later, she worked in different factories (*gongchan*) producing sportswear and lived in the adjacent dorms. She liked this job more than her previous work as a nanny since the wage was higher and she could make friends with her colleagues. At that time, she told me, there was no space for her to dream about professions that suited her interests and talents. She lived on her own in Taipei; if she had quit her factory job, she would also have lost her place in the dormitory. Her low educational level also restricted her employment options. Hence, Mrs Chung's aspirations were confined to the opportunities that the factory offered her. She realized that education could improve her situation and decided to attend evening classes to complete her junior high school certificate. Mrs Chung thus worked during the day and studied at night. Throughout this time, she told me, her parents had a rather indifferent attitude towards her achievements as they were too far away to lend her any form of support.

At the age of twenty-six, Mrs Chung got to know her future husband who worked at the same factory. She found him handsome and, after going out for a year, they decided to marry. However, she could not recall any romantic (*langman*) moments leading up to this marriage. It was more that their friends suggested they suited each other, so Mrs Chung accepted the proposal as she longed for a home in Taipei. She did not regret this step, even though it meant living with her husband's family in an extended household.

Yet the home she had dreamt of soon seemed to be breaking apart. When her son was just a teenager, her husband suddenly died. A few years later, her brother-in-law, who had been the only adult male member left in the household, also passed away. In her early forties, Mrs Chung was thus left a widow with two children and an elderly mother-in-law to care for. Having experienced that her limited education meant that she was only able to work in low-skilled manual jobs, Mrs Chung's encouraged her children to do well in their education.

Talking to her son, Pei-chun, revealed that Mrs Chung did not only try to instil in her children her austere work discipline but also her distinct feeling of obligation towards the family. In one of our first conversations, we discussed the dire working conditions for

young people in Taiwan. Pei-chun complained that it was difficult for him to find a challenging engineering job in Taiwan as most companies in this sector would not invest in innovation. When I asked him why he could not try to find a job abroad if he wanted to extend his work experience, he hesitated and explained that he felt obliged to stay with his family. Pei-chun felt the sole responsibility for his family weighing heavily upon him. He had at first not realized the need to study and was a very negligent student in his youth. But when his father died suddenly, he decided to study hard in order to relieve his mother of her financial worries as soon as possible. Similar to his mother who had worked hard to repay her parents' debt in her youth, Pei-chun also felt the need to demonstrate his sense of filial obligation at a young age.

When I met him, he intended to stay in his mother's household even after marriage in order to fulfil his duties as only son as best as he could. He gave a proportion of his salary to her each month. During one of our conversations, I drew the character for the classical Confucian concept of filial piety (*xiao*) on a tissue and asked him how he would define it. He smiled in slight surprise and explained that this would mean that if his mother bought two loaves of bread, she would definitely give him the bigger, better one. He did not understand the expression in terms of his own duties to his mother, but more in terms of motherly love; this highlights the connotation of reciprocity that the concept implies. He often talked of his mother's caring gestures that seemed to define their relationship.

One afternoon we were strolling around the city. As we passed by a temple, our conversation turned to popular charms (*fu*). Pei-chun took out his wallet and pointed to a subway ticket he always kept in a little pocket with his ID card. His mother had given him the ticket a few years ago, he explained, as the name of the destination sounded auspicious. If he kept the ticket close to his body, she hoped it would help protect him from misfortune. Unlike Liang, who felt alienated from his parents due to their lack of care and attention during childhood, Pei-chun felt deeply indebted to his mother due to her self-sacrificing care and devotion to him and his sister. This feeling was reinforced by these small gestures whereby she demonstrated her concern for their well-being.

It thus seems that although a sense of responsibility for ageing parents was expressed by both Chinese and Taiwanese young adults, young Taiwanese maintained more traditional views of filial duties. In particular, an obligation to be physically present during parents' old age was felt more strongly by my informants in Taipei than in Beijing. This trend has also been noted by Whyte and colleagues who, in their comparison of living arrangements in urban China and Taiwan, found that it was more common for Taiwanese parents to live

with adult children and their families than it was for Chinese parents (Whyte et al., 2003) In China, the ideological shift aimed at abolishing the traditional family hierarchies during the Mao era, as well as social benefits that facilitated early independence from parents, may have led to different notions of filiality among Chinese parents (Hansen, 2015; Liu, 2007). At the same time, however, they had not abandoned more traditional expectations; like Liang, several Chinese informants complained that as their parents aged, their expectations of their children became more conservative. In some cases, like the one of Xiao-xiao, these intergenerational communication problems became so debilitating, that only a deliberately created distance from parents could ease the tensions.

1.3. Yearning for Mutual Understanding and Communication with Parents in China and Taiwan

Xiao-xiao, the young Chinese woman yearning for a more adventurous lifestyle who was introduced in the last chapter, often complained about her mother's great demands and strictness. I have already mentioned how her mother tried to evoke pressure on her during her regular calls. During her childhood, Xiao-xiao complained, her mother's harsh criticism of her behaviour had been unbearable. At that time, her mother had focused only on her academic progress and often scolded her for being lazy. As a consequence, Xiao-xiao had felt estranged from her mother as an adolescent and at times, when she felt overwhelmed by the pressure, she even considered committing suicide. She told me that she became drawn to the edge of high buildings, imagining jumping and thus freeing herself from her worries.

Her mother, Xiao-xiao explained, had never experienced a close relationship with her own mother. Her maternal grandmother had been a difficult person who Xiao-xiao remembered as distant and reserved. Her mother told her that her family suffered a great deal throughout the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, but she and Xiao-xiao's grandmother had always been reluctant to tell her any details. Xiao-xiao could only guess at the reasons for the resentment she sensed in the maternal family members. Sometimes her mother talked about bits of her childhood, for example that her mother had tried to put her up for adoption when she was a baby and that they had to eat chicken feed during periods of famine. She had never conveyed to Xiao-xiao a coherent picture of her family history, however.

Evans notes that, for many women who came of age during the Cultural Revolution, "[m]aking the transition from their experience as daughters of the Mao era to wives and mothers under market reform was not easy, and in some instances produced distress and tensions with their husbands, parents and parents-in-law, and children" (Evans, 2010 p. 990). This was very probably also the case for Xiao-xiao's mother who did not only struggle with her relationship with her parents but also experienced an abusive marriage from which she escaped when Xiao-xiao was still a young child.

Then, as a single mother, she experienced periods of severe financial hardship. She was thus eager for her daughter to become financially independent and pressured her to study hard. Xiao-xiao complained that, in her childhood, all her mother cared and asked about was her performance at school while ignoring her emotional needs. Xiao-xiao's memories of her childhood and adolescence were full of anger:

> "When I was in high and middle school, I really got angry about that. She didn't really care about my heart, my emotions. She just cared about my studies. It's like a machine, almost... One day, I was really angry, like, I hated this family and I wanted to go out. I really went out and didn't come back home. She really got some problems then and came to my school to apologize, but still, we don't talk that much about my life."

Xiao-xiao moved out from her natal home upon entering the last year of junior high school (*chuzhong*) and, from then on, her mother's influence on her life diminished. Even though Xiao-xiao had been successful in pursuing her personal aspirations, studying a subject her mother did not approve of and refusing any financial support to maintain her independence from her mother and stepfather, after visits home she repeatedly complained about her mother's lack of understanding of her choices. Urging her to marry soon, her mother was not happy with Xiao-xiao's plans to go abroad. Even though she wanted her to have a higher education, she did not envisage her daughter using it to break out of a conventional lifestyle. As a consequence, Xiao-xiao kept more and more details of her life hidden from her family.

Evans stresses that women who grew up during the Mao era developed "an explicit antipathy to the model of gendered conduct their mothers represented" and aimed to convey more emancipated values to their own daughters (2010 p. 990). These women's increased reflections on their self-identification as mothers initiated a new consciousness of parenting in the reform era. Despite their resolution to be more tolerant than their own mothers, however, they were not able to prevent rifts from occurring in relationships with their own children. Raising their daughters in a socioeconomic and political environment

that was radically different from the one that they had experienced during their childhood and adolescence, conflicts were inevitable. Similar to Xiao-xiao's experiences, the young women Evans interviewed complained about the ambiguous values their mothers conveyed to them. On the one hand, their mothers wanted them to lead autonomous lives; on the other, they still expected them to fulfil certain gendered expectations such as marriage and childbirth. As a consequence, these young women felt misunderstood and left alone when facing the challenges of modern city life (2008 pp. 179-184).

Although Chinese daughters born in the reform era may wonder why their mothers still cling to rather conventional gender role models despite their personal experiences and their resolve to convey more modern, emancipated ideals to their children, young Taiwanese women appeared to be less surprised by their parents' traditional expectations. However, this does not mean that their relationships were less problematic. Like Xiao-xiao, some young Taiwanese women also tried to establish a spatial distance from their mothers if they perceived them as too demanding and intrusive.

One of such cases was Ma-ling, the young woman whose troubled plan of participating in a water sports event together with her friends I have described in the introduction. Ma-ling felt pressured by her mother to follow in her sister's footsteps and find a suitable husband soon. Sharing a flat with her sister and her sister's fiancé, she sometimes appeared stressed by the crammed living conditions and the lack of privacy. However, being able to split the rent was economical and for that reason, she found it difficult to justify moving out. One night in the late summer of 2012, I accompanied her shopping for clothes at a market popular for its bargains. As we strolled around the stalls, she told me that her mother had criticized her tomboyish style of dress. Ma-ling mostly wore simple t-shirts and denim shorts. Compared to the pastel dresses adorned with rhinestones and frills that were *en vogue* during my fieldwork in Taiwan and which were sported by many of my female informants, she did indeed have quite modest tastes in style. Combined with her pixie hair cut, she looked "sporty" rather than conforming to the Taiwanese idea of femininity. Her mother's words had caused doubt in Ma-ling and after a few unsuccessful dates, she was becoming increasingly unsure of herself. We thus rummaged through the piles of clothes for a summer dress that Ma-ling could feel comfortable wearing. She eventually settled on a plain green dress; while she paid for it, she sighed in disbelief that she was following her mother's advice.

Before her studies abroad, Ma-ling had attended a private university close to her home; this allowed her to live with her parents. In retrospect, Ma-ling admitted, she wished she had

moved out from her natal home earlier. Living on her own, she explained, her social skills improved quickly and now she wished that she had made these experiences earlier. Last time she was at home, she told her mother about a young man she had met but she did not disclose that she liked him a lot. To Ma-ling's disappointment, her mother had only been interested in his academic degree and, when Ma-ling admitted that she had not asked him about this yet, her mother reprimanded her for not caring about such important matters. Nowadays, Ma-ling sighed, she got into the most "random" arguments with her parents; they could not accept that she was no longer a child and found it difficult to accept her privacy.

After my return to the UK, I skyped with Ma-ling to catch up on the events of the previous months. I wondered why she had suggested talking on Chinese New Year's Eve. When I called, she was alone in her bedroom in the flat she shared with her sister and her sister's boyfriend who had already left for their home town in the south. Ma-ling explained that she did not want to go home for the family gathering and had used her work as an excuse. She resented being questioned again about her relationship status and thus preferred to stay in Taipei, even if this meant spending the evening alone. However, her parents tried to convince her to return home after she had finished her shift at work that night. She had no plans to go but, during our conversation, she appeared melancholic and doubted that the New Year would bring any positive changes. Even though she did not appear too keen on marriage, she feared that she would increasingly be pushed into an outsider position in her family and circle of friends should she continue her singledom.

The case studies above illustrate that despite the introduction of new discourses on parenting that place emphasis on considering the emotional needs of children in China and Taiwan, many of my informants who had grown up in the 1980s and 1990s felt a sense of estrangement from their parents. For Chinese and Taiwanese parents alike, it was difficult to accept their adult children's individual goals if they did not conform to the ones that they had envisioned for them. It was even more difficult if they feared that their children seemed to be drifting towards life choices that would not only increase the distance between them but which would also make them unlikely to succeed by any conventional standards.

Kuan describes how Chinese parents struggled to strike a balance between cultivating their child's subjectivity and preparing them for survival in a highly competitive society with hardly any space for individuality. They grew up in a time when families still had more children and when educational achievement had not yet become such an exclusive

determinant of success. Like Kuan's interlocutors, the parents of my Chinese as well as my Taiwanese informants were the first generation of parents who had to ask themselves whether they met the standards of "good parenting" (Kuan, 2015 pp. 209-210). Both the Chinese and Taiwanese mothers I met articulated their worries about the high competition and stressful environment their children were exposed to. Yet, at the same time they wanted their children to succeed which made it difficult not to evoke any pressure.

1.4. Conclusion

The accounts above illustrate how discourses about filiality and parent-child relations have changed over time and how such changes are evaluated by the different generations. There is a struggle for both generations to reconcile traditional values of filiality with the competing ideals that political ideology, new economic opportunities or modern urban lifestyle constitute. Moreover, one important theme is the desire of young adults to have an active dialogue between the generations in order to enable their parents to understand their hopes and aspirations. Thus, my observation made in Beijing *and* in Taiwan parallel those made by Evans in the Chinese capital in the early 2000s (Evans, 2008; 2010). However, while Evans only interviewed young women, my interviews with members of both sexes confirm that young men have similar communication problems with parents as their female peers. Not being able to communicate personal aspirations concerning their education, careers, and romantic relationships, they often felt at a loss of how to maintain good relationships with their parents in the future.

In particular, I observed that many instances of intergenerational conflict were based on a disparity of ideals in terms of personal autonomy. However, there were important differences between the Chinese and Taiwanese cases. Taiwanese mothers maintained rather traditional ideals of filial piety. Although some adult children, like Shu-fen and Pei-chun, were willing to conform to these expectations, even if this meant having to sacrifice their personal goals, others, like Ma-ling, struggled to integrate parental demands with her pursuit of an independent urban lifestyle.

Chinese mothers, at least during their children's childhood, valued independence as a prerequisite for academic and professional success. However, as the cases of Liang and Xiao-xiao have demonstrated, their way of instilling this sense of independence in their children could also cause feelings of rejection in them. Moreover, many Chinese informants mentioned that as they reached adulthood, their mothers also started to

articulate rather traditional expectations with regard to marriage and childbirth. Liang felt overwhelmed by his mother's increasing demands for him to be present in her life, whereas during his childhood, he was left mostly to himself. He found it puzzling that despite the liberal parenting he had experienced as a child, and his mother's negative experiences of marriage, her wish for him to marry became increasingly stronger. Likewise, Xiao-xiao found it difficult to understand the pressure her mother exerted on her to marry early since her mother had traumatic experiences during her first marriage. Moreover, she had also always conveyed to her that academic achievements and a successful career were the most important goals. Jun Zhang and Peidong Sun observed a similarly rapid change of mind among parents of highly educated daughters in Shanghai (Zhang and Sun, 2014 p. 135). While having stressed the importance of academic achievements during young adulthood, they worried when their daughters had not found a husband as they approached their thirties and tried different strategies to secure their timely marriage. At that time, many parents regretted not having granted their only children more freedom to find a partner.

There might be other factors contributing to the return to traditional values that these Chinese mothers demonstrated as they grew older. While those I talked to still emphasized the importance of their children's autonomy, their awareness of their needs with regard to financial and physical assistance in the future might have been heightened by their experiences of divorce and separation. Thus, in the Chinese cases it is difficult to tell whether the tendency to make rather traditional demands of adult children that contradict ideals with which they were raised is a result of the individual experiences of these mothers, or a broader trend pointing to more complex changes in the perception of old age security and filial duties.

Except for Ma-ling's mother, the Taiwanese mothers introduced in this chapter also experienced singledom at middle age due to the death of or separation from their husbands. Moreover, despite the more traditional values with which my Taiwanese informants were raised, they also found their mothers' seemingly paradoxical expectations difficult to understand at times. On the one hand, the resentment Shu-fen's mother felt for her parents was based on the traditionalism with which she was raised. On the other hand, she conveyed similarly strict values to her children which could potentially obstruct their personal career goals. Further, while she was warning her daughters of marriage, it appeared highly doubtful, measured by the otherwise strict rules she imposed, if she was willing to accept them living together with romantic partners without the intention of getting married. I frequently observed this seemingly liberal attitude towards marriage among Taiwanese mothers. Yet as was revealed after time, it did not necessarily give any

indication if they indeed accepted their children's future romantic relationships without any reservations.

Most of the young adults and their mothers introduced above have thus experienced loss, either in the form of the death of a parent or the separation of their parents. This experience might have had an important influence on their emotional needs and expectations of the remaining parent. Moreover, it might also have increased their feeling of responsibility towards their mothers and made them more likely to conform to their expectations.

Another shared trait between the Chinese and Taiwanese cases consists of experiencing an "emotional distance" from parents and this applies to *both* generations. In the parental generation, this distance was often precipitated by patriarchal notions of parental authority and a preference for sons. Mrs Fan, the energetic mother of Shu-fen, had told me that her mother had unsuccessfully tried to abort her. This feeling of being unwanted had overshadowed their relationship throughout childhood until today. Likewise, Xiao-xiao's deceased grandmother had tried to put her mother up for adoption shortly after her birth. Her mother had confided this in her only recently and this opened Xiao-xiao's eyes to the underlying reason for her mother's distanced relationship with her mother. Lisa Rofel notes in this context that daughters born in the reform era were often surprisingly unknowing of their parents' experiences. They had formed narratives of their parents' struggles during the Communist era more by way of popular movies and literature than by way of their own accounts of the past (Rofel, 2007 pp. 117-118). This was also clearly the case among many Chinese informants and was an important factor that obstructed the deep, mutual understanding that the young men and women longed for. To most of my Chinese and Taiwanese informants, their mother's life-choices, especially in terms of marriage, appeared rather arbitrary and difficult to comprehend. Many felt that their parents were guided by "outdated traditions," "questionable political or religious beliefs" or "misguided advice" from parents and in-laws.

The tendency for Chinese mothers to demonstrate a greater acceptance of early independence in their children may stem from their experiences as they came of age during the Cultural Revolution. Although they had not necessarily unquestioningly accepted the political ideals propagated by the CCP during their youth, they came of age under a political system that did not endorse familial hierarchies and that supported youth's autonomy from parents. Later in their lives, these concepts may have been blended with concerns for a secure old age, which led them to return to more conservative expectations

of children. The realization that, by contrast to their parents, they only had one child available for future support might have aggravated their worries. Kuan notes that "Chinese social reality is tremendously contradictory and inconsistent, and this poses constant challenges for actors on the ground - challenges that require the reconciliation of contradictory moral goods and the location of opportunities for exercising personal efficacy" (Kuan, 2015 p. 8). This chapter has illustrated that the diverse moral values that have influenced parent-child relationships in different ideological eras are now closely entangled. With changing personal, societal and individual circumstances, also mutual expectations between parents and children shift. For this reason, notions of intergenerational obligations appeared rather ambiguous within the families of my Chinese informants and had to be renegotiated continuously over the life course.

In Taiwan, KMT party ideology had not contested traditional notions of filial piety. Accordingly, the concepts of filiality to which parents were exposed while growing up were not as seriously challenged during their youth. However, due in part to the women's movements of the late 1970s and 1980s and increasing access to international media, new discourses on gender equality and personal autonomy started to contest ideals of parenting and filial obligations (Rubinstein, 1999 pp. 384-386). Nevertheless, the comparatively traditional values that the parents of my Taiwanese informants conveyed to their children were less ambiguous than those of their Chinese counterparts. However, this does not mean that these values were also easier to realize in modern Taiwan. Whereas their Chinese peers benefited from the independence that they had already established from their parents and that made it easier for them to ignore or negotiate certain demands, Taiwanese young adults were usually more dependent on their parents, making it more difficult to defy their requests. Pei-chun, for instance, felt morally bound to stay in his mother's household in Taipei; this was due to his position as her only son and the only remaining male in the family. Likewise, Shu-fen, her mother's eldest child and close confidant, felt obliged to return home to Taipei after her studies abroad. Liang, by contrast, had promised his mother to stay with her in Beijing until she was in better health, yet refused to make any commitment to stay in the city for the future.

Xiao-xiao and Ma-ling were - perhaps due in part to their relative financial independence - rather successful in distancing themselves from their mothers. However, whereas Xiao-xiao lived unobserved by family members in Beijing, Ma-ling shared her flat in Taipei with her sister and future brother-in-law; this made her more susceptible to her family's control.

Despite these differences, in both societies parents' expectations were countered by their children yearning for parental affection and mutual understanding. It is at the intersection of these different expectations that most intergenerational conflicts emerged. Whereas parents expected their offspring to reciprocate and be appreciative of the educational opportunities they had offered them (often at considerable personal sacrifice), children yearned for emotional closeness and communication.

However, young Chinese and Taiwanese increasingly started to challenge traditional parenting and notions of filiality by asserting their needs. They criticized concepts of parental care that focused solely on the provision of material support and education but neglected their need for emotional warmth and understanding. Many deplored the fact that their parents had not equipped them to discover their personal interest as they were pushed to fulfil normative societal goals which let them struggle to find individual purpose in their later life. Moreover, the particularities of the different education systems in China and Taiwan additionally reinforced the different trends in terms of personal autonomy from parents.

Chapter Two - Educational Choices and the Fostering of Independence

2.1. Introduction

Ming-yue and I were clinging to our seats as the bus sped up, winding through the crowded streets of Beijing's central Haidian district. "I think you are right about what you wrote in your research proposal," Ming-yue suddenly burst out. Ming-yue and her friend, Chao, both PhD students at the university where I was a research associate, wanted to take me on a boat trip around the lake in the Purple Bamboo Park close to the National Library. Chao had found a seat at the back of the bus, leaving Ming-yue and me a few minutes to talk in private. "My professor gave me your proposal to read before you came. You wrote that many Chinese parents have problems understanding their children and cannot give them very good advice for their future. I have the same problem with my parents."

Ming-yue and her classmate, Chao, shared the experience of having left their rural Hebei home villages as adolescents to continue their education. Since that time, not only the educational but also the spatial gap between them and their parents had widened. Although Chao was very assertive and, as a Party member, already had a clear plan for his future as a government official, Ming-yue appeared to be shier and less confident about her studies and career plans; Chao often teased her in my presence because of this. Ming-yue had told me that her parents were farmers who had received little formal education and who could thus read and write only with difficulty. As they were not acquainted with the education system, they could not offer her any advice during her schooldays. Instead, her elder brother, who had studied at a polytechnical college, supervised her performance and educational choices.

We did not have any more time to chat as the bus came to a halt and we rushed to get off before new passengers pushed through the doors. It was one of those rare, clear days when there was no smog darkening the sky and, like us, many people had taken the opportunity to enjoy the last rays of the warm autumn sun. Compared to the bustling streets, the park seemed serene. Willow trees swayed in the wind, their branches brushing the surface of the glistening water of a lake. Colourful boats carrying young couples and families glided through the waves, searching for pathways through the dense fields of water lilies. As we strolled along the pathways, we observed groups of elderly people square-dancing to Chinese pop songs that blasted from crackling speakers, while others played cards under the shade of trees or practised *taijiquan*. "We will only be able to do this once we've retired," Ming-yue sighed as she considered the relaxed scene.

It was the first time in months, they told me, that they had taken some time off from studying. Both were rushing to finish their PhDs in order to free their rural families from the strain their prolonged studies had placed on them. At the same time, they were unsure about how to reconcile their busy city lives with their filial obligations to their parents in the future. Chao was unsure whether his plan to bring his parents to the city once he had a job would work out; Ming-yue was unsure whether she should return to her home province even though job prospects in Beijing were brighter. Having lived in school and university dorms since their teenage years, Chao and Ming-yue had got used to being beyond parental control. Yet their impending graduation reminded them that they would soon have to decide whether they wanted to stay in the city; this risked turning their temporary separation from their parents into a permanent one.

Many young Chinese students and professionals I met in Beijing struggled to reconcile the multiple obligations they felt towards their families. They wanted to increase their families' social status and wealth by having a successful career in the capital. To achieve this goal, they needed to excel at their studies into which their parents had invested many of their resources. In most cases, this could only be realized through rigorous studying which compelled many of my informants to remain on campus instead of visiting their families for important holidays. Similarly, those who worked in professional jobs could mostly only visit their families once or twice a year during the short vacations. An extended separation from their parents was thus the price many young Chinese paid for their ambitions.

I started my fieldwork in Beijing shortly after I had left my first field site in Taipei. With the memories of my Taiwanese informants and their close relationships with their parents still fresh in my mind, I initially found it striking that many Chinese parents, urban and rural ones alike, seemed to be relatively accepting of a long-lasting spatial separation from their children. Most of my rural Chinese informants had to leave their homes upon entering junior or senior high school. Likewise, many young urbanites I got to know had been sent to boarding institutions, sometimes as early as at kindergarten age. In Taiwan, leaving the family home before starting tertiary education would have been a rare experience for my informants. In the few cases in which this did occur, it mostly applied to those from well-off upper middle class families who were pursuing a specialized education or who spent parts of their high school years in the US or Canada. In Taiwan, leaving the family home at a young age for educational purposes could thus rarely be attributed to deficiencies in the local social infrastructure; it was more a symptom of a family's financial affluence.

Thus, my Chinese and Taiwanese informants had quite distinct experiences during their school careers which, in the long run, might have had a significant impact on conceptualizations of the parent-child relationship and expectations of future support. In addition, the different degrees of personal autonomy these experiences fostered may also have played a decisive role in the way in which young adults approached major life choices and their willingness to assume responsibility for their decisions.

2.2. Education and Separation from Family Members in China and Taiwan

Ming-yue still vividly remembered an incident that took place during her first weeks at senior high school (*gaozhong*) after she had moved out of her parental home in rural Hebei. Full of excitement, she was counting down the days to her parents' first visit to the school. A parental visit was something special, even more so in these first weeks when her separation from them was still fresh in her mind and thus all the more painful. On the morning of the long-awaited day, however, she received the disappointing news that parental visits had been cancelled at short notice. She and her classmates were devastated and hid crying in their dormitory together. "In these first days," she recalled, "I had a very heavy heart" (*wo de xinqing tebie bu hao*).

Like many of my Chinese informants, Ming-yue could not recall many pleasant memories from her time at high school. She had to leave her home village when she was sixteen years old in order to continue her education in a neighbouring city. Since then, she was only allowed to return home once a month. In the beginning, she found it difficult to adjust to sharing a dormitory with her classmates and obeying the strict rules at the boarding school. The students were woken up at half past six in the morning and, from then on, their day was strictly scheduled. Even at weekends they had to follow a rigorous study plan.

Ming-yue soon suffered from the stifling pressure that became even more intense before the national exam (*gaokao*). At that time, her busy schedule did not leave her much time for resting. "I never felt happy at high school at all," she complained to me, "for three years, I had no time to enjoy myself. I would have liked to finish high school earlier, but if I had dropped out, I would not have known what to do instead […]. If I had quit school, my parents would have been sad and I did not want to let them down."

Ming-yue's account is by no means exceptional but resembles the memories many young adults had of their childhood in both rural and urban China (Hansen, 2015; Kipnis, 2001; 2011; Roberts, 2013). Like Ming-yue, many Chinese have to leave their natal homes in their

early teenage years or even earlier to prepare for the national exam at boarding schools. Rural students often live in places too remote to be able to commute to school every day. Consequently, they have to move to neighbouring cities to complete their education after finishing primary or junior high school. However, there are also urban middle class families who prefer to send their children to special boarding institutions in the same city in order to secure the best education possible for them.

The memories of my Chinese informants resonate strongly with Hansen's observations at a rural boarding school in Zhejiang (Hansen, 2015). She remarks,

> "[…] because of the needs of parents to make ends meet and at the same time have their children attend school and be taken care of, compounded with the growing expectations for their children's future success, most children were sent to boarding schools or private homes from the age of twelve or younger" (p. 45).

Hansen also notes the psychological challenges parents and children encounter due to separation during the school year. She reports that students were "[…] suffering from little contact with parents and other close relatives, living lives that were structured by the demands for schooling and in which daily emotional support and contact depended on their peers or on the personalities of the teachers […]" (p. 44). Moreover, she explains how schools stylized the stress elicited by the achievement pressure and long absence from home into an individual willpower challenge. Directing the responsibility for psychological stress back onto the students compounded their problems: it contributed to the perception that failure in the classroom or homesickness had to be attributed to personal weakness and an inability to adapt rather than to the structural shortcomings of the schooling system (p. 139).

Pressure to perform often starts far earlier for Chinese children. From kindergarten onwards, they are prepared to succeed by the many preparatory tests that will eventually lead to the national exam (*gaokao*). This exam will decide their professional careers as it assigns them to universities of different ranks according to their performance. In particular, entrance to an urban university offers the opportunity to obtain employment in the cities and an urban residence registration (*feinongye hukou*). Formal residence in the cities facilitates access to the urban housing market and certain state benefits that are restricted to the urban population (Jacka et al., 2013 pp. 65-81). Accordingly, especially rural families regard formal education as their children's only opportunity to climb the social ladder and exchange their unfavourable status as peasants into the more prestigious position of a government official or employee at a successful private company (Kipnis, 2001; 2011).

The only valid ticket to these desirable positions and to modern city life in China's coastal areas is thus a university degree, preferably from one of the first-tier urban universities (*yi ben daxue*). For this, China's rural students compete with the urban population with the latter being granted considerable advantages in the application process (Kipnis, 2001 pp. 20-21). Moreover, many urban students, whose families are often equipped with greater financial resources than rural ones, attended important key point schools; this increases their competitive advantage in securing a place at a popular university (Kuan, 2015). A strict school education that often involves sending children away from home at a young age was thus perceived by many of my informants' families as the only way to succeed in the national exam that will decide not only the students' but the whole families' futures.

The feeling of longing for home that Ming-yue described above was a feeling many young Chinese closely associated with adolescence. Hence, anticipating the return of family members from migrant work or long business trips often became an integral part of their childhood. Children were generally left in childcare facilities or with relatives during their parents' absences; often, they struggled with feelings of being "left behind."

Stafford notes that separation and reunion are highly significant themes in Chinese culture (Stafford, 2000 b). This is not only reflected in the variety of religious rituals that revolve around the greeting and sending off of ancestors, gods and spirits, but also in the importance placed on the proper welcoming and bidding farewell to family members and guests (ibid.). Partings and returns are moments when family ties are reconfirmed and they remind family members of the contingencies that every separation entails. Farewell and welcome dinners, sending family members off to train and bus stations and longingly awaiting their return were thus in many cases incisive events that may have had a deep impact on the way in which my Chinese informants conceived of their own future. Moreover, for many families, partings also signified a renewed hope for a better future that could be achieved through academic and professional successes in the cities. Stafford notes in this context that

> "[…] many families in modern rural China and Taiwan accept the necessity for their children to go away, at least for a while, to places where opportunities are greater. Sometimes, they even express the hope that their children will "become dragons" (*chenglong*) and eventually "leap the dragon gate" (*tiaolongmen*): i.e. become successful by jumping over the gates which symbolically, and sometimes literally, separate the powerful from those outside. It is assumed that if this were to happen, they would then share their success, and their insider-access which accompanies it, with their own families" (Stafford, 2000 b p. 97).

Seeing siblings, friends and neighbours leaving their homes to attend schools in the cities, their own educational itinerary appeared to be laid out for them already. Educational achievement and the chance to get a secure workplace were thus strongly associated with separation from family members for an indefinite period of time.

Chao was one of these young people who had experienced early on the absence of a parent; his account of his school career illustrates that separation was a recurrent motif in his family's striving for a better future through which they hoped to be reunited in the end.

Chao's parents were both migrant workers who had moved from their home village in Hebei Province to Guangzhou where his mother worked as a cleaner and his father had found employment at a chemical plant. When Chao was a child, he and his mother lived on the farm of his paternal grandparents. He only saw his father on his annual visits home at Chinese New Year. However, his father wrote him letters regularly which Chao still cherished and kept stacked together in his closet. In these letters, his father urged him to study diligently so that, one day, he would be able to have a better life than his parents. Chao's father had a middle school education whereas his mother had only finished elementary school. As his father resented his lack of education that restricted him to low-skilled jobs, he instructed Chao's mother to carefully supervise their son's schoolwork. Chao confessed to me that even at primary school, he felt a lot of pressure (*yali*) to excel in class.

As he was a good student, it did not take long for Chao's teacher to ask if he wanted to become a team leader (*dang duidao*) with the Young Pioneers (*shao xiandui*), a group for schoolchildren organized by the Youth League of the Communist Party to which teachers could assign students based on their performance in the first grade (in second grade, every student will usually become a member by default) (Woronov, 2008). Chao liked being part of the group and eventually became the school leader. His task was to check if the pupils were wearing their red scarves (*hong lingjin*) properly and if the classroom had been cleaned satisfactorily. Every Monday, they had to assemble to raise the Chinese flag and sing the national anthem. Afterwards, a cleaning check was announced and the chairman gave a talk during which he encouraged them to study harder. Chao admitted that this was a rather boring ritual; nevertheless, he enjoyed his responsible role.

In junior high school, the pressure to excel intensified. At the age of fourteen, Chao moved into the dormitory of the school. His memories of these years are rather bleak as he resented his crowded room and the bland food at the school canteen. From this time onwards, and throughout his years at senior high school and university, he boarded at

school. While the periods of separation from his parents grew longer, he increasingly became involved in the political youth group. Chao remembered proudly how his high performance enabled him to be one of the first of his classmates to be admitted to the CCP's Youth League. Only the top ten students were accepted early; the others had to wait another year.

As his involvement with political work deepened, Chao increasingly reflected on his family's history. His paternal side of the family had been exceptionally poor. His great-grandparents had been disabled and thus they were reliant on handouts from fellow villagers. Chao's grandfather and his siblings had thus profited immensely from the land reform in the 1950s and the employment that was assigned to them in state enterprises. Even though his family was still struggling to get by, Chao felt a strong urge to "give something back" to the party for the assistance his family received decades ago. Chao was especially inspired by his paternal grandfather's brother who had been in a leading position at a state-owned factory. Although he did not have any higher education, Chao often asked him for advice during his studies when his parents could not help him. At this time, his aspiration to continue his political work in his future career took shape and, after long consultations with his great uncle, Chao decided to study for a degree that would allow him to pursue a career in government.

As an initial step towards realizing his dream, he wanted to become a member of the CCP, which could only be achieved at that young age through extraordinary commitment. However, as he was involved in a number of extracurricular activities at senior high school, he was indeed selected for CCP membership due to his organizational skills at the school's sports competition. He also scored highly enough in the *gaokao* to be admitted to a renowned university in Beijing where he was eventually offered a place on a PhD programme. Close to realizing his dreams, he looked to the future with confidence. As soon as possible, he wanted his parents to quit their migrant work and buy a house for them in the city where he would find a job. He regretted, he once told me, that he had not had the opportunity to spend much time with them during his childhood. He now wanted to make up for that lost time.

In Chao's case, separation did not weaken his feeling of filiality to his parents as he and his parents were committed to a common goal that tied them together across the geographical distance. They hoped that their investments in Chao's education would pay off not only in terms of securing their old age but that it would also enable them to be permanently reunited again in the future. Many of my Chinese informants' parents did not seem to

consider their children's sense of filiality to be endangered by their long absences as long as they actively contributed to the family's future well-being. Daniel Roberts argues along similar lines and notes that

" […] contemporary kinship morality in China […] is not, nor does it need to be, internally consistent (one can both wish to see one's children often while encouraging them to work in faraway cities); and […] very different strategies can be chosen or praised based on competing priorities and circumstances" (Roberts, 2013 p. 165).

James Johnston has observed similar transformations in the notion of filiality among rural college students in Anhui (Johnston, 2013). He notes that students' experiences of extended periods of separation from parents and other family members during childhood did not only form certain expectations in terms of their personal future, but also shaped a perception of spatiality based upon "moral judgments associated with movements in particular directions" (p. 56). They observed villagers who had obtained permanent urban residence returning from the cities in fashionable, modern clothes sporting all kinds of modern consumer goods. Further, also their own trips from their humble village to the more developed neighbouring towns alluded to children that a movement away from the home village did not only entail a spatial move but also a material advancement from poverty to wealth (p. 58). Associating status and wealth with urban life, many Chinese informants from rural backgrounds thus regarded separation from their parents as inevitable, at least until they had firmly established themselves in Beijing.

In Taipei, things appeared quite different. Many of my Taiwanese informants had relatives in the countryside but it was their parents who had made the move from farms to the city. Most of these parents now worked in corporate jobs or for small and medium-sized enterprises in the urban areas of Taiwan. Due to the relative affluence they had achieved, most of the young Taiwanese I got to know were less concerned about securing their parents' old age and were more interested in fulfilling their families' expectations so as to continue their successes in the future.

As Taiwan is significantly smaller and more urbanized than China, children usually do not leave their parental homes until graduation from senior high school (*gaozhong*); boarding schools are rare. Many young people, especially those living in the highly urbanized regions of Taipei, Taichung and Kaohsiung, often continue to live at home while attending university. Moreover, as recent research has shown, those who leave to study at other locations in Taiwan often return to their natal homes after graduation (Huang, 2013).

Similar to the Chinese *gaokao*, the Taiwanese national exam (*liankao*) takes place after the last year of senior high school; like its Chinese counterpart, it assigns the subject to be studied and the rank of university to students. The higher education market in Taiwan is highly saturated; accordingly, after passing the national exam, almost every student will be able to secure a place at one of the many public or private universities scattered all over the island. Yet the competition to be admitted to one of the high-ranking public institutions of higher education, promising better opportunities on the job market, remains fierce. Even though most of these elite universities are situated in Taipei and along its urban fringe, there are renowned universities to be found in most parts of the island. Thus, many young people choose a university close to the parental residence in order to avoid any extra expenses for accommodation or food in the relatively expensive Taiwanese cities.

Whereas in China parents and students alike worry that their children's exam scores will not be high enough to be admitted to a high ranking urban university facilitating the acquisition of an urban residence registration, in Taiwan, parents often have quite contrary concerns about their children's future residence. They fear that they will get into a university which is too far away from home. First, this would limit some of the authority parents have over their children. Second, having to pay for their children's livelihood in another city would mean an extra and, in many parents' eyes, an unnecessary expense. Although the reputation of a university undoubtedly plays a major role in their decision as well, location is another key aspect. Especially families that already reside in one of Taiwan's urban centres expect their children to remain living at home. This was the case with Shu-fen's family; Shu-fen's sister wanted to study at a university in a part of Taiwan too remote for a daily commute from their house in Taipei. Her mother refused to let her leave home and only allowed her to apply for universities in Taipei.

Whereas moving to the capital signifies economic progress for many rural Chinese, many Taiwanese families prefer to live *outside* of Taipei. Apart from the rising real estate prices and high living costs that make the city less and less attractive to many Taiwanese, Taipei also has the reputation of being too damp and cloudy compared to other areas in Taiwan that are considered more favourable in terms of climate and scenery (Chao, 2014). Likewise, many young Taiwanese I met dreamt of moving to a more pleasant location on the island in the future.

Extended separation from parents during childhood and adolescence was thus rather rare for the generation of my Taiwanese informants. Because of the relatively coherent level of

infrastructure development across the island, notions of the "urban" were not as charged with ideas of modernity and progress as in the Chinese context.

The case of You-peng, a twenty-five year old medical student, demonstrates the rather typical biography of an ambitious young adult from an urban middle-class family in Taipei. When I met him through a mutual friend, he was still living with his parents and younger brother in an affluent Taipei suburb. You-peng and I got along well immediately. He was extremely interested in my studies and we often met at tea shops in the afternoons after he finished his part-time job as an academic assistant of his supervisor. You-peng had a strong interest in Taiwanese and US politics and was eager to discuss his opinions with me. He was planning to apply for a master's degree abroad at that time and each opportunity to practice his English appeared to be welcome. You-peng's father had a lucrative job so his parents could afford to generously sponsor their sons' education. You-peng was about to graduate from a postgraduate programme at one of the country's most prestigious universities located in the city centre. He had never left his parental home as all the educational institutions he had attended were located in his immediate environment.

After primary school, You-peng was accepted by one of Taipei's most renowned all-boys high schools; the school was famous for its high success rate in sending students to first-class Taiwanese universities. Due to his high *liankao* score, he was admitted to a popular medical programme right after graduation. His parents always had high ambitions for him and, as the eldest son, he felt that the pressure to achieve weighed more heavily on him than on his more adventurous, younger brother. From early on, You-peng told me, he had felt that he was supposed to act as a "model son" and he internalized his parents' wish for him to have a successful career in a prestigious profession. When he was still a schoolboy, they made it clear to You-peng that they wanted him to become a surgeon and he accepted their wish without much opposition. You-peng was a diligent student and did not greatly question his parents' authority over his educational choices at that time. It seemed self-explanatory for him to apply for a prestigious medical study programme after he had graduated from senior high school. He confessed to never having decided much on his own until the beginning of his twenties. However, things changed during his time at university. Although he genuinely enjoyed studying medicine, he could not picture himself working as a surgeon, the career his parents had envisaged for him. Instead, he would like to stay in academia to do research.

During the time You-peng participated in my study, his parents pushed hard for him to apply for a placement on a residency training programme at a hospital as the next step

towards becoming an accredited surgeon. You-peng refused, arguing that once he had started the residency, there would be no turning back for him as his parents would continue to push him to work as a physician afterwards. They could not understand why he would jeopardize his chances of a highly prestigious career for a low-paid position in academia. You-peng insisted on his choice and started to prepare his application for a PhD programme at a renowned university in the US; he wanted to study epidemiology.

In many of our conversations, he exhibited a profound interest in US political history and the American lifestyle. He once confessed to me that he would love to have experienced growing up in North America, where, he imagined, one could be "in charge of" one's life decisions without parental interference. In Taiwan, he complained, parents could be very authoritarian even with their grown-up children. They would "suggest" things with the expectation that their orders would be followed.

However, after a few months, his parents seemed to have calmed down a bit; they consoled themselves with the prospect of their son's plan to study at an Ivy League institution; this would mitigate the loss in status incurred by not becoming a surgeon. Moreover, You-peng had made it clear to me, and most likely to his parents as well, that he intended to return to Taiwan after he had completed his education abroad as he could not imagine building a career or family abroad. For the time being, however, he needed to "break free" from the restraints of his parental home. Indeed, after he graduated from his programme and completed his military service, he secured a place for a Master's at Stanford University; he started it hoping to be able to enrol in a PhD programme afterwards. When he failed to secure the study place he desired, however, he returned, as promised, to Taipei to pursue his career path there.

Unlike Chao, the Chinese PhD student introduced above, You-peng had been living in the parental household up until his mid-twenties; many of his problems stemmed from this close cohabitation with his family. Whereas Chao's parents hoped that their son would achieve financial security for the family, the ambitions of You-peng's parents were more centred on him maintaining their middle-class status in the ever more competitive environment of Taipei. Like in China, university education had become increasingly standard for the generation born after 1980. Degrees at renowned international universities were thus new "status markers" that could open doors to prestigious careers amidst the steady devaluation of university degrees in Taiwan (Chen and Chang 2010). Even though You-peng appeared to be self-confident and independent in the way in which he pursued his degree and plans to study abroad, he struggled to convey his wish for autonomy over

his decisions to his parents. Whereas Chao had been able to find his own peer group within the Party's youth organization, You-peng had not been able to carve out a niche for himself. He was very active in the local Catholic church but so were his parents; their surveillance thus extended into his leisure activities. Their invasion of his private sphere was a constant topic in our conversations.

You-peng started to date a Taiwanese woman from a southern city during my fieldwork; ever since, his parents had been constantly "on guard," fearing that his romantic relationship with a young teacher would interfere with his studies. She was a junior high school teacher and had not taken the national teacher qualifications certification exam. Thus, she only had a comparatively low salary. His parents, You-peng complained, saw her as a disappointment. In today's Taiwan, he added, only "brand name" universities and exams counted.

Unlike many of the Chinese informants, You-peng did not have to worry about financing his education or his parents' old age. However, having achieved a relatively high socioeconomic status and comfortable lifestyle, his parents expected You-peng to surpass their achievements in his professional career. At the same time, they did not appear to be willing to give up on rather conservative filial ideals and they expected to have a say in their son's choice of partner.

In China, I experienced a comparable obsession with "brand name" education and professional status in some informants from urban and more affluent backgrounds. Social positioning in the urban environment of Beijing appeared to take place against the background of the state-sponsored notion of "population quality" (*renkou suzhi*). This notion was employed not only to create a distance from the migrant population but also so that one could stand out from the "nouveau riche".

2.3. The Concern for Quality and Status in the Urban Environments of Beijing and Taipei

Shortly after introducing the one-child policy strictly regulating women's fertility in 1979, the CCP designed new measures that went beyond merely controlling population growth (Fong, 2004 pp. 70-75). In the 1980s, the Chinese government developed a concept of human quality (*suzhi*) that set standards against which the degree of a citizen's moral cultivation and educational attainment was measured (Fong, 2007; Kipnis, 2006; 2011 p. 65). Accordingly, whereas during the Mao era, children and adolescents had been expected

to be fierce adherents of the party and support the communist cause, expectations altered in the reform era. The Chinese government recognized the need for highly educated professionals in order to advance the modernization of China's economy (Chan, 1985 pp. 60-69; Kipnis, 2011 p. 68).

Elizabeth Croll points out that this new responsibility for forming high-achieving, patriotic subjects according to standards imposed by the ruling party was not left only to teachers. In order to form model citizens, parents now had to contribute to the state's endeavour by laying the foundation for their children's academic excellence, moral integrity and willingness to obey superiors in early childhood. Croll remarks that

> "[t]he new investment in, and significance attached to, the family or domestic group as a unit of socialisation follow thirty years of its marginalisation in this respect. […] To legitimise domestic socialisation and reduce the opposition between the influence of family and school, community and society, the family has been designated 'the first school' and, as such, a valid instrument for state intervention" (Croll, 1990 p. 149).

The state did not only curtail couples' powers of decision over their desired family size due to its comprehensive population control programme (the one-child policy) but also subjected parenting methods to the party's agenda. In order to produce a citizen considered valuable by the state, parents thus had to ensure that their child attained the proper "human quality" through the correct formal and informal education. This situation was further exacerbated by the fact that those men and women who became parents in the early 1980s had grown up during the Cultural Revolution when schools were either closed or, with the curriculum's heavy emphasis on party ideology, did not receive the same education that deemed the Party valuable during the reform era. Hence, parents resorted to state-sponsored parenting courses and evening schools that conveyed the knowledge needed in a society that increasingly rewarded educational success and professionalism (Croll, 1990 pp. 149-150).

The previous case studies from China have already given an impression of the difficulties parents faced when confronted with the new demands that a globalized economy and the urban labour market made of their children. So far, mainly the struggles of rural students who tried to bridge the spatial and socioeconomic gap between them and their parents in the countryside have been discussed within the context of education. However, this does not mean that students from urban backgrounds did not encounter similar feelings of alienation from their parents during their education. As the case of Liang in the previous chapter has illustrated, long separations from parents were also common in the cities.

Often these separations were a consequence of parents' ambitions to provide the best education possible for their children. Many of them had come to Beijing from rural areas and accumulated wealth in the post-reform era but they fell short of the educational standards set by the state. Imbuing their children with "human quality" (*suzhi*) by enabling them to receive the best education possible was thus one of their priorities.

Xing was one informant who had grown up in an affluent family in Beijing and whose parents were willing to make huge investments in his education. His case illustrates the way in which the spatial separation his parents enforced to cultivate *suzhi* in their son caused not only an emotional rift between them but also worsened any mutual understanding between them as Xing started to resent his family for what he perceived as their lack of "moral quality."

Xing's parents grew up in rural Anhui and came to Beijing in the early 1990s to start a business. They were highly successful and ran a building supplies company. However, as they only had high school certificates, it was difficult for them to shed the rather derogative status of being "nouveau riche" in the capital. They thus decided to use their resources to offer their son an education that would enable him to earn those "signifiers of quality" that they had lacked and establish himself firmly within the capital's educational elite.

Kajanus has described the way in which Chinese families attempt to increase their socioeconomic status by making strategic educational choices in order to position their children within networks of the national and international elite; this endeavour often requires meticulous planning from childhood onwards, especially for those people who do not belong to the socioeconomic top layer of society (Kajanus, 2015). Whereas Xing's parents seemed to have the money to enable their son to have an elite education, they lacked experience on the educational market; accordingly, they had to rely on the knowledge they acquired from parenting magazines, teachers and acquaintances so as to decide how they could place their son within China's educational elite.

I met Xing in a coffee shop close to his university. He was in his early twenties but looked very young for his age. He seemed friendly and attentive but I could not shake off the feeling of being unable to "reach" him. Even though he was not very reluctant about revealing intimate details of his private life, at times it seemed as though he was talking about another person instead of himself, almost as if he were playing a well-rehearsed role. Unlike other informants, Xing did not appear to be very interested in the research itself, nor did he wonder what I would make of the information he provided me with.

Throughout our long conversation, this apparent detachedness from his personal story never really dissipated.

Xing was four years old when he was sent to an international boarding kindergarten in Beijing. He still remembered finding it difficult to adjust to this new environment and cried a lot. As he saw his parents only at weekends, Xing soon started to feel estranged from them. After kindergarten, Xing was sent to a boarding elementary school and the gap between them widened. At that time, however, he had already got used to living separately from his parents and his tight schedule at school left little room for homesickness.

In the fifth grade, Xing's life took an unexpected turn. He was offered the opportunity to travel to Canada with a group of students and teachers. In Toronto, he lived with local host families and he still remembers today how much he enjoyed this new environment. For the first time, he experienced the intimate familial atmosphere that he had missed out on at home. Looking back now, he realized that he had wished to feel a "parental love" that went beyond the financial care his family provided for him. His experience abroad prompted Xing's wish for a future in North America, where he thought he had found a society that suited him better than the one he grew up in.

When it was time to select a junior high school, Xing followed his mother's advice who had studied Beijing's school rankings exhaustively. He applied successfully to the city's number one junior high school where he always ranked among the top of his class right from the outset. But his performance decreased towards the end of junior high school and he was not accepted by the senior high school of his choice. Conceiving of this failure in highly individualised terms, he attributed his dropping marks to his lacking working morals at that time; in particular to his love for reading comics. Full of remorse for his low scores, Xing was determined not to cause any more disappointment to his parents. His ambitions were additionally reignited by another school excursion to the US during which his class visited several Ivy League universities. Determined to study at one of these institutions one day, Xing studied even more devotedly. However, not only Xing himself was full of ambition during his preparations for the *gaokao*. In the months preceding the national exam, Xing's mother attended seminars for parents and also read magazines about education to find out which subject would be most promising for him for the future. Together with Xing, they decided on his subject choice while also considering his ambition to study at a renowned American university. Eventually, Xing scored highly in the national exam and was admitted to study engineering at a first-tier university in Beijing.

Around this time, Xing's relationship with his father became complicated when the latter left the family home to live with his mistress. After the separation, Xing's mother was left in a dire financial situation which further motivated Xing to provide a secure existence for his mother. When talking about his family, Xing sometimes appeared full of resentment for the paternal side of his relatives whom he described as highly selfish and unreliable. Stressing their rural origins and lacking education as underlying causes for their "unethical" behaviour, his criticism was strongly informed by the government-informed discourse of "quality" (*suzhi*). Achieving independence through education was thus his way of setting himself apart from them and freeing himself from their influence.

In his first year at university, Xing continued his strict study regime as the competition became even fiercer than at senior high school. In his second year, however, he became more socially active; he started to surround himself with Westerners in order to become accustomed to their culture and language and he set himself the goal that, after his graduation from the undergraduate degree, he would apply to a US university. Accordingly, whereas Chao exhibited "civilized" *suzhi* through his party involvement and reflections on his contributions to China's future, Xing laid claim to a distinct urban notion of "superior human quality" perceived through the lens of international education and cosmopolitan desires.

The case of Xing seems to suggest that the urban, affluent middle classes in Beijing are driven by a notion of *suzhi* that conceives of "quality" mostly as the ability to navigate a globalized urban intellectual culture. This culture is exclusive in the sense that economic assets are needed to become part of it, yet these assets are not sufficient in themselves to guarantee acknowledgement by its members. Likewise, Fong has stressed that among her young urban informants, high *suzhi* represented an "ideal personhood associated with urban modernity" (Fong, 2007 p. 88). Moreover, she observed different conceptualizations of *suzhi* in youth from different socioeconomic backgrounds; these are also reflected in the different notions of "personal quality" held by Chao and Xing:

> "To justify their claims to high quality, they emphasized definitions of quality that favored their own strengths: for instance, those who were wealthier defined quality in terms of the cosmopolitan associated with possession of a wide range of expensive hobbies, talents, and experiences; those who were poorer defined quality in terms of patriotism, morality, and good citizenship; those who were academically successful defined quality in terms of educational attainment; those who were academically unsuccessful defined quality in terms of a modern, cosmopolitan attitude and appearance" (pp. 86-87).

The stories of Xing and Chao also both highlight parents' - in particular mothers' - responsibility for providing an environment where children can realize their academic potential and attain the standards of high *suzhi*. Whereas Chao's father was absent from home due to his work commitments in the south, Chao's mother, who had only a limited education, was solely responsible for her son's moral and academic development. Likewise, Xing's mother felt responsible for guiding her son in terms of important decisions in his educational career; this required her to rely on purportedly "professional" information from specialized literature and parenting courses.

Referring to Hansen's argument concerning the individualizing processes she observed in the Chinese educational sector, it thus appears as though responsibility for academic successes is not only diverted from the education system to students, but also to parents (mainly mothers) (Hansen, 2015 pp. 141-142). The mothers of Chao and Xing were both highly anxious, according to their sons' accounts, to fulfil their task of providing adequate educational guidance. They worried about having to take the blame not only for their sons' academic failures, but, in the same vein, for their inability to raise children who fulfilled the quality standards imposed by the state.

Bayly describes similar observations in late-socialist Vietnam (Bayly, 2013). In Hanoi, she met mothers who felt responsible not only for the demands of their families, but also for the demands of the state and the nation to rear children who would excel in the educational system and thus help propel the country into an advanced state of economic development. Besides their workplace tasks, she argues, "[Vietnamese] women must be successful as domestic nurturers" (p. 159). Yet at the same time, these mothers worry about conveying the image of the notorious "tiger mother," depicted by the international media as overambitious women pushing their children to their very limits to produce academic success (ibid.).

This and the previous chapter seem to demonstrate that the same problems afflict Chinese and Taiwanese women in a similar way: first, the integration of women's dual work obligations; second, the conflict implied by satisfying children's individual needs while preparing them for the competitive world of work. Even though an evaluation of children's performance at schools is less governed by state-set standards of "human quality" in Taiwan, academic achievement has moral connotations to the traditional concept of filial piety and thus serves as a yardstick against which good parenting is measured. In this sense, the notion of personal "quality" was not exclusive to my Beijing informants but could also be discerned in Taiwan. Even though it was not as politically charged as in China, specific

notions of an individual's *suzhi* also surfaced during my fieldwork in Taipei. I described above how You-peng's parents disapproved of his girlfriend because of her low career ambitions which seemed to reflect badly on her overall qualities as a suitable wife for their son. Instead of striving for the prestigious status of a civil servant, she was content working in a lower-paid teaching position. It thus appears that in Taiwanese society, achievements in the educational and professional sectors are also conceptualized as a "moral achievement" within the framework of filial duties that affect how a person's "quality" is perceived. By realizing the potential their parents have "planted" by way of their care and support, children fulfil an important obligation in the intergenerational contract. Not striving for the highest achievements but, like You-peng's girlfriend, being content with less prestigious positions, could thus imply a certain degree of neglect of one's filial duties - and idleness; this could have an unsettling effect, especially on the more traditionally minded Taiwanese parents like the ones of You-peng, who might hope for the support of a daughter-in-law in their old age.

Furthermore - and this was more palpable among my Taiwanese than Chinese informants - expectations that women will rear high-performing children were closely formulated within the context of their obligations to the ancestors and future descendants of their husband's lineage. As Pei-chun's case in the previous chapter has illustrated, mothers tried to shield their children from misfortunes by providing them with protective charms, by praying for them at family shrines or temples or by consulting fortune-tellers about how to avoid any traps of fate. Most Taiwanese flats I visited had a prominent shrine around which the family gathered daily to ask for support and give offerings. Bayly made similar observations in urban Vietnamese houses: "It is before the altar that householders make their prayerful incense presentations, thereby making contact with the departed kin in whose responsive presence they aspire to lead a purposeful and achieving life" (Bayly, 2013 p. 169). Likewise, in Taiwan, the daily dialogue with ancestors might have contributed to parental notions of indebtedness to secure children's prospering for the continuity of the family line.

My younger informants were also concerned about ensuring the best spiritual support possible. This ranged from offering ID cards and exam information to *Wenchang*, the god of literature, to reflecting on which god might have the best expertise within their field of study. One young woman considered praying in a Christian church for an upcoming English exam since she expected that Jesus, whom she thought would have a better knowledge of Western languages, would be of greater assistance in this subject than *Wenchang*. Hence, similar to Bayly's Vietnamese informants, the young Taiwanese I met

were highly concerned with the question of which instance one had to address "when wishing to fulfil one's intricately intertwined achievement obligations to the living and dead: someone reliable, skilled and honest in the use of the appropriate psychic arts; in short, an achiever in the realm of supra-mundane achievement fostering" (p. 171). Spiritual protection was also an important matter for the parents of the Taiwanese woman introduced in the next case study. Yu-ching's parents suffered from the death of their youngest child and the estrangement of their eldest daughter. The protection of Yu-ching's spiritual and physical well-being was thus as closely observed as her academic achievements.

Yu-ching was one of my closest female informants in Taipei. She had an exceptionally affectionate relationship with her parents, in particular to her father, and at times her life seemed to revolve around the urge she felt to realize the hopes they had placed in her. Several tragic events in the family had compounded the pressure on her since childhood. Yu-ching's younger brother, her parents' only son, died from complications during a childhood disease. Helpless in the face of her parents' grief, Yu-ching decided to make up for the loss of her brother by realizing the dreams her parents had invested in him. Her elder sister, however, reacted in a very different way to her brother's death and started to rebel against their parents' strictness. She eventually left the family home and, soon after, became pregnant out of wedlock. Yu-ching's parents were devastated and even though they continued to support their eldest daughter, they almost entirely broke off contact with her.

For a long time, I assumed that Yu-ching was an only child, an impression that was reinforced by her remarkably close and caring relationship with her parents. I was thus surprised when she revealed after months that she had a dead brother and an estranged sister. Yu-ching explained that her parents, afraid that she would attract "bad company" at a regular school, sent her to an expensive private high school. Her parents owned a successful logistics company in Taipei and were thus affluent enough to invest in her private education. But they also anxiously watched over her physical and spiritual health. In Yu-ching's childhood, her mother had consulted a fortune-teller who warned her that her daughter was at risk of having a car accident in her teenage years. Thus, her parents only allowed her to take her driver's license in her early twenties. Moreover, since the death of her brother, her parents had found comfort in the Buddhist belief. Every Saturday, Yu-ching and her parents attended a seminar with a Buddhist master (*shifu*) who gave her advice on private questions ranging from her career plans to her romantic relationships. This shared practice of belief appeared to strengthen ties between Yu-ching and her parents.

When Yu-ching was fifteen years old, she and her parents decided that she would continue her education in the US. However, unlike her Taiwanese peer, You-peng, who wanted to temporarily break free from his family bonds by way of a foreign education, Yu-ching had no such ambitions and returned home to Taipei after completing high school and an undergraduate degree in English in the US. Moreover, in contrast to him, she was rather indecisive about which educational path she should follow afterwards. She relied on the advice she received from her *shifu* and parents with regard to her subject and choice of university. They eventually agreed that she would study for a postgraduate degree in accounting, a subject her parents considered a suitable profession for her. They also remembered that a fortune-teller whom they had consulted years before had predicted that their daughter would work in a bank in the future. This confirmed their belief that they had made the right choice.

Yu-ching admitted that even though she had lived relatively independently during her stay in the US, she found it difficult to make any independent decisions. Moreover, her parents, she complained, still treated her like a little girl, which made it even harder for her to free herself from their authority now that she was living at home again.

I spent several days living in Yu-ching's family home during a visit to Taipei in the late summer of 2013. At that time, not much had changed in her life. In the winter of the same year she had almost become engaged, but following the advice of her parents and her *shifu*, she ended the relationship. They were concerned that the young man was not as sincere and hard-working as they had hoped and they worried that he might not provide Yu-ching with the guidance and support they wished for. Yu-ching had already ended a previous relationship due to the disapproval of her parents and Buddhist teacher. In the same year, she also failed several assessment examinations at local banks. For these reasons, she appeared increasingly hopeless in still being able to find a suitable husband and starting the career her parents expected. As she neared the much feared mark of thirty years of age, the pressure of her parents on her to marry increased enormously. At the same time, they were unwilling to lower their expectations of Yu-ching.

Yu-ching did not appear to be especially interested in the career she was pursuing but she stuck to her resolution to meet her parents' ambitious expectations. Like You-peng, Yu-ching could only prove her moral integrity in the Taiwanese context by returning to Taipei where she could reconcile her professional success with filial obligations of care. Like him, she worried about how she could fulfil her parents' high expectations in terms of her career and marriage. Yet while You-peng pursued his career plans with determination, Yu-ching

often wavered. In one of those moments of doubt, she went to a local temple to ask the gods for guidance by drawing fortune sticks (*chou qian*), a popular divination practice[5] in Taiwan. She was stunned by the accuracy of the response: the small paper slip she received said that she should decide on one single goal and focus her energies entirely on its pursuit. She could relate well to this advice but she had difficulty following it in her love life and career.

Yu-ching's and You-peng's cases seem to demonstrate that parental and filial support in Taiwan is closely oriented on a spatially bound concept of mutual care which, it seems, has been partly transcended by Chinese parents and their children. Being physically present appears to be a cornerstone of the very definition of filial duties in Taiwan and thus even children's absence for educational purposes is mostly only accepted for a restricted time period. This created a conflict among Taiwanese informants that was not as pronounced among their Chinese peers: on the one hand, they had to meet their filial obligations to achieve academic successes which, often, could only be realized through a prolonged absence from home (especially if it involved the pursuit of higher education abroad); on the other hand, they could only *really* be filial if they were physically present in their parents' everyday lives. Another interesting difference is the greater interest in my Taiwanese informants to seek help and guidance through religious classes or divinatory methods; this was less prevalent among Chinese informants. Even though some of their parents had consulted fortune-tellers about their children's well-being and visited temples, young Chinese often claimed to be not very familiar with such practices and often shrugged off any references to religion and divination. This may stem from a certain bias in my type of informant, from their perception of me as a Western researcher or from different ideological discourses that relegate folk religious beliefs to the realm of "backwardness" and rurality that, to them, indicates "low" *suzhi*.

2.4. Conclusion

In China and Taiwan, education is highly valued; parents will usually do their utmost to ensure that their children perform well at school so as to secure a place at a high-ranking university. However, due to the different demographic and spatial landscapes of China and Taiwan, the pursuit of a higher education and career was more often connected with an indefinite period of absence from families among Chinese informants than among their

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[5] See chapter six for a detailed explanation of *chou qian*.

Taiwanese peers. Accordingly, many parents of my Chinese informants seemed to consider a certain amount of independence as a prerequisite for future success in the competitive urban environment, whereas Taiwanese parents were afraid that too much autonomy might divert their offspring from the path of filial piety.

Whereas academic and professional successes are pronounced goals of Chinese and Taiwanese families, expectations of filial support in China take into account the difficulties involved in bridging the geographic distance from children. In Taiwan, however, most parents expected their children to be physically present during their old age. This does not mean that Chinese parents did not possess the ideal of living close to their children in the future; however, this wish could only be realized as long as it did not compromise the careers of their children which would also very probably benefit supporting parents in their old age. In Taiwan, by contrast, parents were less expectant that their children's career choices would cause an indefinite separation in the long run; they thus appeared less willing to compromise on their future expectations of support.

The cases of Chao and Xing illustrate that, in China, early childhood experiences of the absence of parents facilitated children's familiarization with the long periods of intra-familial separation required to pursue secondary and tertiary education in later years. Especially the aspirations of rural Chinese people to improve the social position of their families, as Chao and Ming-yue's stories illustrate, required a spatial relocation to cities. Notions of success among young Chinese people did not only imply a stable, highly paid job that was supposed to ensue after graduation, but also urban residency and the attainment of a superior "quality" (*suzhi*) through patriotic engagement in Chao's case, or the cosmopolitan expertise that Xing aspired to.

Successfully securing an urban *hukou* or, in rare cases, a foreign residence permit, and thus being able to relieve one's parents of their arduous lives in the countryside, was considered the ultimate hallmark of success (Fong, 2011). In Taiwan, however, success had to be taken back home. Most of my informants felt compelled to return to their parents' after having achieved a certain educational or professional status in order to demonstrate their sense of filial responsibility. This was the case with You-peng and Yu-ching. You-peng longed to realize his vision of freedom in the US but was determined to return home to Taipei to his parents after completing his degree. Yu-ching, who left home to attend high school and university in the US, returned to the parental home after completing an undergraduate degree; she planned to stay with her parents until marriage.

With regard to their residence choices, Yu-ching and You-peng were representative of those Taiwanese informants who had grown up in Taipei. Most of them lived with parents until marriage and only interrupted this form of co-residence for studies abroad. As they were from upper middle-class families, their educational choices were also rather typical since they did not stray too far from parental expectations and, in You-peng's case, they tried to compensate for deciding against parental preferences by striving to be highly successful.

However, You-peng was rather unusual in terms of the determination with which he pursued his career choice as well as his highly idealized image of US society. I only encountered such an idolization of a Western society again with Xing. Whereas You-peng, an ardent supporter of political liberalism, associated the US with his ideal of economic and political freedom, Xing pursued a notion of higher moral "quality" that he regarded as more realizable in a Western society than in China. While I heard other Chinese and Taiwanese informants talk longingly of life in a Western country, it was rare that they did so for reasons of such specific political or moral ideals. Moreover, the determination with which Xing and his parents pursued an elite education for him was almost unmatched by my informants in China and Taiwan. The case of Xing also highlights the problematic consequences of long-term separation from families addressed by Hansen (Hansen, 2015 p.45). Xing had felt estranged from his parents, in particular his father, since early childhood. He had difficulties to closely communicate with them. Like Liang, the young man who worked with me at the consultancy who I introduced in the previous chapter, also Xing struggled with feelings of insufficiency when he could not meet his parents' high demands on academic excellence. Both young men appeared to be torn between their love for their parents and their resentment for the perceived abandonment they experienced in childhood.

The cases of Chao and Ming-yue, meanwhile, appeared to be highly representative of students who came to Beijing from rural areas and who succeeded in the educational system due to their willingness to study diligently, driven by the pursuit of a better life for themselves and their families. Almost at their goals, they were now unsure about how to continue with their plans. Would they be able to secure an urban *hukou* or should they return to their home provinces where they would be closer to their parents but where they would have to compromise on their careers?

The socioeconomic differences between my Chinese and Taiwanese informants were undoubtedly responsible for Chinese families' limited residence choices, whereas

Taiwanese families could prioritize location over potential income. While the parents of my rural Chinese informants in particular had invested a substantial share of their household resources in their children's education and expected to rely on their financial help in old age, Taiwanese parents had more leeway as they had largely accumulated enough wealth to support themselves on retirement. Recent research has shown that Taiwanese elderly people do not only increasingly rely on personal savings but also that financial transfers within families have been reversed - from the older to the younger generation (Lai and Tung, 2015). This was reflected in the experiences of my Taiwanese informants who received generous support from their parents during higher education which, at the same time, created dependencies. Traditional expectations still manifest themselves in the wish of parents to live in close contact with their adult children in old age; often, children will feel pressured to meet these expectations due to the assistance they received in their youth (Hsu, 2007; Whyte, 2004; 2005). However, this was becoming more and more difficult due to the globalization of the economy and the growing desirability of international studies and work experience.

Although financial aspects play an important role in these different family dynamics, social prestige is another determinant that influenced parental attitudes towards children's educational and professional careers. Academic credentials from first-tier or even foreign universities enhanced the whole family's status in both societies. However, recognition was also garnered from children's filiality. Children's prolonged absences during periods of their education or career appeared to be more problematic in Taiwan than in China, where urban residence was more considered a marker of success. In Taiwan, by contrast, it seemed to be more likely that prolonged absence was perceived as filial neglect. Separation from children thus had to be weighed up against the gossip and emotional distress that their apparent lack of filial responsibility might cause in the long run.

According to my observations in Beijing, Chinese parents seemed to be increasingly willing to follow their children in old age, whether to Beijing or abroad. This phenomenon might also be a consequence of parents' own migratory experiences which may have influenced their sense of belonging to a certain place. The idea of returning "home" appeared to be becoming more and more obsolete among young Chinese people and their parents. Alex Cockain has observed the same development during his research among teenagers in Beijing. He describes how the high mobility that migrant work and the educational system bring about transformed the meaning of "home" (*jia*) from being understood as a permanent, steady settlement based on ancestral origins into a more fluid and mobile concept (Cockain, 2012 p. 78). Moreover, "[g]eographical movement also meant that

informants re-organized their personal networks, especially when they moved independently of parents, either following divorce or as a consequence of attending boarding school" (ibid.). In Taiwan, the older as well as the younger generations seemed to be significantly more attached to their home places than their Chinese counterparts.

Johnston attaches a moral dimension to this loosening concept of "*jia*" (Johnston, 2013 pp. 49-50). He distinguishes between antagonistic moral forces that drew his Chinese informants back to their families while simultaneously pushing them away. He argues that the "centripetal morality," the moral importance placed upon attachment to the family that keeps persons close to their natal homes, stands in opposition to a "centrifugal" force that commands children to increase their families' socioeconomic status through education and work in the cities (ibid.). I would like to take this theory further and argue, based on the case studies presented in this and the previous chapters, that this centripetal morality was substantially dissolved by the Communist campaigns. Further, the new economic demands emerging during the reform and post-reform era added to its weakening. Its demise might have been further fuelled by the discourse on *suzhi* and the one-child policy that both played to an overriding need for education in order to produce children that would function as ideal citizens and simultaneously as sole providers for aging family members (Fong, 2004). In Taiwan, these two discourses have started to diverge only recently; as a consequence, young Taiwanese felt caught between antagonistic forces; being pulled back and forth between different obligations and aspirations.

Chapter Three - Working towards the Future - Professional Aspirations

3.1. Introduction

Yue-ling looked stressed as she tried to navigate the car through the busy Saturday morning traffic in Taichung's city centre, constantly having to evade speeding taxis and incautious pedestrians weighed down with bulging shopping bags. Yue-ling had invited me to join her on a visit to her paternal grandparents' home for a weekend trip during which she wanted to unwind from her stressful job in Taipei. On a sunny Saturday in September, we thus set out southwards. Having been stuck in the traffic for some time, our conversation turned to her problems at work. Yue-ling was an accountant at her father-in-law's company. The family business made electronic kitchen appliances and had its office with a number of employees situated in a suburb of Taipei. As she not only shared a workplace with her in-laws, but was also living with them in the same apartment block, she felt increasingly stressed as concerns at work threatened to take over her private life as well. Just recently an incident happened that had reconfirmed that her boss and father-in-law did not acknowledge her as a full employee but only saw her in her role as his daughter-in-law.

Recently her husband, Yang-wei, had a business meeting with a client in Tainan, a city located a four-hour drive south of Taipei. Despite the approaching typhoon and his father's warning not to take the car under these conditions, he decided to drive to Tainan. When Yue-ling's father-in-law learned that his son had disregarded his advice, he wrote an angry email to Yue-ling, accusing her of not taking enough care of his son. Perhaps due to a lack of media savvy, or in an effort to shame Yue-ling in front of her colleagues, he did not sent his complaint to her privately but to the whole staff mailing' list. Yue-ling's anger boiled up again as she talked about the incident. When Yang-wei discovered the email, she continued, he became furious about his father's antiquated views of marriage as well as his unprofessionalism. Yue-ling asked her husband to talk about this issue with his father personally as she did not want to reply and take the blame for his misconduct towards his father. Yang-wei, however, asked his mother to tell his father that he was not willing to tolerate his behaviour. Yue-ling and her mother-in-law, originally only bystanders in the incident, were now caught in the crossfire.

Yue-ling's difficulties in dissociating her work relationships from those with her family were experienced by many young men and women I talked to in Taipei. Not only people working in family businesses but also young professionals employed in corporate jobs or by the government complained that their families directly or indirectly tried to get involved in

their career decisions. As a consequence, many of my informants made professional choices not according to their personal skills and aspirations but according to their feeling forced to pursue a career path that had been approved by families and their partners or spouses.

In Beijing, parents for various reasons usually had less authority over their children's professional decisions. The previous chapters have explained that my Chinese informants lived more autonomously and learnt early on to make decisions independently. This trend could also be observed in their career choices. The greater acceptance of long-term separation by families facilitated the absence of young Chinese people' from home, at least during the initial years of their working lives.

Moreover, many of my Chinese informants had already far surpassed their parents' educational achievements and socioeconomic status when starting work. This endowed them with a sense of empowerment that was also reflected in the willpower with which they pursued their careers and fended off unwanted advice and pressure from families. Taiwanese parents, by contrast, had often been very successful during Taiwan's economic boom and set their expectations for their offspring correspondingly high. Having provided their children with an excellent education, they expected them to surpass their past achievements.

However, the Taiwanese labour market looked bleak when my informants graduated and it became increasingly difficult to find adequately paying jobs. Many young Taiwanese were doubtful if there was any chance of living up to their families' expectations at all. Even those young graduates who, like Yue-ling, entered family businesses struggled to assert their place. I experienced that intergenerational rifts were further deepened by the older generation's tendency to blame their children's struggling on their apparent lack of ambition and not on structural changes of the economy. Having missed out on the empowering experiences of socioeconomic ascent their Beijing peers had had, many young Taiwanese were hesitant about taking risks to advance their careers; this only exacerbated their situation and created even stronger dependencies on their families. These factors further reinforced the impression of the seemingly stronger traditionalism in family life in Taiwan, as compared to China, that has been noted by Whyte and colleagues (Chu and Yu, 2010; Whyte et al., 2003; Whyte, 2004).

Despite all these differences in their early careers, young Chinese and Taiwanese encountered similar challenges in their working environments. Most notably, young people tried to strike a balance between achieving job security and realizing their aspirations for a

cosmopolitan lifestyle that employment in international corporations promised. Many of them felt pressured by their parents to pursue safe careers in the government or other prestigious professions that were believed to provide a safe income, whereas they personally aspired to professions that required more risk-taking in the initial phase of the career but which might provide them with a more exciting lifestyle in the future.

No matter which path they chose, most graduate jobs in Beijing and Taipei were highly competitive and placed strict requirements on their employees' performance. Hierarchies based on seniority often hindered promotion to higher level jobs. Gendered stereotypes required female employees in particular to adopt certain forms of conduct that threatened to undermine their authority and assertiveness. Feelings of inadequacy at work were thus pervasive among informants from both locations and the stress and anxiety caused by these factors often resulted in doubts about personal choices. Additional pressure was brought to bear if the career in question had been facilitated by huge collective sacrifices by the family -quitting a job and the prestige it entailed was hence often more a family's than an individual's decision.

3.2. Gendered Expectations and Ambitious Goals - Female Graduates' Striving for Professional Success in Taipei and Beijing

Yue-ling's tension eased noticeably in Taichung. Chatting with her grandparents and cousins while enjoying the sumptuous meals of her grandmother in the intimate atmosphere of their home, Yue-ling seemed able to forget her worries for a while. It had not been the first time that Yue-ling had complained to me about her father-in-law. He often asked her to convey his advice or criticism to his son as he thought that her influence on Yang-wei made it more likely he would listen. This, however, drew her into arguments she could otherwise have avoided. Working under these conditions was difficult, Yue-ling sighed. However, life at home was strained by the same problems. Every night, she and her husband ate dinner with his parents and conversations inevitably revolved sooner or later around the company. As Yue-ling expressed her wish for lighter conversations at the dinner table, her father-in-law changed to his next favourite topic -the lack of a grandchild from Yang-wei. Urging Yue-ling to follow the "normal course of life" and to bear an heir to the company - preferably a son - only worsened the pressure on her. So far she had been able to convince him of the lie that she was trying to conceive but she knew that she was only buying time.

Yue-ling's marriage had been affected by her in-laws' expectations from early on and she and her husband had been pressured to marry as they neared their late twenties. Then, when they wanted to buy their own apartment after living with his parents for several years, her father-in-law had interfered with their plans. He presented them with an apartment he had already bought for them without their consent -right above the one he and his wife lived in in the same building. Due to this close proximity to her in-laws, Yue-ling's obligations as a daughter-in-law and employee in the family business also increasingly interfered with her relationship with her husband.

The problems Yue-ling encountered when entering her husband's family business were far from unusual. Family businesses have flourished in Taiwan since the 1960s and most of them are still run by their original owners; these owners often struggle to set up a "plan of succession" and, like Yue-ling's parents-in-law, anxiously try to secure their company's continued existence by way of future generations (Sui, 2014 b). Moreover, the power imbalances along gender divisions that were fostered by the peculiar work relations pertinent in family enterprises are only diminishing slowly; a factor that further complicates women's status at the workplace (Simon, 2003 p. 10; Takenoshita, 2012).

The foundation for the emergence of Taiwan's family businesses was laid when an import-substitution strategy was set in place during comprehensive economic modernization in the early 1950s (Rubinstein, 1999 p. 367). This was accompanied by a new emphasis on production for export and the introduction of regulations that favoured the development of small- and medium-scale enterprises. As a consequence, family businesses that specialized in textile production and assembling electronic goods flourished (Lu, 2001 pp. 263-265; Rubinstein, 1999 pp. 367-370). To maintain competitive prices on the world market, these enterprises relied largely on informal labour provided by relatives (Hsiung, 1996 p. 145; Lee, 2004 a; 2004 b; Lee and Hirata, 2001 p. 102). The main elements in this cheap, unskilled labour force were young women who had formerly helped in the household; however, also married women participated in the trend and took on assembly work of weaving to increase household funds (Lee, 2004 a; Yu, 2001 p. 238). The government recognized this trend quickly and utilized it to advance the industrialization of the country. With the promotion of a campaign entitled *Living Rooms as Factories*, the KMT aimed to draw more women into the workforce by offering home-based piecework that could be combined with household duties and that did not require extensive training (Hsiung, 1996). "Under the satellite factory system," Ping-chun Hsiung argues, "women are simultaneously converted into wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law on the one hand and waged, unwaged and casual homeworkers on the other" (p. 145).

Mostly born in the mid to late 1980s, my female informants had surpassed the educational limitations of their mothers and grandmothers that meant they could only do low-skilled work on the shop floor or at home. Thanks to their tertiary education, they now worked in highly skilled jobs. However, they still struggled to assert their place within the strict hierarchies of Taiwanese working environments not only at family businesses but also at larger corporations and within the government.

The situation for young women on the Taiwanese labour market closely parallels the situation for highly educated young women in Japan. Karen Kelsky reports that young Japanese women - despite their high education - often have difficulty advancing in their careers as they are expected to quit their jobs upon marriage and childbirth (Kelsky, 2001). For this reason, superiors do not adequately support them in the development of their skills but relegate them to the status of receptionists and personal secretaries. Thus, they often have to take care of tasks that men, who were hired in equal positions, are not required to do. Kelsky notes that many Japanese women "confront the imposition of a quasi-domestic role in the workplace" (p. 95). To outperform their male colleagues by means of their expertise is perceived by many to be the only effective method to prevent being subjected to preconceived notions of gender roles at the workplace. For this reason, Kelsky's informants often pursued a highly specialized education in Japan and abroad (p. 101).

The same problems were often compounded for Taiwanese women by the special workplace relationships found in family businesses. The interplay of the relatively strict hierarchies of the company with those of the family environment also constituted a huge stress factor for Yue-ling. Nevertheless, despite her university education in the US and her foreign-language proficiency that could have opened up international career opportunities for her, she agreed to work at her father-in-law's business.

Like many other parents in the latter half of the twentieth century, Yue-ling's parents wanted their children to profit from an education abroad, preferably in a Western country (O'Neil, 2003). Hence, they decided Yue-ling and her two brothers would continue their school careers in the US. At that time, Yue-ling's grandfather owned a light bulb factory in which the whole family was employed. It was thus decided that Yue-ling's mother would accompany Yue-ling and her two brothers to San Francisco, while Yue-ling's father stayed behind to assist in the family business. When I first met Yue-ling, her mother and two brothers were still living in San Francisco. Yue-ling, however, had rather involuntarily returned to Taiwan in her early twenties.

Yue-ling got to know her future husband, Yang-wei, at a San Franciscan university where they were both studying on undergraduate programmes. After her graduation, Yang-wei suggested that she could intern at his parents' business to gain some initial work experience. His parents owned a highly successful company that produced industrial kitchen appliances and his family resided in one of the most expensive districts of Taipei. Yue-ling thus took up this opportunity but had to promise her mother to return to San Francisco once she had finished the internship after three months. However, upon her arrival in Taipei, she learnt that her boyfriend's parents had kept a full-time position of an accountant vacant for her, expecting she would work permanently in the company. After the extensive training she received from them in the following weeks, she did not want to disappoint her future in-laws. "What would his parents have thought of me, if I just went back to the US after a few months?" Yue-ling asked me over dinner one night. In the months that followed it became clear that her future-in-laws expected her to assist their son in leading the company in the future. There was thus no turning back for Yue-ling if she wanted to stay with her boyfriend.

Yue-ling confessed that the first year had been especially difficult and, even now, she sometimes felt isolated. She had still not found close friends in Taipei as her colleagues avoided establishing any close relationships with her; after all, she was the wife of their future boss. Regular business trips to China were mostly done by male staff as they involved frequent banquets and visits to hostess clubs, an entertainment programme the female employees were not considered suitable for.

Moreover, she struggled to assert her authority in important business decisions. She had to do the accounts for the money that her husband's elder brother had offset from his parents' company account for his business start-up. Yue-ling was reluctant to respond to his repeated requests - as he had already received vast amounts of money - and she complained that her parents-in-law granted their eldest son too many freedoms. After all, her own fate depended on the success of the company as well. Nonetheless, she was reluctant to openly contest her father-in-law's authority. Her job thus slowly ceased to offer her personal validation but increasingly took on the role of a marital obligation. She thus looked forward more and more to having a child that would free her from her obligations at work for some time. The following year, she got pregnant; several months before the baby was born, she returned to her family in the US where she stayed until her daughter was a few months old. She only returned to Taipei, she confessed, because her parents-in-law longed to see their granddaughter.

Yue-ling returned to the family company after a break of about ten months; most other young women who had children during my fieldwork tended to resume their jobs after even fewer months of maternity leave. However, until recently it was not unusual for women in Taiwan to quit formal employment upon marriage and childbirth. Lee Yean-Ju and Shuichi Hirata note that in the 1990s, the rate of labour force participation of Taiwanese women reached a peak during their late twenties after which it declined rapidly in their early thirties (Lee and Hirata, 2001 p. 96). In the early 2000s, not much had changed as still almost thirty percent of women quit their jobs and interrupted their careers for several years because of marriage and childbirth (Yu and Manrique., 2009 p. 50). One of the reasons underlying this trend could be the continuation of a rather conservative attitude towards gender roles in Taiwanese society which is supported by the particular structure of the labour market that makes it difficult for women to re-enter the job market as mothers of young children. This argument is supported by Wei-hsin Yu who examined attitudes toward the family and employment in Taiwan. She found that Taiwanese women struggled to integrate formal employment and family obligations and thus preferred to quit formal jobs once they had become wives and mothers (Yu, 2009).

However, due to the rise in educational attainment, this trend seems to be abating in Taiwan. In 2012, the labour force participation rate of women with children under six years of age was significantly higher (64 percent) than the labour force participation rate of all married women (49.05 percent) (National Statistics, Republic of China (Taiwan)). In China, however, female employment trends changed already with the restructuring of the labour market in the Mao era. Since then, dependencies on family members in the work environment have decreased. Moreover, expectations on women to interrupt or even terminate their careers upon marriage or childbirth are less dominant than it has been in Taiwan until recently.

In the course of China's major economic restructuring in the 1950s and 1960s, the CCP tried to streamline agricultural and industrial production. Private farms were replaced with rural communes (*renmin gongshe*) and urban labourers were assigned to different kinds of work units (*danwei*). For the first time in Chinese history, most women worked in public, in work teams. Moreover, workers employed in the urban *danwei* system were also offered social benefits like accommodation, healthcare, childcare facilities and primary schooling that were intended to further liberate women from traditional care obligations (Coase and Wang., 2012 pp. 14-15; Liu, 2007). However, these welfare services, propagated as steps towards greater gender equality, mainly aimed at making urban women available for full-time work in the industries. For this reason, Liu notes, they often failed to encourage a

rethinking of traditional gender roles, a point that will be important in the following discussion of Chinese women's problems at the workplace (Liu, 2007 p. 3; 65).

Although the work unit system was dissolved in the reform era, Chinese women's participation in the workforce has stayed exceptionally high, in comparison both internationally and to Taiwan. In 2013, the total female labour force participation rate in China was 64 percent, whereas in the same year in Taiwan, it was 50.5 percent (Statista: The Statistics Portal; The World Bank). One factor influencing these numbers might be that, in China, most women work in full-time employment during most of their working lives and this is usually interrupted only for a short time by childbirth (Cooke, 2013 p. 287). However, this does not mean that Chinese women do not have to face gendered expectations in terms of their career goals and preconceived notions of women's suitability for certain tasks. Wei-xin was one of these young Chinese women who struggled to balance gendered expectations of her role in the office with personal career objectives.

Wei-xin worked as a secretary at the Austrian consultancy where I was interning during part of my fieldwork in Beijing. This young woman was one of the first colleagues with whom I became acquainted. Originally from Dalian, she had come to Beijing to study a master's degree and then decided to pursue a career in the capital. During our long afternoons at work, we often met in the office's kitchen and exchanged gossip. Work relationships at the consultancy were tense and strained by competition for the all too rare promotions. We thus looked forward to our daily tea breaks during which Wei-xin often vented her irritation about our boss and other colleagues who burdened her with menial work that was time-consuming but unchallenging. After her graduation from Qinghua University, one of the most renowned institutions in China, she felt lucky to be hired immediately by an international company. Wei-xin had spent a part of her childhood in Austria due to her father's work engagement in Vienna and could speak German fluently; a strong asset that helped her securing the job.

She expected the job as a secretary to be a stepping stone to a more responsible position. Now, however, she feared she was wasting her time. Her senior colleagues anxiously coveted their influence and did not assign Wei-xin any work that could have provided her with an opportunity to shine. In addition, her superiors complained that Wei-xin did not fit the image of a dutiful and docile young secretary. Her self-confident appearance and close-fitting dresses were, in their eyes, inappropriate for an office environment. Worse still, her Western boss was constantly bullying her, many examples of which I witnessed during the weekly team meetings. He had supposedly even harassed her verbally with suggestive

sexual comments at the office Christmas party. Meanwhile, Wei-xin was assigned less and less important work by the head secretary and she feared her contract would not be renewed at the end of the year.

In Chinese society, notions of suitability for certain jobs are, similar to Taiwan and Japan, closely linked to gendered expectations of women in which appearance and age play major roles. Since the expansion of the service sector in the reform era and the accompanying growing demand for low-skilled, mostly female workers, the popular Chinese concept of the "rice bowl of youth" (*qingchunfan*) has encouraged women to capitalize on their youthful beauty and to consider outward appearance as their major assets (Hanser, 2008 p. 17). This "pink-collar class" as Zhang Zhen terms it, "suggests femininity and carries sexual innuendo" as an "imagery [that] clearly opposes that of the iron rice bowl – the permanence and security of glamourless and low-paying state sectors" (Zhang, 2000 p. 98).

However, for young women born in the 1980s and early 1990s, notions of the "ideal career" have changed. After the introduction of the one child-policy and the increase in educational opportunities, parents' hopes for their children's academic credentials and professional careers rose indiscriminate of their children's sex. Now, both sons and daughters are expected to increase their family's socioeconomic status and secure their parents' old age by entering prestigious professions (Fong, 2002; Hong Fincher, 2014). All the while, images of the "gentle" and "physically appealing" female employee have persisted and, as Wei-xin's experiences illustrate, as soon as women diverge from this ideal, they risk conflict with colleagues and superiors. Moreover, parents' also expect that, despite continuous employment, daughters will not neglect their filial duties of marrying and providing grandchildren and this causes significant pressure. However, like Wei-xin, many young Chinese women contest these gendered norms and try to achieve more autonomy in the pursuit of their career aspirations.

One day as we were sipping our tea, Wei-xin angrily told me that she had tried discussing her plans to quit her job with her parents. They did not react very understandingly. The consultancy had a prestigious name and made a good impression on her CV, they argued: why would she jeopardize this opportunity? Wei-xin did not often return to her parents in Dalian but if she did visit, her lifestyle in Beijing regularly gave rise to arguments. Wei-xin enjoyed going out with her friends dancing and drinking in the party districts of the capital almost every weekend. This had earned her the rather unfavourable reputation of a "party girl" among office staff. In the eyes of her family, colleagues and more conservatively minded peers, at twenty-seven years of age she was too old for this lifestyle and many, she

told me, accused her of being promiscuous and wasteful. This reputation did not only curtail her opportunities in her career but also on the marriage market. Wei-xin complained that last time she visited her parents her mother sat on her bedside with a sad look on her face, complaining that she could not recognize her own daughter anymore. Why was Wei-xin turning against everything she and her husband had taught her? In Wei-xin's eyes, the only way out of her misery was to make the final move abroad where she would be able to live a freer life.

When we met in Beijing, Wei-xin had already gained considerable independence from her family. Her wish to study a doctoral programme in the US that, she hoped, would eventually catapult her permanently into a position abroad was a topic of many our conversations. She resented how her parents still tried to exert influence on her. Especially her mother was dissatisfied with the amount of money that Wei-xin spent on herself on clothing and nightlife. While Wei-xin was still studying and dependent on her parents' financial support, her mother threatened her to stop her monthly remittances until Wei-xin had learnt to live a more frugal life. Unwilling to let her parents dictate her lifestyle, Wei-xin took on a part-time job at the weekends and then refused their financial support. This enraged her mother even more and made her complain about neglect by her only daughter. Wei-xin remained steadfast and did not change her mind. She could now easily support herself without part-time employment as the consultancy was paying her well and her salary matched that of her father's. However, to Wei-xin's concern, her parents had come up with a new strategy to force her to adopt a more conventional lifestyle and regain financial control over her: For some time already, her parents had pressured her to buy an apartment in Beijing with their support. This, Wei-xin explained, was a strategy to tie her to Beijing in the future. Moreover, as she would only be able to buy housing with her parents' assistance, they would try to dictate to her how to spend her income and not allow her to go abroad. So far she had been successful in finding excuses for not making the investment in the property but she was not sure how long such excuses would work with her parents.

Even though Wei-xin perceived her career as restricted by parental and societal demands, she had carved out a relatively independent life for herself in the capital and had deferred her parents' wish for her to marry to an undetermined date in the future. Living far away from her family and able to prevent the financial dependency on her parents that would grant them authority over her lifestyle, she was considerably more autonomous than many young single women I met in Taipei. However, her independent lifestyle and refusal to conform to societal conventions also hampered her career and quest for a partner as she suited neither the image of the "subservient secretary," nor that of the "frugal wife."

The cases of Yue-ling and Wei-xin exemplify the gendered struggles young Chinese and Taiwanese women face in pursuing their careers. Yue-ling, who like Wei-xin was highly educated and spoke different languages, was used as a mediator by her husband and father-in-law due to her supposed female diplomatic skills. Moreover, it was impossible for her to gain any complex insight into the dealings of the business as she could neither accompany her husband on business trips that involved negotiations in exclusively male entertainment venues, nor could she establish relations with other colleagues due to her family connections to the company owner. Unable to leave the job as she did not want to anger her in-laws who counted on her help, she was forced to conform.

Even though Wei-xin had more personal autonomy over her lifestyle and choice of workplace, she also struggled with gendered stereotypes in her work. Her Chinese as well as her Western superiors did not take her seriously due to her youth and style and relegated her to administrative jobs that made it difficult for her to demonstrate her professional knowledge and skills. Besides being unable to advance her career in the consultancy, Wei-xin was angered by her colleagues' disparaging comments which, she claimed, were mostly caused by their misconception of her as a hedonistic young woman.

3.3. Striving for Security and Success - New Ideals of Masculinity and Professional Achievement in Beijing and Taipei

Whereas young urban women were eager to exploit the relatively short time span during which socially acceptable singledom and youthfulness could open doors to employment opportunities, young men in their twenties strove to secure jobs that seemed to promise long-term success as well as prestige, making them desirable on the marriage market (Fong, 2004 pp. 98-99; Hong Fincher, 2014; Osburg, 2013). Traditional expectations of men were relatively similar in China and Taiwan; they had to be able to provide for their future families and parents as the main breadwinners. In practice, this was often unnecessary due to parents' wealth (especially for Taiwanese informants) and the extra income of a spouse. Nevertheless, most men felt expected to meet these standards, not only to satisfy their families but also so they could prove themselves to be reliable husbands. At the same time, young women increasingly preferred partners who could not only provide financial security but whose careers also fitted in with their own desires for a cosmopolitan, urban lifestyle. Jobs that had earlier been valued for the stability they provided had lost their appeal as new economic opportunities on the globalized market arose. As indicators of success changed,

formerly important criteria that attracted women on the marriage market ceased to be as convincing.

Dao, originally from Jilin City, had studied law in Dalian before passing the civil service exam; he was then hired by the central government of Beijing. His parents, whose educational careers were complicated by the turbulence of the Cultural Revolution, had always hoped that Dao would become a civil servant and they encouraged him in his studies at school and university. Now, after having worked in Beijing for several years, Dao had finally obtained a local residence registration and, with the help of his parents, he bought an apartment close to the city centre. Dao liked his job that frequently took him abroad, However, he complained, the salary was not very high compared to jobs in the private sector. Nevertheless, he felt lucky to have been able to buy an apartment. He explained that most women would like to compare their partner's economic assets with those of their friends' husbands. Without his own apartment, his chances of finding the urban, highly educated wife he was looking for would have been even slimmer. Moreover, he added, parents tended to be very protective of their daughters and he doubted they would agree to an engagement if he could not provide housing. Nevertheless, he still faced difficulties competing with high-earning professionals in the private sector; they could afford luxuries during courtship that were beyond his means. So far, his search for a potential wife had been unsuccessful.

In China, the popularity of civil service employment has decreased in recent years and powerful state companies and international corporations have taken over as the workplaces favoured by graduates (Riley, 2015; The Economist, 2015). Yet, the education necessary to pursue a career in these prestigious companies is mostly expensive and long. Often, it requires parents to sponsor several years of preparation for university entry exams, job assessment centres and foreign-language courses at home and abroad (Fong, 2011). Likewise, in Taiwan, professional aspirations were changing among the young, even though the popularity of civil service jobs with the central government remained unbroken (Jennings, 2014). Whereas before, employment at a local factory or small family business had provided a stable income, several news sources reported that young Taiwanese increasingly strove for jobs at international companies which not only offered higher salaries than local employers but also the possibility of business trips or even job placements abroad (Chen, 2015; Sui, 2014 a). Thus especially male informants in Beijing and Taipei felt trapped between these different ideals. On the one hand, pursuing new ideals of masculine success could provide personal validation and improve their opportunities on the marriage market. On the other hand, and this was particularly the case

among young Chinese men from less affluent backgrounds, the time and money necessary to realize such an endeavour could mean a significant burden to their families. Moreover, if they did not achieve their goals, it might be impossible to catch up on their careers and family plans within the normative time frame.

One night in early December, I met Dao and Li-ling, a Beijing local who was a mutual friend, for dinner in one of the glitzy malls in Wangfujing where young professionals liked to spend their evenings. Li-ling had told me before that she had got to know Dao on a blind date (*xiangqin*). At first there had been a mutual interest but she then decided that he was not suitable for her, though they did become friends. While we were eating, Dao, obviously in the mood to impress us, took out his mobile phone and showed us pictures of a banquet at the Korean embassy that his boss had sent him to the previous day. Apparently unimpressed, Li-ling teased him about the young waitresses in traditional attire that Dao had obviously taken many photos of. He laughed shyly and showed us more pictures from his recent trip to the US which he had made as part of a government delegation. Li-ling, an employee at a powerful state-owned company, was regularly sent on business trips to exotic destinations all over the world. She did not seem interested in the least (or so she pretended) in the military parades and US officials in his snaps. Instead, she started to tease Dao again by reminding him of the private trip to Laos he had recently had to cancel because of his financial concerns. Worried by the expenses the trip would involve, Dao had to withdraw from a planned vacation with his friends at the last minute. I wondered if her reluctance to be impressed by his professional accomplishments and emphasis on his financial shortcomings were connected to her rejection of him as a suitable partner. Li-ling had never told me the details that led to her decision, but coming from a local, well-off cadre family and highly successful in her career herself, it was obvious that marriage to Dao would have resulted in certain material deprivations for her.

Later on the subway, after Li-ling had left in another direction, Dao confided in me that his male friends often expressed their envy of his freedom. Burdened with responsibilities for their children and wives, they assumed that he could just pursue his personal interests and go out whenever he wanted. However, his words seemed full of regret and it seemed as though his friends' half-hearted words of comfort were lost on him.

While Dao worked hard to fulfil parental and societal expectations, he still struggled to meet the material demands made of males in the capital. As he was neither from a local influential family nor did he own any real estate beyond his personal residence, he had difficulty attracting a highly educated, urban wife. He had made his career decisions in

accordance with his own and his parents' ambitions for secure government employment, but he had not reckoned with the low wages and lack of local connections that would obstruct his marriage plans in Beijing.

In Guangzhou, John Osburg observed his young male informants struggling with similar problems while trying to strike a balance between economic security and new ideals of masculinity. As aspiring teachers, they had chosen a relatively safe but unglamorous profession. Thus they did not meet the standards of "an increasingly normative masculinity based on taking entrepreneurial risks and achieving success in the market economy" (Osburg, 2013 p. 2). Their marriage options were considerably curtailed by their comparatively low status as teachers -a profession that promised neither the high income nor the prestige that could be expected from a successful entrepreneurial career or from employees of powerful corporations (ibid.).

I made similar observations in Beijing. Xiao-xiao looked down on one of her suitors, a civil servant from her home town who now worked for the government in Beijing. She criticized him for his gambling and drinking and complained about her dates with him when she had been terribly bored. Civil servants, in her opinion, were much too focused on security and social prestige whereas she was searching for a partner who had more unconventional plans and could match his career with her cosmopolitan dreams. Likewise, in Taipei, my female informants increasingly valued know-how in navigating the private sector or even the international job market. Jobs in these sectors invested young men with the allure of the cosmopolitan professional.

Whereas men were expected to succeed in the working world to become desirable matches, Chinese and Taiwanese women had to make sure *not* to pursue too ambitious educational paths and careers. Many of my female informants who worked in highly competitive jobs in banking or international trade complained either about a lack of suitable partners or about the pressure they felt to quit their ambitious careers to make time for children and housework. Osburg observed that among young female teachers in Guangzhou it was - paradoxically - their relatively low educational status and training in a traditionally feminine profession, combined with their physical beauty, that provided them with important assets on the marriage market:

> "Because they were educated (but not overeducated), poorly paid (relative to a potential husband), and employed in jobs considered morally appropriate for their gender, these women had no trouble finding a suitable (and wealthy) spouse" (Osburg, 2013 p. 2).

Whereas many young women feel forced to capitalize on their youth on the jobs and marriage market, young men in their twenties have to compete for high-flying corporate or entrepreneurial careers that promise financial success and social prestige to be eligible candidates for wedlock.

Moreover, a certain willingness to take risks was deeply ingrained in ideals of masculinity in both societies. Even under Mao, risk-taking in the name of the Party was a desirable male attribute, promoted by propaganda stories such as the one of the model soldier, Lei Feng, and others who had risked and lost their lives for the revolution (Chan, 1985; Unger, 1982 p. 99). Later, risk-taking became essential in a successful career as an entrepreneur and also in other desirable jobs that emerged with the opening of the market in the reform era (Osburg, 2013). Similarly, in Taiwan, a willingness to take risks became a precondition for success during the economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s. In my interviews, grandfathers in particular used to tell me proudly of their rags-to-riches biographies and the immense risks they took in realizing their business ideas, eventually freeing them from farm work. However, despite the older generation's experiences, they encouraged their offspring to take more secure career paths which, as the case of You-peng in the previous chapter has shown, resulted in conflicts between the generations. Whereas You-peng's parents envisaged the job security that being a surgeon would provide for their son, he aimed at the less secure career of an academic. These intergenerational problems were aggravated by the close contact between parents and children during their everyday life at home.

Dao struggled to fulfil the various requirements for marriage as the next biographical milestone. At the same time, however, the pursuit of his career granted him independence of parental supervision. This distinguished him significantly from many young men I encountered in the Taiwanese capital. In Taiwan, young men's career plans were not only closely interconnected with concerns about social prestige and financial well-being but also with the obligation they felt to stay close to the parental home in later life. Even in cases in which family members also resided in Taipei, integrating these different demands could involve strenuous efforts, disappointment and cutting back on certain plans.

I got to know Shang-yan when a mutual friend asked me if I could help him practise English in preparation for the civil service entrance exam. Like many other young Taiwanese I met, becoming an official at the ministry of foreign affairs was his major career aspiration. Besides offering the opportunity for frequent travel, the job promised lifelong employment and a stable salary; it thus constituted a workable compromise between parental requirements for job safety and the cosmopolitan aspirations of the younger

generation. At that time, Shang-yan was in his early thirties and worked as an electrical engineer at a company in Taoyuan, a medium-sized city an hour south of Taipei.

Shang-yan felt dissatisfied in his current job. He disliked the tense office atmosphere, his little room in a dorm on the company grounds and the limited leisure activities in the neighbourhood. He returned to his family in Taipei every weekend and also applied for relocation to his company's Taipei branch. One Sunday afternoon, during a walk around Daan District, he pointed to a shining white tower and explained that this was his company's head office. If he could work there, he could move back to his parents and have a much more pleasant life.

Another of his major concerns was that he had no girlfriend, a problem he felt was exacerbated by his male-dominated work environment. In recent years, Shang-yan's efforts at courtship had always been bitterly disappointing. He complained that when a new woman was added to the team, she was quickly surrounded by a swarm of suitors. As he could offer neither a high salary nor a prestigious position to impress these women, he feared his marriage prospects were bleak.

After investing months of diligent preparation, Shang-yan finally passed the civil service exam on his third attempt. Before being offered a post, he had to participate in extensive training in Taiwan and abroad. The training was relatively easy but he complained that most of the new recruits had only recently graduated and were in their mid to late twenties. Moreover, most of them held degrees from Taiwanese elite universities and were very self-confident and assertive. Shang-yan, a rather reserved and quiet man, felt it was difficult to hold his ground in discussions. Even though he could look back on ten years of corporate work experience, his younger colleagues confused him with their patronizing behaviour. In addition, his salary was now lower than in his previous job in the private sector. His new position might earn him some prestige and had taken him back to Taipei but he realized that finding a girlfriend was still difficult. Meanwhile, his parents' pressure on him to marry was increasing. He soon had to embark on a nine-month language training programme overseas and was thus desperate to find a potential wife before he left the country. Unfortunately, the last woman he dated had refused to meet him again after she learnt about his imminent move abroad.

One afternoon we were having tea at one of the ubiquitous chain stores in the city centre. During our conversation, Shang-yan's eyes were glued to the screen of his mobile phone. Slightly impatiently, I asked him if he was waiting for a call. Indeed he was, he admitted; he was waiting for a text from a female colleague. He had befriended a young woman on the

government training programme. They had not established a close relationship but he interpreted her tender teasing as a promising sign. That day, he took a chance and asked her out for dinner. She gave him an ambiguous reply which, to me, sounded like a polite excuse. Shang-yan, however, hoped that she would meet him again. The woman, a recent graduate, was more than ten years younger than him although he did not consider this a problematic factor in potential marriage.

As we waited for the woman to reply, our conversation turned to the strategies he could apply to increase his chances of finding a wife. One of his friends, Shang-yan complained, had suggested he should move out of home as greater independence might ease his search for a girlfriend. Shang-yan disagreed. Once he married, he could move out, he argued; but why would he spend money living alone when he could just as well live with his parents? What about more privacy, I asked. That was not a problem, he objected - there were hotels he could take her to. After marriage, Shang-yan intended to move into his parents' second house in a rather unpopular suburb of Taipei, far from the city centre. When I asked him what he would do if his future wife refused to move there, he just shrugged his shoulders. In that case, he might have to rent another place, he replied in a surly tone. With his current entry-level salary, he could not even think of buying a house. For young people, he muttered, buying a house in Taipei without heavy family investment was impossible. When I left the tea shop around dinner time, the young woman had still not got back to him.

In contrast to Dao whose job in Beijing had taken him far away from home, Shang-yan's work for the central government led him back to his parental household. Although the two men were pursuing similar goals, the spatial moves required to accomplish them led them in opposite directions; this would also affect their future plans. Shang-yan expected to live close to his parents even after marriage. Dao, meanwhile, was eager to meet the requirements that would enable him to settle far away from his natal home, with only vague plans to permanently reunite with his parents in Beijing in the distant future. However, both men noticed that although a career with the central government was reputable and would enable them to realize their personal and family's hopes for secure employment, it did not provide the high salaries or allure certain jobs in the private sector offered. Especially in Shang-yan's case, his comparatively high age on entering the government and his entry-level salary complicated his position on the dating market where he was competing with men of the same age who had considerably greater economic assets.

3.4. Conclusion

The case studies above seem to illustrate how the differently structured labour markets in China and Taiwan impact on young people's strategies to pursue their career aspirations and negotiate their ideals with their families and potential partners. Whereas young Chinese are often more successful in establishing an independent lifestyle through their careers than their Taiwanese peers, both groups of informants struggled with gendered expectations of their performance and career objectives in different realms of their professional and private lives.

My young Chinese informants tend to make career choices that do not only let them advance in the highly competitive urban job markets but that also grant them enough spatial and financial independence from family members to be able to lead their daily lives relatively unburdened by their parents' authority. Parental strategies to regain financial control over their children by assisting them in major investments for the future are only partially successful. Wei-xin, the young Chinese secretary, successfully fended off her parents' efforts to exert financial control over her through shared investment on the real estate market. Even though Dao's parents had helped their only son to buy an apartment, their authority was weakened by the spatial distance between their different places of residence.

In Taiwan, by contrast, parents and their grown-up children more often reside in close proximity to each other and, in many cases, they even share a residence and workplace. Whyte claims that it was this expansion of family businesses in the 1950s and 1960s that encouraged greater family coherence in Taiwan compared to China and thus facilitated conditions in which seemingly "traditional" work and residence patterns could be maintained (Whyte, 2004). Hence, the particular structure of the Taiwanese labour market reinforced certain family dependencies that, even today, make it more difficult for young Taiwanese to make autonomous decisions about their careers.

Moreover, different experiences of parental work lives might have influenced my informants' expectations of their own careers. Young Chinese told me about the often almost "nomadic" biographies of their parents caused by the Cultural Revolution and relocation for jobs and education; thus, they were more accustomed to the idea of having to leave parental homes to pursue careers. Meanwhile, the accounts young Taiwanese gave me of their past were more reminiscent of a more traditional family life. Their mothers had often moved into the household of their in-laws after marriage and assisted in the family businesses or were housewives. Many had maintained a close attachment to their home

places into adulthood and thus were reluctant to leave their parental homes without having the objective of returning.

However, Yue-ling's story shows that Taiwanese parents were also willing to relocate, in her case even to another country, in order to improve their own and their children's opportunities. However, in her particular case, her parents became estranged during the long separation. Even though she appeared to be close to both her father and mother, she seemed to be determined not to make the same mistake in her own marriage. Yue-ling was rather exceptional, compared to other young Taiwanese women, in her determination to please her natal family's as well as her in-laws' demands. Most of the times we met, she was about to run an errand for a family member or was under the pressure of time due to an important work appointment.

Wei-xin was, in many aspects, Yue-ling's polar opposite. Like many other Chinese young women I met, she stressed the importance she assigned to her personal autonomy. However, she stood out from most of them in the freedoms she claimed for herself and in her rejection of traditional gender role models. Nevertheless, both women felt pressured by the expectations their families had of them, whether they could identify with them or not.

Even though young men had to face less discrimination at the workplace, they also suffered from gendered notions of achievement in their roles as sons and prospective husbands. Despite working in comparatively stable positions, Dao and Shang-yan found it difficult to assert themselves on the competitive urban dating market that increasingly valued entrepreneurial skills, a cosmopolitan habitus and connections with the upper layers of society. Discouraged that their huge investments in their careers were not yielding the success they had hoped for, both men became increasingly unsure whether they could satisfy their parents' demands for grandchildren in the near future. Their stories appear to be rather typical of their generation. During my fieldwork, many (almost all) young men in China and Taiwan complained in some way about the rising demands on their professional achievements and financial position. These growing expectations simultaneously delayed the time in which they could marry and feel economically secure enough to start a family. Moreover, they also created additional dependencies and simultaneously stronger obligations to parents. Both Dao and Shang-yan relied on parental assistance in the provision of apartments without which their search for marriage partners might have looked even less promising.

Especially in Taiwan, the problematic situation on the labour market added to the problems young adults faced. In 2012, the year of my fieldwork in Taiwan, wages had not

only failed to keep up with inflation; their real value had decreased since the early 2000s (Dou and Hsu, 2012; Jennings, 2014; Rigger, 2011 p. 200). As a consequence, independent living in the capital was hardly sustainable if one only had a graduate job. The continuous dependence on parents after graduation caused many of my Taiwanese informants to feel depressed and inadequate. They had expected to excel in their careers as they had in their education. However, on graduation, with the economy stagnating, many felt their chances to realize their ambitions were dwindling. Their distress was aggravated by the high expectations their families had instilled in them. Many parents and grandparents had achieved impressive successes while Taiwan's economy was booming. By offering their children the best education possible, so parents thought, their children could easily surpass their successes if they only worked hard enough. This might explain why, in conversations with me, parents often criticized the younger generation for being too spoilt and, unlike them, for not having experienced hardship. "Eating bitterness" (*chi ku*) was an expression often used to express the sufferings parents' had endured in the past but which were overcome with hard work. Taiwanese youth, by contrast, criticized their parents' lack of farsightedness. They complained that older family members were prone to blame failure on their purported lack of "work mentality" while refusing to recognize economic changes that underlay the difficulties they encountered in pursuing a career. In sum, my Taiwanese informants' prolonged economic dependency on parents was exacerbated by the feeling of failure that resulted from disappointed expectations of their future careers. In this context, acting against family members' advice and preferences became even more difficult.

In China, the economic situation of young graduates was not much different from in Taiwan. Similar to Taipei, entry level jobs in Beijing hardly provided the income to maintain living in the city, let alone making investments in real estate (Chen and Si, 2014). However, unlike their Taiwanese counterparts, young Chinese interpreted their experiences against the background of their confidence in their skills and a hopeful attitude towards the future; this was shared by family members of older generations (Kleinman, 2011; Sharma, 2014). Like Dao and Wei-xin, many young people had to rely on parental support to buy housing in the capital. However, most parents were willing to support their children's wish for independent living in Beijing as, in their eyes, they had achieved impressive successes by asserting themselves in the highly competitive race for first-tier education. Finding a job in Beijing after graduation could, so parents hoped, open the door to a promising career in the city and would eventually secure their children an urban household registration that the entire family might profit from. Moreover, for those young adults whose family homes were far removed from Beijing or in rural areas, leaving the city might have been more

detrimental to their future careers than sticking out the first years of their careers under financial constraints in the capital. Leaving a social and professional network behind to return to their home places where they might have only found work they were highly overqualified for was not an option for most of them.

Beijing parents shared in this hopefulness. Liang's mother, who was introduced in chapter two, was highly impressed by her son's achievements and eagerly supported him upon his return to Beijing after his studies abroad. She told me, beaming with pride, of her son's talents. Her belief in his bright future did not appear to be weakened by his temporary struggles to assert himself at work or his concerns about how to carve out a niche for his skills on Beijing's saturated job market. Kleinman made similar observations during the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008 (Kleinman 2011). He notes that in particular the elderly, who have gone through times of extreme political upheavals and deprivation, appreciate the relative political stability of the country today. Comparing conditions they grew up under with those of young people today, they are having a markedly hopeful stance on the future of Chinese society (Kleinman 2011: 267).

These different parental attitudes towards children's achievement had an incremental influence on the way in which young people experienced their successes and, as a consequence, influenced their perceptions of self-efficacy. Bandura notes that past experiences of success, in particular if the achievement was perceived as resulting from personal ability (rather than luck or fate), fortify an individual's sense of efficacy and make it more prone to aim at high goals that involve a certain degree of risk-taking in the future (Bandura, [1995] 1999 pp. 10-12). Moreover, he explains, relating to a study by Eccles Elder and colleagues, that "objective economic hardship […] has no direct influence on parents' perceived efficacy" (p.15). He stresses: "Parents' belief that they can affect the course of their children's lives is a more influential contributor to beneficial guidance under disadvantaged conditions than under advantaged conditions […]" (ibid.).

My case studies from urban China and Taiwan show close parallels to Bandura's theory. Even though both sets of parents appeared to have started out with high hopes in their children, this seems to have had a particularly beneficial effect on those Chinese informants who came from rather disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Chao and Ming-yue, the PhD-students from rural Hebei I introduced in the previous chapter, are examples of such cases. Their parents had invested a large share of their hopes and resources into their children, convinced that their efforts would pay off in the future. Thriving in their independence and feeling validated by their parents' pride, they were relatively confident

that they could overcome the difficulties they faced as career entrants in Beijing. However, also young Chinese from more affluent families, like my female colleague Wei-xin and Xing, the young man aspiring to study in the US who I introduced in the previous chapter, showed a strong sense of agency in realising their personal goals. In these cases, their early independence from parents and extended experience of living abroad might be more important factors contributing to their strong sense of efficacy than parental encouragement (which in Wei-xin's case was not perceived as such).

However, many Taiwanese informants from more privileged backgrounds felt rather discouraged by their parents' ambitious goals. I described the case of You-peng, who felt pressured by his parents to become a surgeon while he wanted to become a researcher, in chapter two. You-peng's parents openly showed their disappointment in him when he repeatedly failed to meet their high hopes for his professional future. Shang-yan, the young man finally securing a job at the central government in Taipei, was subjected to less pressure from parents in regards to his career. Yet, he felt increasingly despaired as his new job did not appear to increase his options on the dating market. It was difficult for these young Taiwanese to maintain confidence in the future if their families, with whom they lived closely together, were continuously pointing out their shortcomings. Their feelings of inferiority often undermined projects for the future and held them back from reaching the next biographic milestone - marriage.

Chapter Four - Courtship and Marriage in Beijing and Taipei

4.1. Introduction

Even inside the house, the Taiwanese summer heat was stifling at this time of the day. While the bride and the other bridesmaids dozed under the purring fan, a Harry Potter movie was playing in the background. Chia-ling, the bride, had loosened the corset of her dress that had restricted her movements ever since the long drive to her future husband's home in the morning; we bridesmaids also made ourselves as comfortable as our tight polyester dresses would allow. Forbidden to use the bed prepared for the wedding night, we sprawled across the floor of the small bedroom. After the hour-long journey from Taipei to Chiayi City, we yearned for a nap and worried how we could stay awake through the banquet at night. Most exhausted, however, was the bride. While we bridesmaids had been treated to a lavish lunch with the groom at a local restaurant, Chia-ling had to follow the custom of waiting in the room at her in-laws' house that she and her future husband would move into.

Her new home appeared cramped and humid compared to the villa Chia-ling's family owned in the suburbs of Taipei. But it was not only a spacious house that Chia-ling had left behind for this marriage; she had also left the comfort of her close work place in her family's business. From now on, she would have to commute from Chiayi to Taipei several times a week to help in her father's company; this she would do until the baby was born that she was already carrying.

Sleepily, I gazed at my friend Yu-ching who also had her eyes half-closed. I introduced Yu-ching, the accounting student who had a remarkably close relationship to her parents, in the chapter two. To escape our lethargic mood, we decided to go downstairs to visit the groom and his best men who were smoking and chatting on the veranda. By contrast to the languid atmosphere in the bridal chamber, the groom and his friends were in high spirits, laughing and arguing; the alcohol that was generously served for lunch was having a noticeable effect. We sat down on shaky plastic chairs under the canopy and observed the goings-on for a while until the young men noticed us and included us in their conversation. Quickly, one of them took a liking in Yu-ching and tried to attract her attention by involving her in a heated discussion. Yu-ching, however, soon prevailed by countering his bold statements with well articulated arguments; this triumph, it turned out later, had been observed critically by the male bystanders and this would discredit her in their eyes as a potential match for their friend.

Yu-ching was still single and, as I described in chapter two, she was nearing the end of her twenties and her family was pressuring her to find a suitable husband. Being asked by Chia-ling to be a bridesmaid at her wedding, a role only unmarried women could do, strengthened her mission to find a partner. On the bus ride to Chia-ling's family home the previous evening, Yu-ching complained to me that she was tired of dating. Just a few days before, she had experienced another failed date with a young man chosen by her mother. At first glance, her dating partner appeared promising. He also came from an upper middle-class family and had received his education abroad, just like Yu-ching. However perfect that match appeared to be to her mother, upon meeting the man, Yu-ching quickly realized that their characters and interests were not suited. She was now close to giving up on a quest for a partner and wondered how her friends who were already married had had the patience to wait until they found "Mr or Mrs Right." Moreover, she feared that her chances of finding a suitable match were fading as she approached her thirtieth birthday. At the same time, she was aware of the concessions many of her female friends had made to reach married status and she was not sure if she was prepared to follow suit.

Concerns about finding a suitable match were omnipresent in conversations with young men and women in both Taipei and Beijing. However, not only the different and, at times, contradictory expectations of family members and friends but also the reconciliation of diverging relationship ideals between partners emerged as problematic as relationships progressed and different attitudes towards family life and gender roles became obvious. Even though the topic of marriage was handled with equal importance by my Chinese and Taiwanese informants, significant differences became apparent in courtship practices as well as in the way young adults negotiated their new roles as potential spouses and sons- and daughters-in-law.

In Taipei, where residence in the natal household until marriage was common for men and women, dating took place more or less under the watchful eyes of parents. Even if the partner had been accepted by family members, meetings did not usually take place in the parental home but at one of the many dating venues that Taipei offered. Especially popular in this regard were restaurants, coffee shops and KTV lounges, as well as hotels that offered one-night getaways for young couples, mostly in one of the greener suburbs and hot spring areas of Taipei.

Especially young Taiwanese women who were still living in their parents' household often regarded marriage as a chance to "break out" of the authority of their natal families. Cohabitation with a partner before marriage was rather uncommon and often looked down

on, especially by the older generations. Hence, marriage was for many young women the only way to leave the parental household. However, more often than their Chinese counterparts, they also feared the high expectations of their future in-laws who tended to be more demanding in Taiwan due to the more orthodox approach to Confucian family ideology. This stronger traditionalism was reflected especially in the common practice of patrilocal residence for at least several months after the wedding; the in-laws of the young bride, Chia-ling, also expected this. For this reason, many young adults did not only abruptly plunge into cohabitation with a partner upon marriage - they also had to adjust to the habits and demands of their *in-laws* which placed additional stress on young wives, especially on those who conceived of their duties from a more traditional perspective. The obligation to swap lively evenings out for nights at home with the in-laws often caused tensions within families. Women's seeming emancipation from the natal family through marriage thus bore the risk of being restricted by an even more powerful authority - this step therefore required careful consideration.

By contrast, my Chinese informants enjoyed relatively greater personal freedoms in the city. This was especially the case if their families were not resident in Beijing. Living in student dormitories and flat shares, they could easily hide their romantic adventures from parents and were less constrained in meeting romantic partners in the urban environment of Beijing. That being said, parents' expectations for their children to marry within a certain time frame as well as high material responsibilities revolving around courtship and marriage also placed significant pressure on young Chinese. Even though patrilocal residence was less common in Beijing, I found that young Chinese also feared the responsibilities that marriage could entail, in particular the high costs of housing in the capital.

Despite the increased freedom in mate choice, the more liberal attitudes to premarital sexual relationships and the delay in the age of one's first marriage that could be observed in both societies, taking care of future obligations to parents and in-laws after marriage was still a key concern of young couples in China and Taiwan. Deborah Davis and Sara Friedman point out that the increasing deinstitutionalization of marriage in East Asian societies is not accompanied by other social phenomena, like an increase of childbirth out of wedlock and an erosion of intergenerational ties that are often attributed to demographic changes in Western societies. They note that "it is important to distinguish the deinstitutionalization of marriage from the deinstitutionalization of multigenerational family formation" (Davis and Friedman, 2014 p. 5). In many cases, as the following will show, parents regarded it as their responsibility to assist their children in the search for a suitable partner. Often, they feared that their children's prolonged singledom would not

only aggravate their marriage options but also risk their own old age security and prospects of grandchildren. Hence, just as parents tried to assist their children with educational choices, they also perceived it as their responsibility to support them in their search for a partner.

Leta Hong Fincher describes how many Chinese parents and young women fear the derogatory status of being a "leftover women" (*shengnü*) – this is an urban female professional who, in her late twenties, has succeeded in her career yet has failed to attract a suitable husband (Fincher, 2014 p. 2). Although the perpetuation of this concept was a political concern in China, fuelled by conservative state agencies and the state media lamenting the alleged selfishness of young women who shun family responsibilities, the term was not as widely used in Taiwan (pp. 1-4). However, the notion of the "overambitious career woman" who missed out on "the right time" to marry was also a popular concept that inspired fear in young Taiwanese women and their parents.

Sometimes, as the following case studies illustrate, parents took rather extreme measures to find a suitable partner for their single children. Jun Zhang and Peidong Sun interviewed parents in Shanghai who tried to find potential matches for their daughters by frequenting "matchmaking corners" where they met like-minded parents (Zhang and Sun, 2014). Encouraged to concentrate on their education first, many of these daughters remained single far beyond the age normatively considered suitable for marriage. Their parents feared that they might not find a spouse matching their high achievements if they waited any longer and advanced in their careers. They tried to support their daughters by pre-selecting promising bachelors for them (ibid.). Even though I observed that Taiwanese parents were more successful in convincing their children to meet potential matches who they had chosen, mostly because they had more immediate influence on their offspring's life than the parents of my Chinese informants, Chinese and Taiwanese parents were both highly concerned about their children's marital future; they were prone to intervene if they were dissatisfied with the partner choices of their children. Moreover, as the cases of young women in this chapter will show in particular, mothers as well as female peers would criticize their appearance, public conduct and attitude towards sexuality in an effort to improve their marriage prospects. The notion of being inadequate and having to change to find a marriage partner weighed heavily on many female informants in both locations and often seemed to engender great insecurities in them.

The case studies presented in this chapter will show that, in China and Taiwan, marriage is to varying degrees still conceived of through the lens of intergenerational obligations by

parents and children. Even though, as James Farrer notes, the social stigma surrounding premarital intimacy and cohabitation have lessened (especially in China) and passionate and romantic feelings are increasingly conceptualized as key aspects in relationships, parental approval is still considered essential as soon as marriage is approaching (Farrer, 2014). This becomes obvious from the importance bestowed on the formal introduction of the partner to parents. Farrer remarks that his urban informants perceived the willingness to introduce one's parents to one's partner and the time frame within which such a meeting was realized as important yardsticks that measured the seriousness of a relationship (pp. 76-77). This was also true of the young urbanites I met in Taipei. Sometimes, however, as the case studies below will reveal, it was the introductory meeting with parents *in itself* that sowed doubt about the partner as well as the family life one could expect after marriage.

4.2. The Ambiguous Search for Romance and Fears of Falling Behind - the Pressure on Young Women to Marry in Taipei and Beijing

The morning of Chia-ling's wedding was hectic as we rushed to prepare the final items in her luggage -a child's bathtub filled with baby paraphernalia symbolizing fertility that the bride traditionally had to take to her husband's home (in this case of actual, immediate use). However, Chia-ling repeatedly stressed that she would return to her parental home the day after the wedding; this was a custom practised by many families in Taiwan. As she would also return home regularly afterwards, there was no need to rush with the packing. It almost seemed as if the prospect of returning to her family immediately after the wedding day consoled her while the atmosphere of departure hung over her house. However, whereas I expected to see a nervous, excited bride, Chia-ling appeared absent-minded and indifferent throughout the preparations and the banquet. Initially, I did not understand her lack of euphoria but I soon learnt that Chia-ling had already had her big day -the engagement party her father had arranged for her several weeks before. Yu-ching showed me pictures of the banquet and, from the venue to the dresses, everything looked very luxurious and stylish, somewhat different from the more "local" wedding that was planned by her in-laws. The father of Chia-ling's future husband also owned a business but his was much smaller than her family's company. Whereas at Chia-ling's engagement party a high ranking politician from the central government gave a speech - indicating her father's sphere of influence - only local officials would make an appearance at her wedding in Chiayi. This fact had not escaped the father of the groom, who, at the banquet, apologized upfront for not being able to match Chia-ling's father's business prowess. It soon became

clear that Chia-ling, in order to get married within the socially accepted time frame, had conceded to a match that did not fulfil the normative expectations on women to increase or at least maintain their socioeconomic status (Chu and Yu, 2010 p. 110).

When I first met Chia-ling, she enthusiastically told Yu-ching and me the story of the romantic engagement her boyfriend had organized as a surprise at a luxurious hotel and proudly showed us her engagement ring. However, when I talked to Yu-ching in private, she did not seem equally impressed. Chia-ling had admitted to Yu-ching that she feared not finding another partner if she broke up with her current boyfriend. She thus wanted to marry him, even though he might not be the best match for her. Like Chia-ling, Yu-ching's parents also owned a successful family business. Her parents, however, expected her future husband to match her not only in terms of educational background but also in his potential to offer her the material comfort to which she was used at home. Clearly, this was not the case with Chia-ling's husband and her friends were well aware of this. Nevertheless, the pressure to marry had eventually outweighed all material arguments and that day, watching fantasy movies while waiting to get married, Chia-ling seemed the somewhat "resigned bride," acceptant of the things to come.

Whereas Yu-ching had repeatedly stressed her wish to start a family soon, she was also unsure about leaving her parental home that had offered her emotional *and* material comfort. She clearly stated that she did not want to realize her aspiration of marriage at any price; she hoped for a partner who could facilitate the lifestyle she was used to from her parental home - she was not willing to lower her expectations in this regard.

The step to marriage is an ambiguous experience for many young Taiwanese women. On the one hand, young Taiwanese perceive marriage as a means to break free from parental authority. On the other hand, this also implies a transition to a life phase that is, for some brides, characterized by more responsibilities and even frugality. Whereas many women look forward to being acknowledged as an adult and self-responsible person, a state difficult to achieve living in their parental homes, the flipside of these new responsibilities often scares them. For these reasons, Bonnie Adrian notes, many Taiwanese women in their mid-twenties find it increasingly difficult to give up the comforts of this relatively carefree stage of life at which they can spend large shares of their salaries on themselves (Adrian, 2003 pp. 82-107).

Among my female informants in Taipei I observed that especially young professionals who still lived at their family homes and who had most of their salary at their own disposal (despite small monthly remittances to their parents) feared the economic responsibilities of

marriage. These changing attitudes are also reflected in a shift to a later age of marriage in Taiwan; this is now in one's late twenties for women and one's early thirties for men – this shift has taken place in recent decades (Huang, 2013 pp. 77-78). Nevertheless, parental concerns increased if daughters had not found themselves committed relationships by the latter half of their twenties. During this time, as Yu-ching's case shows, the pleasure initially derived from personal freedom changed into stress due to the need to find a suitable spouse. The process of choosing a partner was, from then on, largely determined by mounting time pressure and parental expectations.

Our preparations the night before the wedding were frequently interrupted by Chia-ling's many family members peeking into her room to greet us. Besides her parents, her elder brother, his wife and their new-born son also lived in the house. The bridesmaids were especially thrilled by the new-born and took turns cuddling the baby. Yu-ching, however, was noticeably quiet throughout the evening. She later told me that although she had been very close to Chia-ling's elder brother -almost on the verge of dating -their relationship cooled after he got to know his current wife. They more or less rushed into marriage and soon had a child. Yu-ching was baffled by his behaviour and had largely avoided him since. His wife sensed their tense relationship and, according to Yu-ching, behaved jealously when they met to visit Chia-ling. However, I did not observe any tension between them that night. Yu-ching started a relationship with a classmate but since they had broken up, she found it difficult to find somebody she was truly interested in. One by one her female friends were getting married and she nervously asked herself when *she* would leave her parental home and start her own family. For that reason, and much to Yu-ching's displeasure, her mother had taken matters into her own hands and was now actively searching for a spouse for her daughter.

Even though professional matchmaking services are still used and relatives also often introduce prospective marriage partners to one another, "self-determined spouse selection has become a status marker" as romantic love, Adrian points out, is "'the idiom' for discussion of marriage" in contemporary Taiwan (Adrian, 2003 pp. 80-81). Whereas semi-arranged matches among the parental generation are not uncommon, marriage for romantic love is now interpreted as a crucial marker of modernity - most young people want to conform to this ideal and use romantic feelings not only as social legitimization for their marriage plans but also to show progressiveness in contrast to the older generation that maintains more traditional values (p. 81). Although 'romantic love' was undoubtedly an important concept in the courtship rituals of my Taiwanese (and Chinese) informants, best exemplified by the lavish proposals scripted according to Hollywood romances that

were increasingly expected, I observed that, as they got older, my female and male informants were increasingly willing to accept their parents' help or even professional help from dating agencies. This, as Yu-ching's case illustrates, meant that parents also had more influence on partner choice – this increased the pressure on young adults during courtship.

From an upper middle-class background, Yu-ching had grown up in one of the most affluent parts of Taipei and had received an expensive education at Taiwanese private institutions and schools abroad. However, she confessed to me that despite her high academic credentials, she still felt very dependent on her parents not only in questions concerning her education and career but also in her choice of future spouse. Yu-ching knew that her time in the safety of her parental home was limited since her mother was desperate for her to get married. Yu-ching's mother confided in me during one of my visits at their family home that she believed women developed a psychological "imbalance" if they married too late. Beyond that, she was convinced that through marriage, a woman could improve her skills of socializing in an unfamiliar environment.

After a string of disappointing experiences with men, Yu-ching's mother arranged several dates for her daughter. I met Yu-ching after one of these introductory meetings where her family and the family of the young man had been present. At the restaurant, their parents shared a table while Yu-Ching and the young man were placed at a separate table to have the opportunity to get to know each other in more privacy. However, as Yu-ching told me with some annoyance, her mother had overheard their conversation and criticized her afterwards for her frequent, noisy laughing. On a first date, she expected a more demure demeanour from her daughter. Yu-ching lamented that the young man had not been very interested in her and she had not heard back from him. A few days later, on a second date with the family of the man, he revealed that he had a girlfriend his parents did not know about. He had gone on this date just to hide his secret relationship. Even though Yu-ching did not seem to feel sorry about this lost opportunity, her worries about not finding a suitable match before the end of her twenties became more palpable during the following months. She attributed her difficulty in finding a partner to her perceived lack of gentleness and a 'cute' (ke'ai) appearance that her ex-partners had already criticized her for. She complained that her previous dating mishaps had only confirmed her inability to "entertain" men. Indeed, one of her ex-boyfriends whom I met several times during my fieldwork repeatedly stressed his rather conservative outlook on relationships, in particular his preference for Japanese women who he assumed to be more docile, caring and more "family-focused" than Taiwanese women. For this reason, Yu-ching told me, her mother

had recently advised her to 'just obey' her dating partner and not to be too opinionated if a controversial topic came up.

Tzu-i Chuang analyzes the notion of "cuteness" (*ke'ai*), a concept adopted from the Japanese "*kawai*", that Yu-ching refers to (Chuang, 2005). He notes that *ke'ai* does not only refer to a certain sexually non-threatening female attractiveness but condenses a number of character attributes such as docility, playfulness and vulnerability that are ascribed to ideal femininity. I often observed among my female informants, as Chuang has described, that they actively performed "cuteness" to their boyfriends by talking in high pitched, nasal voices (*sajiao*) as well as appropriating an infantile habitus – this ceased abruptly as soon as their partners left the scene or grew tired of this behaviour (p. 22). Even though Chuang attributes a certain form of female empowerment to this "playing cute," I mostly observed the ostentatious performance of cuteness in situations in which young women behaved pointedly non-assertive; situations in which they tried to downplay their intellect to bolster the self-confidence of their male partners. Moreover, I had the impression that young women "played cute" (or were required to do so) in public situations, especially service sector jobs (this was more often the case in Taipei than in Beijing). One juice shop at a Taipei night market that was frequented mostly by young students even earned itself questionable fame by ordering its female employees to attract customers with extremely high pitched cat imitations. This sounded strangely like a real cat and regularly made people turn around in the street.

However, my female Beijing informants were also familiar with gendered expectations of their behaviour and appearance – some feared being perceived as tomboyish or as too strong-minded women (*nühanzi*). Chao once described his friend, Ming-yue, as a *nühanzi* in my presence, which drew loud protests from her. Ming-yue, nearing her mid-twenties, was anxious that she might not find a husband soon. Her worries were aggravated by Chao's and her parents' teasing her singledom.

In contrast, Sun-yi - a young Chinese woman in her early thirties with an impressive career in the media - appeared proud of being associated with the image of a *nühanzi*. One afternoon I met her and her former classmate who was now a successful academic. The young women talked about their circle of friends and remarked with a sense of pride that most of the women they were close to could be considered *nühanzi*: they were all ambitious, headstrong and had successful careers. Similarly, in Taiwan, especially single female informants who had already passed the normative age for marriage found pride in their

perceived "otherness." They placed a heavier emphasis on their independence and assertiveness -attributes that younger, single informants more often tried to play down.

In any case, Yu-ching considered her lack of skills and willingness to adopt a subordinate, flattering demeanour as one of her biggest obstacles on the marriage market. The events after our conversation with the group of young men in the courtyard on the day of Chia-ling's wedding might have contributed to her assessment of this dilemma.

Even though her role as bridesmaid at Chia-ling's wedding roused ambiguous feelings in Yu-ching, it also offered her an opportunity to meet potential dates. It turned out that the introduction of bridesmaids and best men - a relatively new custom borrowed from Northern American wedding rituals – seemed largely to serve the purpose of offering single friends of the bridal couple an opportunity to get to know each other. After our conversation with the groom's best men in the courtyard, however, Yu-ching found that even though the young man who engaged her in conversation seemed nice, he was far from the ideal Yu-ching and her parents possessed of her prospective partner.

I gained an insight into the men's impression of Yu-ching on the way back to Taipei. One of the groom's best men offered me a lift – while alone with him in the car, he revealed his thoughts about the events in the courtyard. He was married, had a young child and was in his late thirties. For these reasons, he seemed to take on the role of an experienced mentor for his younger single friends. He said that at first he had thought that Yu-ching would be a good match for the young man. However, after the conversation he had overheard in the courtyard, he had some doubts about their suitability. As she studied law, he explained, she would be very headstrong. His friend, although a law student himself, was a more relaxed type. Consequently, their mindsets did not match. Moreover, he argued, no man wanted a wife as inquisitive as Yu-ching so he would not recommend that his friend pursue her. Baffled by his assessment of the situation, I probed the aspect of unsuitability further; he admitted that he feared that Yu-ching would stop his friend from going out at night and partying as she appeared too assertive. His ideal type would be the Japanese model of a wife, he stated, one who supposedly focused on her obligations within the household and would also keep a pleasant appearance while her husband pursued life at work and beyond. Like Yu-ching's ex-boyfriend, he thus subscribed to a stereotypical image of Japanese women as incorporating the feminine values of demureness and domesticity.

Recent research shows that despite the demographic trends that are conventionally attributed to modern industrial societies – such as decreasing birth rates, an older age on one's first marriage and childbirth as well as rising divorce rates - the division of housework

and marital decision-making is still heavily influenced by patriarchal Confucian family values in Taiwan even in young birth cohorts (Yu and Liu, 2014). Women assume a considerably heavier share of the housework and have less influence in important financial decisions. This tendency is also reflected in the young men's attitude towards Yu-ching's confrontational argumentation. They might have feared that she could display the same behaviour in marital decision-making. Likewise, Yu-ching's mother's directive to "just obey" her dating partners suggests that she was concerned that Yu-ching's perceived stubbornness could be an obstacle to finding a husband.

However, Yu-ching was also criticized by her close female friends. She had engaged in sexual relationships with several of her previous partners so they accused her of agreeing too readily to physical intimacy. Yu-ching explained that young women often feared that their partners would lose interest in them after sex and thus postponed it for as long as possible in order to enforce a commitment to the relationship. Her friends found that Yu-ching's behaviour lacked strategy; they feared she was gambling with her chances of marriage. Her mother, unaware of any details about Yu-ching's past relationships, even expected her daughter to still be a virgin and to remain so until marriage. If she lost her virginity before wedlock, her mother had threatened Yu-ching that "she would break her legs."

Whereas recent studies about the age at which one has one's first sexual encounter in East Asian societies point to a growing tolerance of premarital sexual relations, this was a controversial topic among my informants in Taipei and Beijing (Farrer, 2002; Farrer et al., 2012; Pei, 2011; Wong and Yau, 2011). Premarital virginity in women was rarely expected (even though preferred) by young men. However, as also found by Farrer and others, the number of premarital sexual partners and the context in which sexual experience had been gained clearly played a role in the assessment of a woman's suitability as a wife (Farrer, 2014 pp. 83-84; Parish et al., 2007 p. 746). Not only female Taiwanese but also Chinese informants told me about what they perceived as an annoying double standard that allowed young men to gain premarital sexual experience whereas women risked their reputation as suitable wives if they engaged in non-committed intimate relationships. It was not uncommon, they reported, to be bluntly asked on first dates about the number of partners with whom they had had sexual intercourse.

Even though my female Chinese informants - mainly due to their autonomous lifestyle in the capital - had more opportunities for premarital sexual relationships without being controlled by their social environments, the fear of being stigmatized as promiscuous (*jian*)

also were manifest there. Becoming a "leftover woman" (*shengnü*), a derogatory term coined by the supposedly feminist Women's Federation of the CCP which describes high-achieving single woman beyond their late twenties, was an overarching fear among many of my Chinese informants (Fincher, 2014 pp. 2-3). The following case study will illustrate how young women in Beijing, despite being less constrained than their Taipei peers, still had to carefully consider sexual encounters and partner choices so as not to risk their marriageability.

Xiao-xiao looked excited as we entered the tunnel-like underground market close to Beijing's zoo which is famous for its bargain clothes and accessories. We arrived early on this Saturday morning but the streets around the subway station leading to the market halls were already buzzing with young people. At weekends Xiao-xiao usually tried to escape early from the narrow room she shared with another girl in a suburb of Beijing. She suggested showing me around the Zoo Market, a chaotic conglomeration of stores that draws young people, especially women, at the weekends. She complained that her flatmate too often invited guests to play cards deep into the night. Despite these inconveniences, Xiao-xiao had not considered moving out as the room was relatively inexpensive compared to the soaring rent prices in the city. While we strolled through the bold coloured items on display, Xiao-xiao updated me on her recent problems with her mother who was pressuring her to marry soon, preferably a young man from her hometown in Henan. Xiao-xiao, however, aspired to a husband with cosmopolitan allure and a sense of adventure, something she did not expect from a local man from her home province. She told me how she was annoyed about her recent unsuccessful date with a former classmate from her hometown who, with the help of his parents' bribes, had been promoted to the central government in Beijing. She quickly became bored by his conservative opinions and his passion for playing *majiang*, a game she considered more suitable for older generations. Since then, she had rejected his invitations to meet despite her mother's urgent plea to hurry up with her quest for a husband.

While talking about her love life, our conversation turned towards her recent romance with a French student. Even though the relationship lacked the commitment she was hoping for, he had impressed her with romantic gestures and adventurous outings, something she found lacking in relationships with local men. Despite the immense emotional pain which the instability of the affair caused her, she would not give up the hope for a future together. She reminisced about the night he took her to the top of the CCTV Tower from which they enjoyed the view over the glittering lights of the city. That night, she smiled, had been "like in a movie." He inspired her interest in politics and history and, for the first time she

had the feeling that a man was interested in her personal thoughts and opinions. At that time, she really felt like her life was taking a turn for the better.

Her mother, however, had not been impressed by the young men. Xiao-xiao had taken him with her on a visit to her home town. She introduced him as a friend but her parents understood immediately that they were in a relationship. When her little brother asked the young man if he had a girlfriend and he replied no, her parents became very concerned. Even Xiao-xiao's stepfather, who rarely interfered with her personal life, took her to one side and warned her that her boyfriend was playing with her feelings. If she continued the relationship, he feared that he would humiliate her. During that trip, Xiao-xiao had been out drinking with her date in her hometown. She was sure, she added, that her parents' neighbours had gossiped about them. Her mother had been so exasperated that she cried the whole night. After the trip, Xiao-xiao became thoughtful and ended the affair. She even deleted him from her online contacts. However, her resolve did not last long and they soon talked again. She was deeply hurt when his affections for her diminished and she found out that he had planned a romantic trip to Paris with his new Chinese date. However, she still found it difficult to ignore his allure.

A growing emphasis on romantic performance among young Chinese, Yan points out, was promoted by the increased access to national and international media during the reform era and has profoundly changed courtship practices as well as the concept of the ideal spouse over recent decades. Whereas an ability to endure hard physical labour and a suitable family background were desired attributes in a man during collective times, men are now measured by their emotional expressivity and their ability to convey their feelings through "romantic" speech and acts modelled on popular TV dramas and Hollywood movies (Yan, 2003 pp. 72-85). Moreover, since the restrictions on the household registration system have been loosened and people can leave their rural home places to pursue an education and a career in the cities, the ability to navigate the urban environment has also become a primary concern in terms of a marriage partner. Matthew Kohrman points out that

> "To be a competent man or woman in China today one must be willing if not eager to venture away from home and use skills to earn a better living. […] Chinese men, more than women, are expected to occupy and control mobility within most public arenas: being a man in contemporary China demands demonstrating and generating status by exiting and moving around quickly outside the home and by having greater agency over where and how movement is made […]" (Kohrman, 1999 p. 894).

Like Xiao-xiao, many female informants in Beijing valued insider knowledge of the urban environment and, beyond that, international travel experience as desirable assets in males because it proved to them that their partners had shed their "backward" rural lifestyles. In some cases, Western foreign men were considered as reliably possessing these assets and, for this reason, they proved to be desirable dating candidates among those female informants who aspired to a more adventurous, cosmopolitan lifestyle (Farrer, 2013).

The rising heat in the market hall and the ever stronger stream of people shoving along the narrow passages made us feel increasingly uncomfortable and we decided to have lunch at a nearby shopping mall. As we were sitting in front of our steaming hot pots, Xiao-xiao told me that for a short time, she had moved into the apartment of her French date. I was surprised since she had never mentioned it before. As he was hesitant to enter into an official relationship with her, she explained, she was wary of sleeping with him. One night, he tried to approach her and when she refused to let him get closer, he shouted angrily at her. She asked me if I thought that it was a mistake not to give in to his advances as, soon afterwards, he started dating somebody else.

Farrer argues that some of his female Shanghai informants entertained "a fantasy of liberation from Asian patriarchy by embracing western education and also an idealized version of western romance […]" (Farrer, 2013 p. 14). Xiao-xiao was notably impressed by the closely followed script of Hollywood-like dating romance she experienced with her foreign affair in the beginning of their relationship. At the same time, however, she was highly aware of the fleeting nature of their encounter when she very matter-of-factly explained that her date was very volatile in his affections and he soon found another affair. Despite her seeming independence, Xiao-xiao was worried about passing the acceptable age for marriage without having found a partner and was torn between her strong feelings for the French man and the hopelessness of the affair. However, even though she stressed that the advantages of a foreign passport was not a consideration for her in this match, she found it difficult to let go of her dream to go abroad that seemed to have receded into the far distance when their affair broke apart.

Whereas among my female Beijing informants, sexual relationships that did not have the clear objective of marriage could flourish to a greater extent due to a more autonomous lifestyle, this rarely occurred with their Taipei counterparts. As they mostly lived with their families, it was difficult to pursue fleeting affairs without raising unwanted parental attention. Especially romantic relationships with a foreigner, at least in the Taiwanese upper middle classes, were almost frowned upon as Western men often had the reputation of

being promiscuous and were unwilling to permanently settle in Taiwan. One of my female Taiwanese informants who started a committed relationship with a Western man repeatedly stressed that he was a visiting professional of a renowned international company and that she originally did not want to date him as she wanted to stay in Taiwan with her parents. I knew several other Taiwanese women who had a profound interest in Western culture and dreamt of travelling and living abroad, yet emphasized that they could not imagine a marital future with a Western man due to different cultural expectations. Decisions to pursue romantic relationships with foreigners among women in Beijing and Taipei thus seemed to be influenced by the socioeconomic differences and the demographic profiles of the places that determined how promising relationships with Westerners appeared.

As noted in the introduction, Xiao-xiao had found effective ways to conceal her adventurous trips and private life from her mother; this allowed her to explore Beijing's dating scene without being reprimanded. Nevertheless, during their telephone calls, her mother would pressure her to marry soon while her "value was still high." Xiao-xiao feared that if she had not found a husband by the age of thirty, her mother would surely "go crazy." A fear that their daughters would pass child-bearing age before they found a partner was very prominent among the parents of young Chinese and Taiwanese people. Many, like Xiao-xiao's and Yu-ching's mothers, expressed their fears that, after a certain age, their children would be difficult to place on the marriage market and would spoil their often only chance of grandchildren. This was especially true of the Chinese cases. In China the threshold that made parents worry about their daughter's marital prospects was set in the mid-twenties and thus a few years earlier than in Taiwan (Fincher, 2014 pp. 1-3). However, like Yu-ching's experiences in Taiwan, in China young women like Xiao-xiao who had a higher education and pursued successful careers often had the reputation of being non-desirable spouses as many men were reluctant to marry wives who outperformed them academically and professionally (Zhang and Sun, 2014).

Moreover, like Yu-ching, Xiao-xiao was also accused by her peers of giving herself away "under her value." Upon hearing that Xiao-xiao had slept with her foreign date, her female boss, with whom she had a very close relationship, criticized her for not demanding any material compensation for the intimacy she had offered the young man. In her eyes, Xiao-xiao could at least have "cheated" (*pian*) him into taking her on a trip to France. Xiao-xiao explained to me that it was common to consent to sexual intercourse only if one was certain that a marriage proposal would soon follow. It was easier to find a husband if one was still a virgin. If a woman claimed to be a virgin but there was no blood after first intercourse, she might get into trouble with her partner. Her mother had advised her to

stay a virgin until she married. However, she would not listen to this advice and also did not mind showing her solidarity with her flatmate as she knew how difficult it was to maintain privacy in the crowded dwellings young people occupied in Beijing. When her flatmate invited her boyfriend to their place, Xiao-xiao mostly stayed out late or spent the night at a friend's place.

However, during our lunch at the mall, Xiao-xiao seemed to be discouraged by her dating experiences in Beijing and doubted ever finding a partner she could be happy with. "If you marry a guy," she sighed, "your life ends, especially, if you marry a Chinese guy. We won't have an option for seeking more things."

Yu-ching's and Xiao-xiao's stories exemplify the different problems young women face searching for future spouses in Taipei and Beijing. Whereas young women from affluent middle-class backgrounds in Taipei often struggled to overcome the limitations their protected family environment placed on their search for a partner, young women in Beijing more often had more autonomy over decisions due to their spatial and economic independence from parents and they found it easier to distance themselves from parental demands. However, they also felt suppressed by patriarchal norms that restricted their sexual freedom and status as equal partners in romantic relationships and marriage. Like their Taiwanese peers, they felt the pressure to conform to standardized notions of female behaviour and beauty and were warned by parents and friends not to "sell themselves under their value" and to observe certain rules of intimacy to protect themselves from supposedly exploitative male sexuality.

However, the following case studies that will shed light on courtship and marriage from the male perspective will show that these norms are not only criticized by women, but also by young men. They will also offer insight into an issue that so far has only been addressed briefly, namely the impact that the repercussions of different state-sponsored ideological campaigns and welfare measures have had on partner choice and decisions about post-marital residence in Beijing and Taipei.

4.3. Pressures of Responsibility and Success - Searching for Wives in Taipei and Beijing

Pei-chun, and his new girlfriend were already waiting as I arrived at Longshan temple in Taipei's Wanhua District. I introduced the young man in the first chapter where I told the life story of his mother and described the severe losses the family had to endure when Pei-

chun was an adolescent. At that day, Pei-chun and his girlfriend wanted to meet me at the temple to introduce me to the god who had, they explained, helped them find each other. As we entered the temple, we were immediately wrapped in a swathe of incense that hung like a heavy cloth over the inner courtyard. Under the jarring chants emanating from the loudspeakers, groups of worshippers were moving from shrine to shrine. As we walked into the inner courtyard, Pei-chun explained that he would usually visit this Buddhist temple that also hosted Chinese folk deities if he wanted to pray for a certain matter that concerned him. Especially during his studies, he often came here to ask for divine assistance with his exams. As we arrived at the shrine of *Yue Lao*, a god believed to help love-seeking singles find the right match, we were confronted by an impressive crowd of young people. Pei-chun's girlfriend explained to me that she had asked *Yue Lao* to help her find a partner and that Pei-chun matched perfectly her requests to this god. He was kind-hearted and considerate and, most importantly, had an income of over 45,000 TWD[6]. Pei-chun chimed in and confirmed that he had also been here to ask for the god's help in his search for a wife; shortly afterwards, he had met his girlfriend. His requirements, however, had been slightly different. The most relevant request on his list had been that his girlfriend should respect his mother.

It was not unusual for my Taiwanese informants to rely on divine help in searching for partners. However, especially in cases like that of Pei-chun and his girlfriend, who had quickly started out on a committed relationship after getting to know each other, references to divine approval or destiny (*yuanfen*) were made to justify their fast progress towards marriage. I observed that especially when confronting ambiguous situations in their love lives, young Taiwanese tended to consult fortune-tellers, temple oracles or religious specialists more often than their Chinese counterparts. Likewise Yu-ching had sought the advice of a Buddhist master when her desperation over her unsolved relationship problems grew too great. Although a revival in folk religious practices could be observed in China, the number of adherents to folk religion was considerably higher in Taiwan; in addition, Yang and colleagues have found, unlike in China, the younger generations (below the age of forty) were most active in ancestor worship and the veneration of local deities (Yang and Hu, 2012). These observed differences were also reflected in the ways my young informants approached important life choices, in particular those pertaining to romantic love and marriage – this was one of the spheres young Taiwanese appeared to perceive as especially amenable to influence by supernatural powers.

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[6] Approximately 960 GBP in the summer of 2012.

Returning to the request Pei-chun and his girlfriend made to the temple god, it must be noted that it was not uncommon to articulate requirements for a future spouse's earning potential or preferences for rather traditional gender role models in marriage. Recent studies point out that despite profound demographic and economic changes in Taiwan, an adherence to traditional family values has remained strong, also in young adults (Chu et al., 2011; Yu and Liu, 2014). However, the heavy emphasis that Pei-chun placed on his future wife's harmonious relationship with his mother was rather unusual, even by Taiwanese standards – this could be explained by the close relationship he and his mother had shared since his father's early death.

When I got to know Pei-chun in spring 2012, he was thirty-one years old. From the outset, most of our conversations revolved around the topics of marriage and partner choice. He had worked as a computer engineer for a software company in the outskirts of Taipei for several years and had found that he was financially stable enough to think about marriage. His former girlfriend did not get along well with his mother. As Pei-chun planned to live in his widowed mother's household after marriage, he broke up with her. Since then, he had found it difficult to find a new partner. For a woman, he insisted, getting married implied that she would have to live with the family of her husband. At the same time, he did not consider a close relationship with his in-laws to be essential: "If her parents don't like me, it's ok, because I won't live with them."

A few months after our first meeting, Pei-chun was excited to tell me the news that he had found a girlfriend. He had participated in a singles dating event (*lianyi*) that had been advertised online. The young woman he eventually arranged a date with brought another friend along.[7] He soon realized he preferred this female friend to his original date. After a few more dates, he was sure that she was a suitable partner. He had introduced her to his mother only a few weeks after they started dating officially, a rather unusual gesture compared to the reluctance my other male informants showed in this respect, fearing the pressure to marry such meetings often brought to bear.

Pei-chun's new girlfriend was working as a teacher and was thirty-two years of age. She did not want to wait much longer to get married either. She was preparing for the civil servant exam and thus they met only once a week on Saturday afternoons at a coffee shop. They could not talk much as she brought her exam preparation material and he worked on his laptop during these meetings. However, they soon felt very close to each other and, one

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7 It was not unusual to arrange group dates or to bring a friend to a first date in Taiwan. This was to prevent the occasion from becoming too formal and threatening, especially to rather shy young men and women.

Saturday, Pei-chun took heart, confessed his feelings and asked her to be his girlfriend. She agreed but it was clear to both of them that, from now on, they would quickly gravitate towards marriage.

Farrer stresses that in China, the verbal declaration of love is an important step in the transition from a more ambiguous love interest to a formal relationship (Farrer, 2014 p. 72). This was also clearly the case among my female Taiwanese informants who often complained about the half-hearted interest of their male dating partners; the women also often required a formal statement of a man's sincere intentions before allowing sexual intimacy to occur. Many of my female informants feared getting stuck in dubious relationships (*aimei*) that did not imply any commitment and that might jeopardize their chances of marriage. For this reason, it is not surprising that Pei-chun's girlfriend, who had expressed her wish for marriage and who had already passed the age threshold for accepted singledom in Taiwan, was expecting a clear articulation of Pei-chun's willingness to commit.

Soon after our meeting at the temple, they started to plan their married life. Their choice of residence turned out to be particularly complicated as Pei-chun discovered that although his fiancée liked his mother, she did not want to live in the same household. She was also not as economical as he had hoped. One evening, when I met Pei-chun after work, he complained that whereas he was making long-term plans and was thinking about the high costs of education for their future children, she focused only on short-term pleasure. He sighed: "Because you know, my girlfriend is [...] still a girl, even though she is one year older than me but [her] thinking is still like a little girl. Work, money and so on…"

A few months later - I had already left Taipei at that time - they married and moved into their own flat, which, despite Pei-chun's concerns, was closer to the natal home of his wife. When I asked Pei-chun during an online call what his family thought about him having moved out, he replied that they had found a fair solution that would, in his eyes, be a suitable compromise: during workdays, they lived in their own flat but on Friday night, he and his wife moved to his mother's house until Monday morning. By way of this patrilocal weekend residence, they had found a compromise that fulfilled his mother's *and* his wife's needs.

As Pei-chun's case demonstrates, an important factor that influenced partner choice among young Taiwanese men was their future wife's willingness to integrate into their natal families. In Taiwan, post-marital residence was often a disputed topic among young couples and their families. Often, as in the case of the young Taiwanese bride introduced above, parents would request that a newlywed son and his wife should reside in their

household for at least several months before moving into independent housing. As Yue-ling's case in the previous chapter demonstrates, a commonly practised form was for a couple to move into the immediate neighbourhood (Chu et al., 2011 p. 133). This often caused tensions, especially between the young wives and her parents-in-law, and many quickly started to resent this living arrangement.

By contrast to their Taiwanese counterparts, most of my informants in Beijing, whether from urban or rural backgrounds, expected to lead a relatively independent life from both sets of parents after marriage. Few intended to return to their home cities and none of them planned to move into the same household as parents or in-laws after marriage even if their parents also lived in Beijing. One reason why the practice of neolocal post-marital residence was relatively firmly established in China was that already the parental generation had lived independently in flats or dormitories provided by their work units after marriage. During collective times, the "iron rice bowl" (*tie fen wan*) had provided people not only with employment and various social services but had also allocated housing to young workers (Ikels, 1993). However, since these welfare measures had been abolished in the course of the reform era, young Chinese have also become increasingly dependent on parental support in the provision of apartments.

The expectation to provide independent housing before marriage placed a heavy strain on young men, especially due to skyrocketing real estate prices in many urban areas of China. Li Zhang has observed in the urban environment of Kunming that for young adults, "[h]omeownership has undeniably become one of the primary concerns in their decision making and how they assess the worth of a potential spouse. This is particularly true for men who are largely held responsible for providing a place to live" (Zhang, 2010 p. 168). Fong made similar observations in urban Northern China where parents could not hope to marry off their son unless they could provide him with adequate independent housing (Fong, 2004 p. 113). Similarly, Friederike Fleischer found that in Bejing housing played an important role in the process of social differentiation; as such, especially residential compounds have become the new marker of Chinese urban middle class identity (Fleischer, 2007). She describes that the ability to pursue a Western-inspired life style in one of the capital's prestigious suburbs was considered an important status enhancement. Fleischer notes that with the increasing stratification of the urban real estate market, "[…] the consumption of space has turned into a special realm, and housing is one of the prime markers of socio-economic status" (p. 297).

In Taiwan, the situation was not that different. Modern apartments in prestigious urban neighbourhoods were highly coveted status markers among my informants. However, soaring real estate prices and stagnating wages made it almost impossible for young graduates to afford to buy housing (Chen et al., 2007). In most cases when couples moved into independent housing after marriage, young men had to rely on parents to support them in their investment or transfer them property they already owned. The economic dependencies created by these expectations only reinforced parents' authority over their children and, in an interplay with the more traditional expectations of spouse selection described above, made young men even more susceptible to parental interference in partner choice and other areas of their lives.

Likewise, for young people in Beijing, certain freedoms gained during the Communist era were compromised by the increasing economic necessity to rely on parents in the provision of housing. In any case, as the following will show, important ideological differences persisted that granted young men more decision-making power in relationship questions in comparison to young Taiwanese men with similar economic dependencies on parents.

Liang, my colleague at the Beijing consultancy who was introduced with his mother in the first chapter, was one of those young Chinese men who struggled to maintain their economic independence due to rising living costs in Beijing.[8] Liang returned early from his studies abroad to move back to the flat of his separated mother to take care of her after complicated surgery. Liang was not satisfied with this situation - most of his life he had lived rather independently while his parents busily followed their professional engagements. Now that his mother had retired and was suffering from ill health, he was subjected to a form of family life he had rarely experienced before and he felt increasingly constrained by the obligations it implied. Thus, several months after he had started working at the consultancy, he decided to move in with his girlfriend. In Chinese urban areas, premarital cohabitation is becoming increasingly common and, as I observed with several informants, it is also more and more accepted by parents (Farrer, 2014 p. 68). Liang's decision to leave his family home to move in with his girlfriend while staying in the same city was thus not as bold as it would have appeared in the Taiwanese context.

However, despite their relatively well-paid jobs in international companies, Liang and his girlfriend did not have enough savings to finance their own flat. Liang's mother thus offered them her apartment and she would rent a smaller place that had become vacant in

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[8] For a detailed discussion of the decreasing affordability of housing in Beijing and other major Chinese cities, see Mak, et al., 2007.

the basement of the same housing complex. By transferring the apartment originally assigned to her by her *danwei* to Liang, she thus curiously subverted the original intent of state allocated housing; the accommodation that had liberated her from dependencies on her parents was now, in times of increasing economic uncertainty, used to install a novel form of coresidence with parents. However, under closer inspection, Liang's story reveals important differences in Chinese family and gender ideology that clearly distinguish his decision to move close to his mother from residential choices made by my Taiwanese informants and their families. At that time, Liang did not intend to ever marry and build a family as he wanted to focus on his desired career as an artist abroad. Even though his mother undoubtedly wished that her only son would change his mind and might even have intended her offer to encourage him to reconsider his plans, she was willing to provide him and his girlfriend with housing without them promising to marry. One reason contributing to her liberal attitude may have been her own disdain for marriage and child-rearing. Like her son, she grew up relatively independently from her parents and followed her professional ideals. Even though with increasing age her expectations became more traditional, something that often irritated Liang, she refrained from interfering in his personal decisions despite the economic dependencies between them that rendered her some authority. Her respect for her son's autonomy distinguished her clearly from the more traditionally minded parents of the young Taiwanese men I met. You-peng's parents, for example, made strenuous efforts to intervene in their son's career and relationship. They even read the correspondence between him and his girlfriend and criticized their intimate exchanges. Moreover, You-peng's girlfriend did not even stay at their house during a short visit to Taipei, fearing she would be considered "too loose." Even though some parents of my male Chinese informants expressed more traditional opinions than Liang's mother, none of them told me of having experienced such strict parental interventions in their love life at that age.

Moreover, even though Liang did move into the same apartment complex, neither he nor his mother ever mentioned regarding this as part of his filial obligations. This is clearly different from the seemingly similar residential arrangements that Pei-chun strove for: Whereas Liang stayed in his mother's flat out of economic necessity, Pei-chun intended to do so more out of a feeling of filiality. Even though economic concerns did play a part in his wish to stay at home, the dominant reason was a deep feeling of obligation to be present in his natal household. Liang was also highly filial; he returned from his studies abroad to assist his mother during a health crisis. This form of filial care did not, however, imply any obligation of continuous coresidence.

Nevertheless, Liang surprisingly accepted what may seem at first glance to be a more traditional living arrangement than Pei-chun, whose wife eventually convinced him to move into an independent flat in another part of town. Yet, whereas Pei-chun and his wife spent their free time at the weekends within the circle of Pei-chun's family, Liang was plotting his escape. He renovated an old house in a *hutong* to use as his studio - he sometimes stayed there overnight and continued to dream of a career as an artist abroad.

4.4. Conclusion

Both my Chinese and Taiwanese informants complained that despite living in a modern metropolis that should offer them a variety of possible lifestyle choices, they perceived their actual range of choices as rather limited and restricted because, from a certain age onwards, the pressure to marry sets in. Even though young adults in Beijing and Taipei can approach their selection of partners with varying degrees of freedom, their lifestyle choices are curtailed by the imperative of marriage and by future obligations towards their natal families and in-laws. Furthermore, far from completely abandoning traditional concepts of the need for matching family backgrounds and socioeconomic status between partners, they try to justify their choices according to traditional parameters; yet, modern notions of romantic and passionate love are equally important. The many expectations potential spouses have to fulfil complicate a consensus with parents in terms of what constitutes a good choice of partner.

Nevertheless, similar trends in decision-making that were observable in the areas of education and career planning are also present in partner choice and residential arrangements. The case studies cited above illustrate how in Taiwan not only the more traditional gender and family ideology but also certain demographic specifics benefit parents' influence on the selection of their children's spouses and future residence.

Chia-ling, the young Taiwanese bride, was supposed to move directly from her natal family's home into that of her parents-in-law; she thus exchanged one parental authority for another. She actually lived in their household for much longer than the several months originally planned. A few months after her marriage, she gave birth to her first child. She thus did not only have to take care of her new responsibilities as a wife and daughter-in-law in the months after her marriage; she also had to grow into her new role as a mother in her in-laws' household. The request of Chia-ling's in-laws for her to move into their household after the wedding was not unusual among my Taipei informants. However, many managed

to turn down this request, fearful of having to spend more time than previously agreed at the husband's parents' apartment. It was especially striking that Chia-ling agreed to this arrangement as her father would have been able to finance independent accommodation for them from the outset of their married life.

Likewise, Yu-ching still lived at home which increased her mother's authority over her dating behaviour. Her parents' say (as well as the influence of her *shifu*) in her choice of partner was so influential that she ended relationships with several boyfriends because they did not consider them suitable. Her case was unusual in terms of the very close yet emotionally stressful relationship she had with her parents. Despite their close proximity to parents, most of the young Taiwanese I met who felt greatly pressured by parental demands had found some way to distance themselves from parental critique more effectively by a certain age.

Yet, also Pei-chun conceded that he would only marry a woman that his mother and grandmother got along with and who was willing to spend a great deal of her free time with his family. His case demonstrates that as neolocal post-marital residence becomes common in Taiwan, young people still have to make heavy concessions so as not to seem neglectful of their filial duties.

Even though my informants in Beijing also felt pressured to marry before a certain age, their parents usually had far less direct influence on them. Xiao-xiao's case shows that young women who live independently in the capital have comparatively greater personal freedoms in testing different forms of relationships and change partners without their parents' intervention. She had moved into the flat of her foreign date for a certain time period but moved out when she did not like their cohabitation. Likewise, Liang was not entirely sure whether he wanted to stay with his girlfriend in the long-term when he moved in with her. His mother placed only mild pressure on him to marry but Liang was not willing to compromise on his career to lead a conventional family life. Even after he moved in with his girlfriend, I observed him living a pointedly single lifestyle which included long nights out with our colleagues and withdrawing to his studio at weekends.

Even if the parents of my Chinese informants voiced their disapproval of certain partner choices they were not very effective in preventing their children from pursuing their love interests. Once Xiao-xiao's mother had the opportunity to get to know her daughter's boyfriend, she made her disapproval known in a rather dramatic way. Initially, Xiao-xiao was so impressed by this incident that she ended the relationship -only to re-establish contact with the man once she was back in Beijing. In this regard, Xiao-xiao's attitude was

very similar to that of many other young women I met in Beijing whose parents were not around. Most of them offered only highly selective insights into their lives in the capital to their parents.

In conclusion, all these cases show that despite the significant changes in dating behaviour and marriage expectations in both societies, questions of intergenerational responsibilities are still highly relevant in decisions on marriage. The "continuities in the 'rules of the game' for family formation" observed by Davis and Friedman, in particular with regard to duties toward parents, were also reflected in the accounts of my Chinese and Taiwanese informants (Davis and Friedman, 2014 pp. 26-27). Moreover, whereas premarital sexuality has become more accepted in both societies and, in China, premarital cohabitation is increasingly common, the notion of marriage has remained largely unchanged. Evans notes that her Beijing interviewees made "little conceptual distinction between marrying and having a child" (Evans, 2008 p. 172). This also pertains to my Chinese and Taiwanese informants. Both sets of informants predominantly equated marriage with the obligation to have children. The few young people I met who tried to uncouple these expectations and strove for childless marriages encountered serious conflicts with partners and other family members.

Likewise, having a child without marrying was unthinkable to most of the young Chinese and Taiwanese I met. I did not experience the birth of a child out of wedlock among any of my informants. However, cases I was told of were reported in tones of commiseration, suggesting that neither the mother nor the child would have a promising future. Davis and Friedman note that the government of Taiwan, despite incentivising an increase in births, still refrains from destigmatizing childbearing out of wedlock (Davis and Friedman, 2014 p. 22). Restrictive policies - such as China's one-child policy that was in force until 2015, as well as traditional notions of family life in Taiwan - thus continue to define marriage as the only possible domain within which childbirth is possible.

Whereas young Chinese appeared to be as concerned about their parents' future well-being as young Taiwanese, they were nevertheless more autonomous in their pursuit of relationship ideals and partner choices and they seemed more willing to accept personal responsibility for their decisions. The demographic specifics of the two locations, as well as diverging approaches to traditional family ideology, had a significant influence on these observed differences. The question remains, however, whether the more autonomous approach to romantic relationships of my Beijing informants will be sustainable as they grow older. As most of them were in their mid twenties to early thirties, their parents were

mostly still able to lead a relatively independent life. As soon as additional care obligations for parents such as physical assistance in their everyday lives enter the scene, filial obligations might become more pressing and parental demands more traditional, also among Chinese informants.

Chapter Five - Making Choices

5.1. Introduction

Mei-ling waited impatiently until the waitress had taken our orders before she announced that she had finally visited the fortune-teller (*suanmingzhe*) her friend had recommended. The young Taiwanese woman had cancelled a previous appointment with him. She was uncertain if she wanted to know about her fate. Eventually, she decided to give it a try and inquire about the future of her relationship with her boyfriend of over a year. During the session, she learnt that the *yuanfen*[9] connecting her with her partner would only last for two years. As according to this prediction there was not much time left for them, she admitted that she felt like breaking up right away. There was no doubt about the credibility of the fortune-teller, Mei-ling affirmed, since her friend had tested him. He showed the fortune-teller several pictures of women, including one of his actual sweetheart and asked whom he should pursue. The fortune-teller pointed out her friend's real love interest and said that she was the only one he had feelings for. However, he also recommended he give up on her as she was in a relationship. All of this was true, which, Mei-ling insisted, confirmed that the fortune-teller was reliable.

Mei-ling and her boyfriend, a young man from Italy, met during their master studies at a French university. Since she had returned to Taiwan, they were continuing their relationship via online chats and video calls. However, Mei-ling was careful not to let her father know about her romance with the young foreigner. She was certain that he would not approve of the relationship since the young men was unemployed. Keeping their romance a secret became increasingly difficult for Mei-ling since she had moved back into the family household that included not only her parents and sister but also her maternal grandfather and several unmarried aunts. Her father regularly inspected her room and his discovery of her relationship seemed imminent.

However, I had already noticed before our dinner meeting that Mei-ling was becoming increasingly insecure about her feelings towards her boyfriend. It slowly emerged that she was thinking about breaking up with him as she feared that planning a future together would be too problematic. Quickly after her return from Europe, she had found employment in a renowned consultancy in Taipei while her boyfriend, who had decided to stay in France after his graduation, was still searching for a job. Mei-ling felt increasingly annoyed by his calls during which he sought consolation for his job seeking and

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9 Predestined binding force in relationships.

confirmation of her unwavering love. She was in her late twenties and there was not much time left to find a suitable husband if this relationship did not work out. Torn between a feeling of obligation towards her emotionally unstable boyfriend and her doubts about the feasibility of the relationship, she decided to consult the fortune-teller that her friends had praised for his reliable predictions.

A few weeks after our meeting, Mei-ling terminated the relationship. She insisted that her visit to the fortune-teller had not influenced her decision to eventually go ahead with the break-up. She had made up her mind to end the relationship independently of his prediction. Nevertheless, this was not the last time that she would ask the fortune-teller for advice on her love life. Only a few weeks after her break-up, she found herself in an ambiguous relationship (*aimei*) with a Taiwanese man who had a girlfriend. Before she invested too many feelings in it, she wanted to consult the fortune-teller again. When he advised her strongly to give up on that man, she decided that getting involved more deeply in this affair was too risky and let their contact fade out.

The previous chapters illustrated that, for young Chinese and Taiwanese, making important decisions was often a difficult and problematic task since not only personal doubts but also conflicts of interests with parents had to be resolved. While both young Chinese and Taiwanese adults had to deal with these intergenerational disputes to a certain degree, I observed that my Taiwanese informants were more hesitant about making choices that went against societal norms. Moreover, young Taiwanese appeared to be more reluctant to take risks and to assume personal responsibility for their decisions than their Chinese counterparts. This was even more surprising as they had, in most cases, a more stable financial and emotional safety net than my Chinese informants. In the previous chapters I described how differences in personal autonomy impact on young people's educational, professional and partner choices. This chapter will take a closer look at these decision-making processes and the factors that influence young adults' willingness to take risks and assume personal responsibility.

Whether Mei-ling was certain about terminating her relationship before consulting the fortune-teller is difficult to assess. However, what is certain is that she realized this plan only *after* she consulted him. Since Mei-ling had grown increasingly estranged from her boyfriend and a separation would also have been supported by her parents (had they known about him), the social and emotional risks of a break-up did not appear very high. Still, it was only after the fortune-teller revealed that their common fate (*yuanfen*) would not last that she made the decision to leave her boyfriend. As will be shown in the following, in

the course of my fieldwork it became clear that notions related to fate (*ming*) played a key role in the decision-making of my Taiwanese informants. However, the fear of misinterpreting fate and taking a wrong path also let them ponder on decisions for a long time. The more they waited, the more their doubts and fears of failure surged.

When I started fieldwork in Beijing, however, I was surprised to find a situation very different from the one in Taipei. Young people still battled with insecurities in making important decisions. However, as the previous chapters have illustrated, the young Chinese I met approached decisions in a more independent and confident way. They were less tormented by fears of potential failure even though they had less secure financial and social support networks to rely on than young Taiwanese urbanites. Moreover, the more liberal approach towards gender and family ideology, as well as the more subordinate role played by folk belief and other religions, had a direct influence on their decision-making. First, they mostly did not encounter as severe moral conflicts originating from discrepancies between their own and their parents' ideals as many young Taiwanese did. Second, because of their spatially and financially more independent lifestyle, they often did not have to deal with parental disapproval as urgently as if they had lived in the same household, as was mostly the case in Taipei. Third, religious and spiritual concepts of fate and destiny did not play as dominant roles in their decisions; for this reason, divination practices were rarely used to gain reassurance.[10]

However, the immediate influences of the current states of the local economies contributed to my informants' different decision-making attitudes. As I have discussed before, at the time of my research in 2012 and 2013, young adults in China and Taiwan had very different outlooks on the future. Young Taiwanese were becoming increasingly hopeless because of the stagnating economy as well as Taiwan's deadlocked position in the international political arena - in China, meanwhile, the atmosphere among young adults was markedly different. Encouraged by the state media's forecasts of consistent economic growth and the government's assertive claims of being a global power, young people envisioned a brighter future for themselves and their families (Holland, 2013; The Economic Times, 2015).

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[10] At this point I would like to emphasize that this observation refers specifically to my sample of students who shared a highly educated background and who predominantly came from northern and central Chinese provinces. Current research has shown that in China, age, education and income have an important impact on religious practices. Especially people below fifty years of age, those who received college education and members of the middle classes appear to be less prone to engage in religious activities (Yang, et al., 2012 pp. 516-517). However, Julie Y. Chu has found that folk religious concepts of destiny and fate play a pivotal role in the decision-making of young, aspiring migrant labourers in Fuzhou in southern China (Chu, 2010). Hence, beyond socioeconomic and educational background, geographical location seems to importantly affect young people's attitude toward folk religion.

Their different future perspectives were further supported by their experiences during their coming of age in these different economic and political environments. The previous chapters illustrated how many young Chinese had already far outperformed their parents in regard to academic and professional achievements. Especially those who had migrated from the countryside to the city had achieved this through extraordinary educational successes. Having become a part of Beijing's aspiring middle class, they had realized an economic potential that was beyond their parents' reach. Moreover, many parents of Chinese informants had invested a great proportion of their financial resources in their children's education. Not only for rural parents, but also for those parents with middle-class backgrounds, this often implied a considerable risk. However, these investments had paid off in most of the cases I encountered as they had indeed enabled my informants to achieve the successes they aspired to. These experiences might have contributed to their greater willingness to take risks in advancing their educational and professional careers compared to Taiwanese peers who had less confidence in their achievements.

The situation that my young Taiwanese informants found themselves in was very different. I have described how, far from matching their parents' economic success stories, they mostly worked in low paid graduate jobs and worried about maintaining their socioeconomic status without their parents' help in the future. The fear of not being able to realize parental expectations caused an air of disenchantment among them. Envisioning their future from such different positions of empowerment thus undoubtedly affected the degree of confidence with which young Chinese and Taiwanese approached personal life choices.

A comparison of ethnographies from societies in different phases of economic transition illustrates how collective sentiments of hope and despair influence individual perceptions of choice and risk. Pedersen conducted research among aspiring entrepreneurs in Mongolia in the early 2000s (Pedersen, 2012). Despite Mongolia's bumpy transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy - accompanied by rising unemployment and lengthy phases of stagnation - Pedersen's young informants remained markedly unaffected by the rather dim economic outlook. Instead, they were counting on soon being able to exploit the new economic opportunities that they expected to emerge with the liberalization of the market. Being jobless but still "surprisingly hopeful," as Pedersen puts it, they did not get discouraged by recurrent experiences of failure but chose to "continue to act as if tomorrow will be a better day" and adjusted their economic decisions accordingly by "making new debts and entering into new trading adventures" (Pedersen, 2012 p. 137).

The situation that Brinton observed among young Japanese graduates struggling with unemployment is decidedly different (Brinton, 2011). Japan's transition to a post-industrial economy was accompanied by surging unemployment and job instability that complicated young people's entrance to the labour market. Having internalized the parental faith in meritocracy that was based on experiences the post-war generation had had in an expanding economy, many young Japanese felt betrayed when their degrees did not translate into secure jobs after Japan plunged into recession in the early 1990s. Not managing the transition from school to stable careers, many young adults started to suffer from low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy. They realized that they would not be able to attain the financial independence to establish a lifestyle that matched their expectations (Brinton, 2011 p. 157).

The parallels with the current situation of young adults in China and Taiwan seem salient. Like their Mongolian counterparts, young Chinese came of age in a period of reform. However, unlike Mongolia, the Chinese economy experienced rapid growth during the reform era. Nevertheless, the abolition of the state welfare system and the increasing privatization that were part of the restructuring resulted in growing insecurities for the individual. Despite that, my young Chinese informants were confident of their abilities to carve out their personal success stories in a China rising and looked full of optimism to the future. By contrast, like Japan's "lost generation," many of their Taiwanese peers were increasingly suffering from unstable labour conditions and low graduate wages and felt paralyzed in their decision-making. They were increasingly giving up, faced with growing job insecurity and the hopelessness of ever meeting parental expectations.

In the following, I will examine how these factors have an impact on young people's decision-making in Beijing and Taipei. How do young adults integrate their personal wishes with those of family members and partners, how much risk is acceptable to them and how do they overcome insecurities and fears?

The cases presented in this chapter focus on the experiences of young women. Due to gendered expectations of male behaviour, young men did not let me share in their decision-making as closely as my female informants. Of course, young men also experienced conflicting situations in their life choices and discussed these with me, as the next chapter on disenchantment will show. However, I did not gain as deep an insight into the actual decision-making process they went through; for this reason, I decided to draw on data mostly collected among young women for this chapter.

5.2. Decision-Making in Taipei

Two weeks after our meeting at the restaurant, I met Mei-ling, this time in the company of her elder sister Hui-yu, at a busy night market close to their house. Hui-yu was excited. On the same evening, she had an appointment at the fortune-teller's whom Mei-ling had consulted previously. She intended to ask for advice in a conflicting decision that involved the future of her career as well as her relationship with her boyfriend. Hui-yu had pondered on leaving her secure job at the council of agriculture for several months to visit her boyfriend who was on a work and travel trip to Canada. He had been dissatisfied with his lack of career options and low salary as an insurance broker in Taiwan and hoped to be able to save some money working in Calgary. At the same time, Hui-yu also wanted to take a particular government examination which, if she passed, could secure her a more lucrative position. Hui-yu was unsure if it was feasible to align her travel plans with the exam preparations. Moreover, knowing that her parents would neither approve of her taking time off so early in her career, nor of her moving in with her boyfriend for the duration of the visit, she especially feared her father's reproaches if he learnt about her plans. He did not like her boyfriend as he had not yet established a promising career. Their relationship was a reason for constant arguments and resentment between Hui-yu and her father. Now that her boyfriend had decided to extend his stay abroad, she feared that he would only fall lower in her father's esteem. Hui-yu thus hoped that a consultation with the fortune-teller would provide her with some clarity regarding this decision.

After an hour had passed, Hui-yu returned to our meeting point, looking exhausted and sweaty, while still pondering the predictions the fortune-teller had made. She told us that he had confirmed that thanks to some very benevolent ancestors, her family was suited to working in the government. Upon hearing this, Mei-ling shrieked with excitement; the fortune-teller had predicted the same thing to her several weeks ago, not knowing they were sisters. In her eyes, this was more proof of the legitimacy of his claims. However, he also told Hui-yu that she would always only be mediocre in her current job and that her fate would be to work in tax. Somewhat paradoxically, he recommended she look for work in the private sector where she would be successful in the long run. While the fortune-teller supported Hui-yu's plan to take the government examination to increase her prospects in her current position at the council of agriculture, he encouraged her to delay the exam to the following year which would be more auspicious for her. Moreover, he did not recommend her to visit her boyfriend in Canada. However, as he could see that she was set on this plan, he would not elaborate on this matter any further but only advised her not to stay longer than five months. Mei-ling chuckled when she listened to the lengthy, slightly

confusing career advice the fortune-teller had given her sister and revealed that she had her doubts about how accurate his detailed recommendations were. He had recently advised her good friend to work at an important company. When she replied that she was working at the Bank of China, he had asked her if that *was* actually an important company. This might indicate, she claimed, that despite his young age, he was not especially well-versed in worldly things.

However, the fortune-teller also warned Hui-yu that her boyfriend had not found his path yet and that they might encounter problems in the future. When I asked Hui-yu if she would change her plans after hearing his warnings, she was adamant that the fortune-teller's advice would not make her reconsider her career decisions. However, when I talked to her a few weeks later, she had decided to postpone the preparations for the exam to the next year but she still wanted to go travelling. Even though her parents did not approve of her decision, she appeared to be relieved to have avoided the stressful examination this time and would see her boyfriend very soon.

Mei-ling and Hui-yu both appeared relieved to have received approval for decisions they had been prone to take from the outset but which they feared finalizing. Instead of wholeheartedly following the fortune-teller's advice, they picked the recommendations that aligned with their personal preferences. Mei-ling chose to ignore his advice that she would have a more prosperous career in the government and continued working in the private sector, while Hui-yu decided to ignore his warnings concerning her boyfriend's unstable professional future.

Consulting a fortune-teller or employing other divinatory methods to confirm one's decisions seemed to be rather common among my Taiwanese informants. A reluctance to make independent decisions, so it seemed, originated less in confusion about which route to choose than in insecurities about making self-informed decisions and assuming responsibility for their consequences. Hence, rather than seeking advice, most of the young Taiwanese I knew sought first and foremost a valid rationale for their choices when consulting divinatory specialists.

This kind of reassurance was not only necessary in decisions that might result in interpersonal conflicts or that challenge societal norms. Divination practices were also used to cope with inner conflicts which resulted from decisions that were made to maintain harmonious relationships within the family but which implied huge personal sacrifices. Despite young people's worries about living up to parental expectations, the pursuit of one's personal aspirations and, in this context, more autonomous decision-making, was a

growing concern among many highly educated young adults in Taipei. Yet, while many young Taiwanese in their early to mid-twenties appeared highly motivated to pursue personal ideals regardless of parental opposition, their determination often dwindled as they approached their thirties and they realized that following individual ideals would have immense consequences on their family life or partnership. The need for compromise or even the abandonment of certain aspirations in favour of marriage, childbirth or a career at home in Taiwan often caused inner turmoil. In this situation, as the next case of a young Taiwanese woman will illustrate, reassurance was sought so as to feel able to let go of one's dreams and adjust to the expectations of family members and spouses.

I was introduced to Ming-yan, a young consultant in her early thirties, by Shang-yan, her former colleague. She was unhappy in her current career and had decided to finally realize her long-held dream of pursuing a PhD degree in the US. She hoped that I could help her prepare for the mandatory English language exam she had to pass to obtain a place. However, it soon emerged that her family was not very supportive of her plan.

Ming-yan had married shortly before we met. Her husband had recently founded a tech-company for mobile phone applications and expected her to assist him in her free time. More importantly, he wanted them to start a family soon and tried to convince Ming-yan to have a baby before she began the PhD programme. Ming-yan confessed to me that she and her husband had very different lifestyles and hobbies. Sometimes, it was difficult to find a compromise. Initially, she was reluctant to start a relationship with him since she was hoping that she would find a partner who would match her character type better. Eventually, however, she gave in to his courting.

During our first meetings, Ming-yan appeared ambitious and driven but I soon noticed that under the pressure of her husband and in-laws her personal career aspirations were increasingly receding into the background. Over the following months, she fell behind in her preparations for the PhD applications and was increasingly consumed by other undertakings that swallowed up most of the couple's already scarce resources. Ming-yan explained that her husband had persuaded her to buy an apartment in the suburbs which, he thought, would be a good investment for their future. She was also still trying to have a baby as her husband and mother-in-law were increasing their pressure, warning her not to become too old to have a child. Her husband had even visited a temple to ask the gods for help in her difficulties to conceive. "Maybe," Ming-yan laughed, "the gods don't want me to have a baby right now." She felt torn between the expectations of her husband and mother-in-law that were difficult to integrate with her personal ambitions. Her husband,

however, had also promised that once his company pulled in higher sales, she would be able to pursue her PhD. For this reason, she claimed, she might have to defer her studies for a year but she had not abandoned her plans yet.

A few weeks later, Ming-yan called me to ask if I wanted to accompany her to the Xingtian Temple. This temple in the Zhongshan district of Taipei was devoted to *Guan Yu*, a god revered for his business skills and often asked for assistance in financial matters. Ming-yan had told me before that she did not often go to temples. Only when she felt insecure did she ask the gods for support. She argued that even though the reason behind this might be "psychological," she felt better after having prayed at the temple, knowing she could count on the gods' assistance.

Upon our arrival at the temple, heavy rain was pouring down as a harbinger of an approaching typhoon. However, Ming-yan was determined to follow through with her requests to *Guan Yu* and pulled me into the inner courtyard. We were not the only ones undeterred by the torrential rain. Amidst the crowd of worshippers and heavy incense fumes, Ming-yan revealed that she had to inquire of *Guan Yu* about the prospects for her husband's business which, over the last months, had consumed more and more space in her own life. Her husband had ultimately been successful in convincing her to delay her preparations for her PhD proposal to assist him in an application for a start-up competition that had been advertised by a renowned Taiwanese technology company. Now, she wanted to ask about their chances of success and appeal to *Guan Yu* for his support.

She drew a numbered fortune stick (*chou qian*) from a vessel next to the shrine and took two of the crescent-shaped wooden divination blocks (*jiao bei*) from a bowl. She then kneeled down to tell *Guan Yu* her concerns together with her name and address.[11] Next, she tossed the blocks and was delighted to see them coming to the ground, one facing up and one down, meaning that she had received a "yes" from *Guan Yu*. This confirmed she could proceed with the next step of the ritual. We then went to a chest of drawers on one side of the temple that contained oracle-like messages stored in drawers labelled with numbers that corresponded to the ones found on the fortune stick.

On reading her message, Ming-yan feared that she had not received especially promising advice and she nervously decided to ask for the opinion of an expert. Thus, we queued up for a consultation with one of the Daoist monks who volunteered to interpret messages for worshippers. The young monk who greeted us could quickly dispel Ming-yan's worries and

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11 I was repeatedly told that this part of the divination procedure had to be taken very seriously, as giving an incomplete address could result in a delay in one's request being granted.

assured her that the god's advice could also be interpreted as encouragement but she would have to work hard and steadily on the new business. Ming-yan appeared relieved by the monk seemingly resolving her concerns about the potentially inauspicious stick. However, it was difficult to discern whether her relief was due to the prospect of forthcoming business successes or that, indirectly, she had obtained justification for shelving her study plans.

Stevan Harrell notes that despite openly expressed doubts about the precision of divination techniques, most of his Taiwanese informants considered it important to know their fate (Harrell, 1987 p. 97). He further argues that the concept of fate is a welcomed rationale in cases where general societal values do not apply. Although in theory, he claims, fate can only be predicted by a divination expert, "practically, it is more than anything a kind of post-hoc rationalization, a catchall explanation when others fail, a way of acknowledging that even the most moral and diligent human beings cannot necessarily guarantee their own success in life" (p. 101). However, my informants did not seem to be satisfied with having a "post-hoc rationalization" available if their plans failed. Like Ming-yan, many preferred to hear the opinion of an expert with a certain accredited competence *before* finalizing a decision. In this sense, the idea of basing a choice on the assurance that one was not working against fate seemed to guide many decisions. Accordingly, receiving an expert's confirmation that her business would soon flourish may have given Ming-yan a strong reason validating her decision to abandon her personal career wishes.

When I returned to Taipei nine months later, Ming-yan had indeed quit her job as a consultant and worked full-time for her husband's company. She told me that her husband still maintained that as soon as the company generated revenue, Ming-yan could travel to wherever she wanted. However, until then, she sighed, she had to stay put in Taipei and help him.

The cases in this chapter have so far shown that divinatory practices were quite popular among young women in Taipei to resolve conflicting situations. However, why did they perceive these decisions as so fraught with conflict in the first place, if their educational and professional careers had thus far shown that they were quite successful in navigating the high expectations of their environment? A comparison with observations made among young Japanese might offer some answers.

Similar fears of failure and insecurity in autonomous decision-making were observed among Japanese adolescents and young adults who came of age during the increasing economic uncertainty caused by the recession (Cook, 2013; Brinton, 2011; Kawanishi,

2004). Yuko Kawanishi argues that more and more Japanese youths suffer from a "lack [of] autonomy, endurance, and self-motivation" which, she claims, persists into adulthood and makes them incapable of tackling "even trivial problems" (Kawanishi, 2004 p. 25). She locates the reasons for young people's low self-esteem in an increasingly tense societal atmosphere caused by economic crisis. This general insecurity, she claims, creates anxieties they cannot be resolved independently by young Japanese (p. 24). The young Japanese high school graduates Brinton interviewed also appeared to be increasingly hopeless of achieving entry to a stable career due to the insecure economic climate; they were drifting between lethargy and complete withdrawal from society (Brinton, 2011).

Likewise, in Taiwan, economic stagnation and low wages have made it increasingly difficult for young people to establish careers. Even though my informants were not as paralyzed by anxieties as those cases described by Brinton and Kawanishi, their reluctance to take economic risks and their insecurity in assuming responsibility for important decisions were clearly palpable. Hui-yu's parents feared that her boyfriend might not succeed in establishing a career in Taiwan after his return from Canada; they also disapproved of her decision to put her own career on hold to visit him. Even though she appeared resolute to pursue her plan, she hoped for the fortune-teller's reassurance in her decision to act against her parents' wishes. Ming-yan, however, opted to support her husband in establishing his career instead of creating additional financial insecurities by pursuing her wish to study abroad. Her decision appeared to be economically less risky as well as in line with gendered expectations. Yet, at the same time she jeopardized an opportunity to realise her dream of studying for a PhD degree. Gaining reassurance that her sacrifice was not in vain seemed to reinforce her decision to shelve her own plans.

Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber note that humans "systematically look for arguments to justify their beliefs or their actions" (Mercier and Sperber, 2011 p. 72). Individuals thus strive to base their decisions on a convincing rationale that increases their confidence in their choices and also to convince others of the legitimacy of their decisions (Mercier and Sperber, 2011; Shafir et al., 1993 p. 33). Unsurprisingly, Eldar Shafir and colleagues found that selecting from options is highly guided by the context they are presented in. Accordingly, the most compelling reasons on which to base a choice were those that best conformed to the standards and rules provided by the particular situation and social environment (Shafir et al., 1993). The issue they point out is that choices individuals make are much more dependent on the particular context than on immutable preferences or cost-benefit analyses. In the study mentioned above, Shafir and colleagues do not differentiate between the cultural backgrounds of subjects (ibid.). However, their findings

may allow one to suppose that particular cultural beliefs will have an important impact on context-based choices.

In the introduction, I discussed several studies that compare cross-cultural differences in decision-making. These studies deal with the question of how cultural variations in the perception of the environment affect reasoning and choice. Of particular interest in this context is the research conducted by Nisbett and colleagues (Nisbett et al., 2001; Nisbett, 2003). As mentioned, they found that participants from East Asian cultural backgrounds tend to pay more attention to the context than their Western counterparts in the assessment of a given situation. These perceptual differences, Nisbett argues, allowed participants to draw different inferences about certain events which are ultimately reflected in their choices. Accordingly, what is commonly considered a convincing rationale within one cultural group need not seem convincing to members of another one (Nisbett, 2003 pp. 165-190). This stronger reference to societal and cosmological interconnections Nisbett points out might give some indication of why many of my female Taiwanese informants felt highly conflicted if their choices were not consistent with the expectations of their families and wider social environment and why, in certain cases, they needed supernatural reassurance that they did not obstruct their predestined paths to success.

From these studies it follows that: a) people's choices are highly context depending; and, b) the scope of the context that influences choices is subject to cultural variation. Notions of the convincing power of a rationale can thus be expected to vary within and between cultural groups. Moreover, Shafir and colleagues note, rationales have to serve a range of different purposes: "We often search for a convincing rationale for the decisions that we make, whether for inter-personal purposes, so that we can explain to others the reasons for our decision, or for intra-personal motives, so that we may feel confident of having made the 'right' choice" (Shafir et al., 1993 p. 33). Many of my young Taiwanese informants appeared not only to search for a working rationale to convince their immediate social environment of their choice but, first and foremost, they did so to overcome feelings of doubt that accompanied a decision. This need for a rationale to erase indecisiveness and tormenting doubts might be closely interconnected with the insecurities, discussed above, that were roused by societal uncertainties.

Further, Shafir and colleagues assert that concerns about the benefits of certain choices as well as the risks involved in them can be rationalized based on widely shared assumptions and beliefs about the state of the world (pp. 33-34). In the Taiwanese context, this was especially reflected in young people's references to notions of fate. In cases in which young

Taiwanese felt particularly torn, divination was considered a legitimate way to substantiate a rationale. This does not necessarily offer any conclusion with regard to their genuine belief in these practices, which they often questioned openly to me. It does, however, offer an important insight into the urban environment of Taipei that provides a context in which divination is considered a legitimate means to dispel doubts. In my conversations with the mothers of my informants, the topic of fortune-telling was often addressed. It appeared common to consult fortune-tellers when children were young to inquire about their fate and receive recommendations about how a child could be raised and avoid the ensnarements of fate. In some cases, my informants confirmed that they were made to follow these recommendations meticulously. Most of my informants, however, gave rather vague answers when I asked them about their actual belief in the divination methods they used. Some, like Ming-yan, even alluded to the "psychological" reasons behind their behaviour. Nevertheless, the ubiquitous preoccupation with fate in Taiwanese society definitely influenced why those arguments could pass as powerful rationales for their choices in the first place. It appears that when faced with ambiguous choices, obtaining reassurance for not pursuing a path that fateful events would sooner or later block was a decisive step in their decision-making.

5.3. Decision-Making in Beijing

The conference room of the luxurious hotel in Beijing's city centre was buzzing with students in business attire who, brandishing their CVs, rushed between the different desks where representatives of international universities were handing out information brochures. Xin-wen looked nervous but determined as she pushed through the groups gathered at each table. She was looking for the representatives of an American university with whom she had arranged a consultation session in advance. Weeks before, Xin-wen had expressed her high hopes for this international studies fair. Now that she would soon graduate and her grades looked promising, the realization of her long-held dream to do a PhD in the US seemed to be within close reach. However, each of the students in the crowd looked just as determined to make a good impression. Xin-wen was not deterred by the competition and, accustomed to asserting her rightful place, she was soon involved in a lively conversation with the representatives and eagerly absorbed their advice on the application and selection processes.

Xin-wen was studying for a Master's in economics at a renowned university in Beijing when I met her in spring 2013. Her parents still lived in her home city of Harbin in

northern China. The years leading to the completion of her degree had been difficult since she could only see her parents, to whom she was very close, a few times each year. Xin-wen was very ambitious; often she spent vacations at school, studying for exams or improving her English.

Xin-wen had not always been a diligent student. At high school, she caused her parents much trouble and refused to concentrate on her studies. At that time, her arguments with her ambitious mother had escalated to such a degree that her parents decided to send her to boarding school. She still thought of this period of her life with unhappiness. At the new school, she had suffered from isolation from her friends and from her classmates' bullying. Recalling these experiences still brought tears to her eyes. When she told her mother about the bullying, she advised her to be strong and learn to rely on herself. Xin-wen took this advice to heart and, studying diligently, she was eventually accepted by a Beijing university.

Although Xin-wen reckoned that her opportunities of being accepted on a PhD programme at a Chinese university were greater, she dreamt of experiencing life in a Western country. Her parents were supportive of her plans but they were also adamant that their financial assistance was limited. Especially in light of the vast expense for luxury items that would be required for Xin-wen's future dowry, they worried that they would not be able to finance her education *and* her wedding expenses in the future. If she pursued a PhD abroad, they warned, she might not be able to meet the material requirements for marriage. Xin-wen did not seem very worried about this. A few months before, she had started dating an American student so Chinese marriage customs were not on her mind. Besides hoping that she could secure a scholarship, she was confident that her boyfriend would help her settle in the US. Living far away from her parents, she was relatively free to do what she liked and had already moved in with him partially. Certain that this relationship would last, Xin-wen wanted to apply for a university in his home city.

However, she had her own concerns about leaving China. Her parents were getting older and her father's health was deteriorating since he had been diagnosed with diabetes. Despite her long absence from home, she was close to her parents and she knew that they hoped that, one day, she might relocate to her home province. Nevertheless, she felt confident about taking the financial and emotional risks connected with her plans as she was determined to make the most out of her education to realize her dream of becoming an academic.

Julie Y. Chu has observed among aspiring migrants in Fuzhou that the hope for a better future, fuelled by tales of individuals who had supposedly achieved a better life abroad,

generated a willingness to take substantial risks that could even endanger the livelihoods of entire families (Chu, 2010). She has illustrated that despite her informants' relatively scarce resources and the high risks connected to illegal migration to Western countries, they invested their entire savings in migration projects that offered only vague promises of success. Accounts of failed returnees and media coverage of health dangers and formal punishment experienced by migrants should have conveyed a discouraging message of the disproportionate high risk included in illegal migration. Yet, her informants showed surprisingly little concern about potential negative consequences of their endeavour. "[L]onging and belonging," Chu notes, was "about inhabiting the world in a particular cosmopolitan and future-oriented way -that is, as a valorized subject of a modernising and globalizing China" (p. 12).

Although Xin-wen's study plans did not involve risky, illegal endeavours and she was also from a more affluent background than Chu's informants, like them she exuded a determination and boldness that I observed among many young Chinese who were certain that a better future for themselves and their families was possible. It was this very yearning to belong to a "modern" and "globalizing" China addressed by Chu which shaped Xin-wen's orientation on the future and encouraged her to take relatively high risks. "I want to experience things!" she once passionately burst out as she explained her vision for her future. Her urge for adventure as well as her wish to excel allowed her to accept the risk of remaining unmarried should her relationship fail.

It was thus understandable that when we met at the student fair that morning, she was nervous about making a good impression. Gaining a place of study and, if possible, a scholarship would not only determine her professional but also her private future. She was thus disheartened when the advisor of her first choice of university in Denver - the home town of her boyfriend - said that she should not count on getting one of the highly competitive university scholarships; she would need sufficient funding from an external source.

Despite this discouraging news, Xin-wen was not willing to give up on her plan. Her boyfriend also guaranteed his support. He suggested that if Xin-wen could secure a place at Denver University, they could both move into his parental home. While he worked, Xin-wen could study. She was aware of the risk that she was taking, dependent on her boyfriend throughout the programme – but this was a risk she was willing to take.

Even though not all of her relatives had instantly accepted Xin-wen's boyfriend, her parents had been tolerant of her choice and agreed to her leaving the country with him.

Xin-wen valued her parents' approval but was determined to lead a different life than they did, especially when it came to her romantic relationship. Her mother had warned her that she should adopt a more rational attitude towards romance; her mother feared that Xin-wen might be disappointed by the realities of everyday life as a couple. Nonetheless, Xin-wen decided to pursue her romance:

> "I just want to follow my heart. If I have a feeling for this guy, I will go for it. […] Love will last for a long time, I choose to believe this. I don't know if it's right or wrong but I just don't want to go through my parents' life; to repeat my mum's life. I want to be different. I don't know: does it exist or not? But I want to try -at least, I will try."

Even though Xin-wen was not blind to the financial concerns of her parents, or to their warning not to rush into a relationship with her foreign boyfriend, she was self-confident in her decision-making and risk-taking. From adolescence onwards, Xin-wen had been highly self-reliant and independent in dealing with her schoolwork and social relationships. This had endowed her with the self-reliance she now demonstrated in making decisions about her personal and professional future. Living far away from her parents and being able to keep certain details of her personal life secret from them certainly contributed to the relative ease with which she made decisions. I observed that this was a common pattern among my Beijing informants, especially those who lived independently in the city. Letting parents know about decisions only after they had been made limited parents' scope of interference. This was also true of another female informant who had moved in with her boyfriend long before her parents even knew about his existence. When her mother visited her in Beijing, she took her boyfriend to the station to welcome her. Her mother, delighted by the fact that her daughter had finally found a partner, did not protest when she later revealed that they were already sharing an apartment. By applying such tactics, relationship or career choices could first be "tested" until they were revealed to the family. In Taiwan, this was largely impossible due to the close spatial contact of family members. This might also explain why my Chinese informants, like my next case Sun-yi, tended to face less severe inner conflicts; they thus appeared to be less dependent on external advice to justify their motives.

Sun-yi was introduced to me by a mutual friend. At first she was reluctant to participate in my research as she was rather introverted. However, we soon started meeting regularly and she was eager to help me understand "her society," as she put it. Sun-yi's parents lived in a city in Shandong. She was able to see them a few times each year during her vacations but the distance made more regular meetings impossible. She was glad about this as she soon

ran into arguments with her parents when they spent more time together. Even though Sun-yi did not have a partner, her mother was pressuring her to have a child soon. Sun-yi was in her early thirties but her mother was so afraid that she might miss the right age for childbirth that she even offered to raise the future grandchild herself while Sun-yi pursued her career. Sun-yi rejected her mother's offer - if she wanted a child, she would prefer to raise it herself. However, the atmosphere within the family was currently rather tense.

Sun-yi led a very independent life in Beijing. She had studied at a university in Hong Kong and then started a successful career in the media. After a few years during which she had saved a considerable amount of money, she decided to make a career change and applied for graduate studies in sociology in the US. This decision implied an immense risk as she had to quit her well-paid job and had spent her entire savings, enough to buy an apartment, on the degree. She admitted that many of her peers may have found her behaviour strange. However, she was convinced she was making the right choice. On hearing that she had been accepted by a famous American university, her parents also agreed to her plan. Although they were conservative with regard to marriage, they were rather liberal when it came to her educational choices, she explained.

Now, a few months after her return to China, she was contemplating which step to take next. On the one hand, she would like to study for a PhD. On the other hand, she felt it was time to resume her career. She had received a tempting offer from an international company where she could start working at the end of the year. During our regular meetings, she reflected on her choices. She felt torn between the prospect of returning to her studies and the advantages a career in Beijing offered. As she was not reliant on parental support or the preferences of a partner, her considerations mostly revolved around the kind of future she could imagine for herself and how she could finance her plans. She said clearly that she would eventually return to China where her assets - fluent English and a degree from a Western university -would guarantee her a top career.

After pondering for a few weeks, she decided to take up the job offer in Beijing and postpone her plans to study for a PhD for a few years. She had to save some money before studying again, she explained. Her new job was not stressful and paid very well so she could imagine working in it for a while. However, this did not mean that she would follow her parents' wish for her to marry. She was determined not to lower her expectations of a potential partner and was adamant that she would not enter marriage just for the sake of social prestige. Sun-yi did not feel any obligation to please her mother by agreeing to a "mediocre" match. She had several male friends she spent her time with but she had not

yet found a man who she could imagine sharing her life with. Until this happened, she was determined to enjoy city life with her friends.

Like Xin-wen, Sun-yi longed for an adventurous and cosmopolitan lifestyle that she realized through studies abroad. However, her long-term plans also focused on a life in China where she expected her career opportunities to be most promising. She had taken a considerable risk in quitting her safe job and spending her savings to realize her dream of an international education - she was willing to do the same again to study a PhD. Sun-yi was aware that not everybody approved of her lifestyle. Studying the humanities was often regarded as less useful than subjects that promised a high-earning career in business in Chinese society. Even though her parents had a rather liberal attitude in this regard, returning to university also made it more unlikely that Sun-yi would enter the more conventional path of marriage they envisioned for her. However, as she personally bore the financial risks which her studies involved and she did not expect to rely on her parents' support, she was relatively unrestrained by their opinion and made her decisions without relying on external validation.

Both Sun-yi and Xin-wen conceded that asking their parents for advice about their careers was not helpful. Most parents, Sun-yi explained, had grown up in a rather "closed system" and could thus not give them any career advice. Instead, Xin-wen and Sun-yi placed their trust in the hope that their diligent work ethic and their willingness to take personal risks would pay off in the future. Since childhood, this had been their experience -their strenuous years of studying had enabled them to attend renowned universities and, in Sun-yi's case, to attain highly coveted career opportunities.

It thus appears that experiencing success in the education system as well as learning independent problem-solving at boarding school had a decisive influence on my Chinese informants' self-reliance in decision-making; this made them less dependent on external validation in risky decisions. This resonates with Bandura's theory saying that experiences of success strengthen the belief in one's efficacy and encourage the taking of risks in the future (Bandura, [1995] 1999). Moreover, their parents' encouragement of independence and self-reliance (especially apparent in Xin-wen's case) was also manifest in their nuanced sense of responsibility as adults. Hansen and Pang note that the strong sense of personal responsibility that young Chinese exhibit can be attributed to the fact that the socioeconomic and political reforms of recent decades have increasingly placed the responsibility to earn a livelihood on the individual. This development, they claim, has also transformed the way young people conceive of personal choices and responsibility (Hansen

and Pang, 2010 pp. 51-52). Likewise, Arthur Kleinman and colleagues remark, "[a] new understanding of meritocracy has led many individuals to accept personal responsibility for their failure in career development" (Kleinman et al., 2011 p. 4). While the young Chinese Hansen and Pang interviewed were considerate of their parents' opinions, "notions of freedom," "personal development" and "the importance of their own personal choices" were important goals to which they aspired (Hansen and Pang, 2010 pp. 51-52). As the case studies above illustrate, increasing notions of freedom and the ideal of personal development were also important aspects that my Chinese informants aspired to. However, as observed by Hansen and Pang, this does not mean that they strove for highly individualized lifestyles since, at the same time, they did not dismiss their obligations towards their parents.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter has provided examples that suggest that the experiences young women had while coming of age in the different socioeconomic and political environments of China and Taiwan also influence the degree of self-reliance with which important decisions about their private and professional future are made. Whereas the young Taiwanese women I met were reluctant to make important decisions and take risks without obtaining reassurance from a higher authority, young Chinese women showed more confidence in relying on their individual judgment. Moreover, they also appeared to assume more easily personal responsibility for taking comparatively high risks. Growing up more autonomously than their Taiwanese counterparts, they had to make everyday choices without immediate parental advice from a relative early age. This might have contributed to the relative ease with which they approached important decisions later in life. Further, usually living independently from parents, my female Chinese informants were less exposed to immediate parental evaluations and criticism of their choices compared to many Taiwanese women who lived at home, with siblings or in close proximity to other family members. This may also help explain why young Chinese women were in less need of external reassurance when facing conflicting choices. However, this does not mean that young Chinese were inconsiderate of their parents' opinions. Despite the high value young Chinese women attributed to independent decision-making, in important matters they strove to achieve consensus with parents. Yet, given their relatively stable position of power due to their successes in the educational system or through professional careers, their opinion had considerable weight in negotiations with parents.

Like my female Chinese informants, young Taiwanese women also increasingly idealized personal development and independence. However, as they were exposed to a more traditional family ideology and experienced direct criticism and tacit resentment from family members at home if they did not live up to certain ideals, many decided to abandon or amend their personal aspirations to maintain family harmony.

Increasing insecurity about the future and an increasing lack of trust in one's abilities to achieve important markers of adulthood might have contributed to the reluctance and comparably low self-esteem with which young Taiwanese women approached pivotal decisions. Their lack of confidence, as the case studies above make clear, was closely tied to their prospects in Taiwan's stagnating economy. Similar to young people's experiences in Japan in the 1990s, although work and life course expectations remain unchanged, the economic reality of Taiwan today does not allow one to reach important milestones such as financial independence and marriage within the socially accepted time frame (Brinton, 2011; Cook, 2013). Cook notes that due to their precarious employment situation, young Japanese men feared having to give up on their career aspirations or on their plans to have a family (Cook, 2013). The fear of failing "no matter what they did" was also palpable among my Taiwanese informants (p. 30). This overpowering fear of failure seems to be the main factor which, reinforced by a prominent societal discourse on the younger generation's lack of willpower and stamina, stifled young people's agency. Like those young Japanese who felt less and less adequate to compete on the labour market and increasingly withdrew from important decisions, helplessness translated into a low sense of self-efficacy also among young Taiwanese.

In order to overcome doubts about their decisions, young Taiwanese women in particular resort to divination methods that seemed to convey a certain sense of security. The cases of Mei-ling, Hui-yu and Ming-yan show that divinatory methods are used by young Taiwanese to support different kinds of decisions that either conform to or contest societal conventions. Divination helped reassure Hui-yu in taking a risk and her sister, Mei-ling, as well as Ming-yan felt justified in not pursuing their romantic interests or personal career aspirations. Without the external validation of their "safe" choices, Mei-ling and Ming-yan might have felt like betraying the emancipated ideals they advocated in other areas of their lives. In all cases, divination helped create powerful rationales that seemed to support the biases of my young informants.

Mei-ling, her sister Hui-yu and the slightly older Ming-yan are representative of many of my Taiwanese female informants. While their family backgrounds differentiated -Mei-ling and

Hui-yu had very protective parents, whereas Ming-yan already lived with her husband and appeared not to be on good terms with her parents, the ways in which they dealt with conflicting events was rather similar and reminiscent of many cases I observed. The same is true of the Chinese informants introduced in this chapter. Xin-wen appeared far closer to her parents than Sun-yi but in their attitude towards their filial obligations and the compromises they were willing to make in pursuing their aspirations, their assertiveness and willpower were representative of many, if not most, of my female Chinese informants.

Although Chinese informants seemed to be familiar with the Chinese concept of fate, they did not mention it as important in considering important decisions. One may ask whether this different attitude to divination practices is related to communist campaigns against "feudal beliefs" during the Cultural Revolution. In any case, my observation that the Chinese concept of fate was rarely used by my Beijing informants to explain certain incidents might point to their having a different attitude to the notion of fate and destiny. The topic of religion or divination usually emerged when I asked about it. However, several of my female informants told me that as adolescents and undergraduate students, they had a keen interest in Western signs of the zodiac. Some still had subscriptions on *weibo* or other social networks where they were sent their personal horoscope every day. However, they rarely referred to these horoscopes and it appeared as though they mostly applied to romantic matters. Moreover, such online services offering Western horoscopes were also common in Taiwan but were not an important topic among my informants there either.

In Beijing, stories about visiting fortune-tellers or temples were mostly set in rural home towns and they were told in a way that clearly demarcated the story teller's personal convictions from the "backward" beliefs of the countryside. I remember a conversation with Xing when he told me, obviously amused, how he had visited a ritual specialist with his grandmother in his parents' rural home town. He introduced the topic by emphasizing: "My grandma is very superstitious -*very.*" His grandmother thought that some serious health problems from which Xing suffered could be attributed to a spell cast on him. The specialist performed certain rituals to free him from the supposed spell. As Xing explained, "it's not scientific at all." He attributed his subsequent recovery to the Western medicine he took. However, he complained, the traditional healer "took the credit" for it. Moreover, "another funny thing" Xing continued, was that his grandmother, he believed, took him for the reincarnation of a certain god famous for his intellect (*Wen Qu Xing*). Each year she went to the temple and asked for his success. When Xing was accepted by a prestigious university, his grandmother attributed this to her visits to the temple. He explained: "I think, I didn't tell her, but I think if I am that god, I wouldn't have to study at all! I could

just sit at home, eat crisps, watch television and then go to Qinghua University. I can get one hundred every time. [..] I would never try to convince her to believe me, because it's useless, because she believes in this way."

Other Chinese informants who talked about their experiences at temples and with fortune-tellers often did so with the same disbelieving and amused undertone as Xing. I rarely heard similar rationalizations of religious beliefs from my Taiwanese informants. Though they conceded, like Ming-yan, that their consultation with the gods might have a "psychological" effect, they remained vaguer about their beliefs. It is difficult to assess whether this way of talking about religious beliefs and divination was indicative of how the young Chinese I met personally felt about these matters, or, as they were talking to a Western researcher, perhaps they were responding to a certain notion of modernity that excludes superstitious beliefs. Xing especially liked to be regarded as particularly open-minded and Western and these stories were clearly told to entertain me.

Apart from the different ways in which my informants employed religious arguments to form convincing rationales, they also had rather different perceptions of risk. My Taiwanese informants were very reluctant to make decisions that could also adversely affect their families and partners. Their Chinese peers were however more confident about making decisions that involved family resources or which risked their opportunities for marriage. Young Chinese women, similar to Pedersen's Mongolian informants, appeared to feel justified in their risk-taking by a collective hopefulness which was sponsored by party propaganda forecasting a better future (Pedersen, 2012). In believing that personal success was more dependent on their willingness to take risks and work hard than on societal developments beyond their sphere of influence, their attitude to the future was significantly different from that of their Taiwanese counterparts. Self-agency in decision-making, so it seems, was closely interconnected with the societal context in both China and Taiwan. While the positive economic climate and government-supported belief in meritocracy encouraged young people's sense of agency in China, young Taiwanese women felt greater insecurity in their decision-making that was exacerbated by concerns about Taiwan's economy and fears of disappointing parental expectations. Due to their greater confidence in making decisions, my female Chinese informants seemed to be less conflicted and hence less in need of seeking external validation for their choices.

In this chapter, I have mostly drawn on case studies of women so it is difficult to assess whether the differences observed in decision-making are exclusive to them. The observations I made among young men in both societies suggest that the general

tendencies I observed in the risk-taking and acceptance of responsibility among women are also reflected in their decisions. Young Taiwanese men also frequented fortune-tellers and applied other divinatory methods. However, I had the impression that they did not as often allude to concepts of fate or religion in our conversations. Perhaps they were not entirely open about such issues with me as particular notions of masculinity prevented them from addressing these topics. In any case, my male Chinese informants, like Xing, rejected religious and divinatory practices more firmly than their Taiwanese peers.

Young people's sense of personal agency in decision-making and their attitude towards risk-taking was hence closely linked to the societal climate of either despair or anticipation of a better future. Moreover, young Taiwanese women appeared to also let their decisions be guided by concepts of fate and destiny which was less common among young Chinese and which could be attributed to the different religious environments they grew up in. The decisions of both sets of informants were thus strongly affected by the particular socioeconomic context they were embedded within. A willingness to assume responsibility for one's choices was highly dependent on which kind of future one imagined.

Chapter Six - Disenchantment and Escape

6.1. Introduction

Li-ling sighed with relief as she sank into her seat and kicked off her black heels. For the last few hours she had been stuck in a meeting, she complained. While she was trying to get as comfortable as her tight business dress would allow, she explained that she did not like appointments that required her to dress formally. Since her return from a work and study tour abroad that had lasted for a few years, Li-ling was now working for a state company in Beijing. Initially, she had not liked the work but since she was sent on business trips abroad more often, she had started to enjoy it. Nevertheless, she planned to apply for a PhD programme in the UK as she was longing to return to the free lifestyle she had led abroad. When I asked her how her application was progressing, Li-ling pulled a face. This whole summer, she admitted, she had been consumed with relationship problems. A few months before, Li-ling had rekindled contact with a male friend from Shanghai whom she had known for years. They had started to talk regularly via a popular chat application and, over several months, they developed romantic feelings for each other. However, when the man requested Li-ling quit her job to move to Shanghai for him, she drew a line and ended the burgeoning romance. It annoyed her, she argued, that he had not even considered coming to Beijing for her where she had a successful career. Li-ling lamented that, in her opinion, men would always try to push women into marriage. "They have this illusion," she claimed, "that having a wife is like having a live-in maid. There is always somebody for them to wash their laundry and cook them food." However, more serious than her concern about not becoming a housewife seemed to be her suspicion that this man had a liking for fragile, innocent-looking women; Li-ling feared being measured against this ideal and could not identify with it. She found out that the former girlfriend of her date had been a rather feeble, fragile type. Li-ling compared her to the character Lin Daiyu from the famous 18th century novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*hong lou meng*) who was praised for her beauty and refined composure. Li-ling, in contrast, regarded herself as a strong, confident woman. However, she feared that men who were initially attracted to her free spirit would revert to their more conservative preferences as soon as marriage was approaching. She claimed to feel lucky to have seen through the young man's strategy of making her as needy and dependent as his ex-partner before moving to be with him. "Men construct the social norm," she criticized. By claiming that women would be "leftover" if they were not married by the age of twenty-seven, Li-ling continued stridently, men placed pressure on women to settle for marriage early.

Her ambition to pursue a PhD, however, appeared to have been strengthened by this experience. When I met Li-ling a few months later, she confirmed that she could not wait to leave the country to continue her education. She knew that she might eventually have to return to Beijing, as her job opportunities looked best in the Chinese capital, but her parents had agreed to support her plans. "My parents were worried about it [marriage] two or three years ago," she explained, but they had realized it would be difficult for her to find a husband in China due to her high education and the relatively conservative mindset of many young men who preferred women of lower educational status. For this reason, her parents had promised to support her, whether she chose to marry or do a PhD abroad.

The previous chapter described the impact that societal factors have on individual decision-making. I illustrated how collective views of the future, which emerged from the specific socioeconomic and politico-ideological landscapes of China and Taiwan, influence young women's perceptions of their choices and their willingness to assume responsibility and risk.

This chapter shows that despite these societal differences, many of my Chinese and Taiwanese informants shared feelings of frustration and disenchantment as they approached their late twenties. Those who were unable or unwilling to meet normative expectations of marriage and who decided to pursue other goals often experienced rejection and criticism by their social environment. High achieving young adults felt especially frustrated by the change in parameters measuring success. Whereas before, their diligence and endurance in the education system and their early career had been praised, they now faced mounting criticism of their unwillingness to compromise on their professional aspirations to pursue marriage. Young women were particularly disappointed that their hard-won academic and professional successes were receding into the background as they were increasingly measured according to their marital status. However, young men also felt frustrated by expectations to settle for less attractive jobs in order to fulfil expectations in terms of their future roles as fathers and husbands. The realization that - apart from the dominant script of family and marriage - there were no alternative life designs available to them often fed into their desire to escape to a social environment that offered them greater freedom of choice.

Chinese and Taiwanese parents place an equal emphasis on the education of sons and daughters and for this reason, young men and women alike could gain recognition through educational successes well into young adulthood. However, expectations on children become more gendered once they have completed their education and marriage emerges as the next biographical milestone. As they approach their mid-twenties women in particular

are increasingly measured by a highly gendered set of criteria that determines their potential on the marriage market. This change often happens so quickly that they hardly find the time to adjust to these new expectations that frequently collide with previously set goals in their careers (Zhang and Sun, 2014 pp. 123-124).

In her study of Chinese student migrants, Anni Kajanus has observed similar patterns in the gendered notions of success within the families of her informants. She found that parents often direct their daughters toward jobs that can be integrated with their future tasks as wives and mothers (Kajanus, 2015 p. 95). Moreover, as the cultural preference for hypergamous marriages remains unbroken, the higher women perform in their careers, the weaker their prospects become of finding a partner of higher professional and economic status. In this context, Kajanus stresses that "[o]n some geographical scales (for example, parent-child ties in the family) gender has little influence on the educational aspirations and achievements of sons and daughters. But on other scales - namely, the job market and marriage - gender matters" (p. 100).

Men also struggled when the pressure to marry set in. Young Chinese and Taiwanese men often complained that their opportunities to find a wife were too tightly linked to their professional performance which put them under high stress to succeed right after they had finished their educations. The young men introduced in this chapter felt trapped in an increasingly desperate situation as their private and professional aspirations were difficult to integrate with meeting ideals that would confer social status upon them.

Like Li-ling, many of the young Chinese and Taiwanese women who felt disenchanted with their opportunities to pursue their academic and professional aspirations beyond marital age did not have the urge to completely abandon their social environments. Instead, they were considering taking "time-out" during a phase of life that many considered one of the most stressful times -the short time window when marriage and childbirth were overbearing expectations. The young people whose story this chapter tells seem to yearn for an opportunity to make life choices at their own pace or, more rarely, evade them altogether. They stand out from their peers by way of their very clear ideas about their future and their unwillingness to make compromises. They are also exceptional in their readiness to take enormous risks to realize their dreams. Disenchanted by a society that does not offer them much space to choose a life design with which they could identify, they opted to escape, at least for a while, to pursue their aspirations in Western societies that they imagined to be less restrictive and judgmental of their choices.

The case studies in this chapter also point to an increasing flexibility in parents to grant their children these (temporary) escapes. Especially mothers, it seems, could identify with their daughters' problems and were considerate of alternative life plans that involved marriage to foreign men or the exploration of career opportunities abroad. Whereas the previous chapters have illustrated the difficulties that young Taiwanese men and women faced in breaking free from their close-knit families, this chapter shows that many found a way of nearing this goal by pursuing an education, a career or even marriage abroad. Even though not all of the young adults introduced here realized their aspirations, their belief that they had found a route to escape from an environment they perceived as confining at that particular time in their lives provided them with confidence.

Li-ling's passionate critique of the societal pressure which single women are often exposed to in China made me think of my Taiwanese informant Ma-ling. I described in the first chapter that Ma-ling felt increasingly pressured to dress and behave more femininely to increase her chances of finding a spouse. Not only her parents and relatives pressured her to conform to a standard ideal of femininity; her female colleagues also advised her to exhibit a more demure and thus gender appropriate behaviour. In the course of my fieldwork, Ma-ling felt increasingly desperate about her situation, especially as everybody around her appeared to be happily in love. One night as we were strolling through a department store, she confessed that she felt especially pressured by her friends' presence on social media. They were constantly updating their status and location on their social network profiles. Some of her friends' favourite pastime was to discover new restaurants with their boyfriends. They would then post online pictures of the food and statements about the fun they had had with their partners. Being single, she felt under pressure to find a partner with whom she could share such activities. She confessed that when she saw fashionable girls in department stores who seemed to revel in cosmetics and clothes, she asked herself why she was so different and not as gentle and smiling. Ma-ling enjoyed doing combat sports and outdoor pursuits. Due to their masculine connotations, she mostly practised these activities with male Taiwanese and Western friends. She thus feared that she was drifting away from other Taiwanese women in her interests. As her career as a web designer had stalled, she was contemplating leaving the country for a while. In the coming year, she told me decisively, she planned to travel to the US where she wanted to look for work, hoping to lead a life that was less constrained by the worry of not fitting in.

Like Li-ling, Ma-ling had a master's degree from a Western university and spoke several languages. She had acquired a certain "cosmopolitan competence" and appeared to have attained all important markers of educational success; however, she was increasingly

measured by her position on the marriage scale (Vertovec and Cohen, 2002 pp. 13-14). Both young women feared that it was the very traits of their characters -their willpower and determination -that had enabled them to realize academic successes that were now preventing them from being considered suitable marriage partners. Disenchantment with their opportunities was thus closely tied to burgeoning feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Both young women hoped that going abroad would reinstall the confidence and self-affirmation they lacked in their current environments. There are close parallels between their future hopes and the international aspirations that have been observed among young female professionals in other parts of East Asia.

Since the early 1980s, Kelsky argues, cosmopolitan aspirations among Japanese women have soared; this is a direct reaction to their disenchantment with local gender structures and values that suppress their free development and success on the labour market. As a consequence, a form of internationalism has emerged that projects "the West as a site of deliverance from Japanese gendered structures of family and work" (Kelsky, 2001 p. 86). However, whereas Kelsky describes strategies to circumvent gendered obstacles on the labour and dating market by going abroad as exclusively female, my observations in urban China and Taiwan show that in these societies, young men also consider this option. Although men face different stress factors than women, these are no less restrictive and constitute an equally forceful impetus for contemplating at least temporary migration to a Western country. However, as the previous chapters have shown, young men are simultaneously confronted with different obligations to their families which constrain their migratory plans in specific ways.

In the following, I will compare the cases of young Chinese and Taiwanese who, for various reasons, aspired to leave their home societies. With a focus on the gendered dimensions of the experience of disenchantment, I will analyze the underlying reasons for young men's and women's apprehensions of not fitting in and the options they envisage to circumvent the restrictions of societal expectations and limited options on the labour market.

6.2. Young Women's Disenchantment and Aspirations to Escape in Beijing and Taipei

The humidity that lay over Tainan would have been unbearable had it not been for the slight breeze drifting in from the nearby ocean. It was autumn already but the summer heat

had not yet abated in the southern part of Taiwan. Chin-ying looked absentminded as we slowly strolled along the alleys in the neighbourhood of her family's house. The streets lay sleepily as most people seemed to have withdrawn into the air-conditioned comfort of their apartments. Chin-ying, however, seemed to be less affected by the boiling heat than by an inner turmoil. By the strained expression on her face, I could tell that something was weighing heavily on her and she was contemplating how to tell me. Then she suddenly burst out: "I will maybe have an arranged marriage in the US!"

As we sat down in a nearby restaurant, it emerged that by "arranged marriage" Chin-ying meant her relatives' assistance in setting her up with a number of dates with Taiwanese American men in the US. It was important to her, she argued, that her future husband should have a Western passport. She wanted to have the opportunity to leave Taiwan for a Western country as she could not imagine her future here. She was especially disillusioned with the Taiwanese job market. The salaries paid to graduates in Taiwan, she argued, would not allow one to lead an independent life. Chin-ying's frustrations with her stagnating professional career as a translator in Taiwan and her aspirations to leave the country have to be understood against the background of her international experiences as a student. Chin-ying had spent several years in the US and Ireland where she first learned English and then studied for a degree in translation. However, her subsequent attempts to establish a career in Ireland had been met with repeated failure. When she was pursuing her education abroad, Chin-ying could rely on her family's social network and generous financial assistance. However, this also meant that she had to follow her family's call back to Taiwan when her parents decided not to support her search for employment abroad any longer.

When I met Chin-ying in her hometown, it had been a year since her graduation and the disenchantment with her failed career abroad still weighed heavily on her. She was working as a freelance translator and was struggling to find a fulltime job that rewarded her expensive foreign education. No longer willing to put up with the conditions on the labour market, she decided to find a way to leave the country. Her aunt lived in Houston, Texas and had agreed to introduce her to suitable bachelors. She had already made contact with an unmarried man that seemed promising. When I asked Chin-ying who he was and if she had seen a picture of him, she shook her head. She did not want to build her hopes up and had turned down any further information. She stressed that, to her, it was only important that he could speak Chinese, had a similar cultural background and was willing to work on their relationship. She had arranged to fly to the US on Chinese New Year where her aunt would then introduce her to the selected men who, Chin-ying assumed, were unsuspecting of her intentions.

Unlike Kelsky's Japanese informants, Chin-ying's aspirations for a life in a Western society were not a form of resistance to Taiwanese values. She emphasized that although she despaired of realizing her professional ambitions in Taiwan, her future husband should have a Taiwanese cultural background and be understanding of her Taiwanese values. Her disenchantment with her opportunities in Taiwan was not based on a notion of Taiwanese cultural values and practices as "backwards" and Western ones as "progressive," as Kelsky observed among Japanese women (Kelsky, 1996 p. 29). Kelsky has noted that Japanese women with international aspirations move in "ambiguous, hybrid, 'transnational' spaces that radically destabilize Japanese ethnicity and implicate them in Western agendas of universalism and modernity" (ibid.). Chin-ying, by contrast, was consciously trying to prevent any such national and cultural ambiguities in her future marriage. In contrast to Kelsky's informants, who hoped for emancipation from Japanese gendered expectations through marriage to a Westerner, Chin-ying formulated her aspirations less in terms of feminist ideals. Instead, her goal was to extend the time frame within which she could attain the normative benchmarks of adulthood as well as avoid the crisis of the local labour market.

When I met Chin-ying during a visit to Taiwan almost a year later, her mood was low. She had been to the US for Chinese New Year and met several of the young men her aunt had selected. She showed me pictures of them on her mobile phone and described their different characters and reactions to her. She had mixed feelings about her dates and was insecure about how the men perceived her. After her return, she had stayed in contact with just one of them who was already in his late thirties. To her distress, he had soon stopped returning her emails. His parents were eager for him to marry, she explained. However, now she was unsure whether his interest had been serious. With every day that passed without a reply in her in-box, she became increasingly hopeless.

After Chin-ying had already accepted that her visit to the US had been in vain, she learnt from her aunt that the parents of another man she had met during her stay had inquired after her. They had also asked if she had married yet. Chin-ying was surprised, as she had assumed that she had not made a good impression on this particular family. However, she was willing to give it a try. With rekindled hope, she arranged another visit to Houston a few months later. When she was interviewed by an immigration officer on arriving in the US, she lost her nerve and admitted she also intended to seek employment during her stay. As she only had a tourist visa, Chin-ying was deported.

I skyped Chin-ying a few months after her second visit to the US. Resignedly, she explained that she had eventually given in to her parents' demands and started working at a local company. For the coming years, she would have to stay in Taiwan and work. Perhaps she would try to go to the US in a few years' time. Until then, she wanted to save money to be able to study another postgraduate degree at an American university. Living once again in her parental home in a suburb of Tainan and working in a corporate job, she led the life of many of her single female friends. However, as she was nearing her mid thirties - and with her younger sister newly engaged - she felt the increasing pressure to marry weighing on her heavily.

Chin-ying stood out from my female informants with ambitions to go abroad by voicing her intention to realize an international career by securing work permission in a Western country through marriage. She was also exceptional in her demand that her future husband should have Taiwanese cultural roots and be able to speak Chinese. Other young women who were as adamant as Chin-ying in their desire to live abroad, for example Ma-ling, did not exclude the possibility of a non-Taiwanese partner. For some of my Taiwanese and Chinese informants, similar to the Japanese women Kelsky interviewed, avoiding the gendered pressures of the local dating market by finding a foreign partner even appeared to be the main goal of their cosmopolitan endeavours. My Chinese colleague Wei-xin, whose workplace difficulties I described in chapter three, was one of those young women whose aspirations to undertake postgraduate studies abroad were not only driven by her disenchantment with her stagnating career but also by increasing frustration at the problems she encountered during her quest for a partner in Beijing.

Wei-xin's room was light and spacious. Pieces of clothing and accessories were scattered across the floor and the French bed took up the centre of the room. Like so many other days, she had left her home in a rush in the morning. She always had trouble waking up in time, she explained, Sometimes, when she was especially late, she did not take the underground but called a taxi to reach the office in time. Wei-xin lived in a flat share in Wudaokou, a Beijing district popular with international students as it was close to different universities and offered a variety of Western-style restaurants and entertainment venues. With its international flair and colourful lifestyle, it had also attracted Wei-xin; for a while, she had been willing to pay the high rents common in this area. Now, however, she had become weary of the pleasure-seeking crowds of students populating the noisy streets at night. Having turned twenty-seven, she felt she was too old to live among students.

As we stepped out of the apartment block, the sun had set and the vendors and food stall owners were getting ready for the groups of students who spilled out of the underground station looking for dinner and drinks to unwind. Wei-xin led me to her favourite bistro just around the corner from her house. A narrow staircase led to a wide room that, with its bookshelves at the back and small table lamps, had the ambience of a Western-style living room. Wei-xin ordered a salad, saying that she had gained several pounds in the last few months that she now had to lose. She always gained weight when she felt stressed, she explained. Due to her insecurity about the near future, the multiple challenges posed by her moody boss and her upcoming graduate admission exams, she felt exceedingly tense.

Later she revealed to me that the verbal sexual harassment of her boss during a company outing had made it clear to her that her career was stuck in a dead-end. As soon as she had the confirmation of a study space, she said with a decisive tone, she would quit her job. She had planned to leave the company earlier but her parents had been against it. The relationship with her parents had grown increasingly tense over the recent years but now they had agreed to her plan to continue her education in the US. They found that studying a PhD degree was a reasonable alternative to having a family. While her parents would like to have her close in old age, she told me, her mother had already declared, maybe to provoke her, that she feared that Wei-xin was not suitable as a caregiver. For this reason, she did not want to be cared for by her daughter in old age.

Not only Wei-xin's mother but also her ex-partners complained about her lack of feminine qualities. Her first boyfriend looked down on her international aspirations and frequent visits to night clubs with foreign students. Wei-xin remembered that they had made plans for marriage but then broke it off as he became increasingly dissatisfied with her lifestyle. From an affluent background, she had enough money as a student to indulge in small luxuries from time to time. Her boyfriend, from a rural, less well-off family, had little understanding of her needs and aspirations. All he wanted, Wei-xin claimed, was to make money to help his family. Seeing her spending money on consumer goods he found unnecessary, they often quarrelled. When she became more deeply involved in the international student community and went out more frequently with her group of new friends, he snapped: "I have never heard that you have to go out to learn English, you are the only one who learns English in a club."

However, their different lifestyle preferences had not been the only reason for alienation between the couple. Wei-xin also suffered from the pressure he exerted on her to adjust to a certain image of femininity that Li-ling had also criticized. Wei-xin remembered that her

ex-boyfriend had once criticized her for ordering too much food in a restaurant, warning her that she was already "fat." She left the restaurant in tears, especially as it was not the first time he had insulted her weight. Some time before, he had asked her to lose some weight to save him face (*mianzi*) when they were out together. When she later told a female friend about her relationship problems, she recommended slimming down to find a partner.

After these discouraging experiences, Wei-xin tried to regain her self-confidence by surrounding herself with Western friends whom she did not perceive as critical of her looks. She started going out more often and consumed more alcohol. She soon had the reputation of a "party girl" among her classmates, a rumour that even reached her professors. Wei-xin complained that due to her classmates' gossiping, she had never been able to establish a trusting relationship with her supervisor. She put much effort into her master's thesis but in the end, she feared that her professor had not taken her ambitions seriously. Her situation on the dating market also suffered from her contact with the international scene. Many Chinese men she dated immediately inquired if she had had sexual experiences with Western men. She felt more and more estranged from her Chinese peers and for this reason she mostly spent her time with Western or Western-minded Chinese friends.

When I asked Li-ling, the young Chinese woman who also wanted to resume her studies abroad, about the seemingly popular strategy among highly educated women of avoiding marriage by studying for a PhD abroad, she confirmed that this was a strong trend. Nowadays, she explained, people said that there were three types of women in China: married women, single women and women with PhDs. The increase in time spent taking higher education could be considered to be a strategy to prolong the period during which success was measured on the relatively gender equal scale of academic success mentioned by Kajanus (Kajanus 2015). Choosing to study abroad not only kept options open to settle outside of China but also prevented young women from being continuously measured against local gender standards by family, friends and romantic partners. Wei-xin's case also shows that the scales measuring professional success and marriageability are not neatly separate but often permeate each other. With increasing age, behaviour that runs against gendered expectations is not only detrimental to a woman's private life but also discredits her in the eyes of her colleagues and superiors.

When I met Wei-xin a few months later, she looked devastated. Her test results had been very low, she confessed. She had been so disappointed about this failure that she relapsed into her old lifestyle of clubbing and drinking too much. The other night, she had collapsed drunkenly on the floor of a karaoke hall and her friend had to bring her home. These days,

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she sighed, she did not have the strength to write applications or concentrate on a job. However, the way things seemed, she could not quit her work but would have to wait for new opportunities to open up for her.

In Beijing, Wei-xin had strategically positioned herself - both spatially and socially - within an international subculture of Western students and young Chinese aspiring to a Western lifestyle. Having spent parts of her childhood in Austria due to her father's work postings, she was fluent in German and English. This had allowed her to shift her professional life into an international environment. Wei-xin had thus effectively reduced to a minimum her contact with the local Chinese. During my fieldwork in Beijing and Taipei, I observed that this immersion in the subculture of foreign exchange students and Western language teachers was not uncommon for those who felt disenchanted with society. These young people displayed "internationalism as resistance" but they practised it within the subcultures of their home society, often for years, without ever leaving the country (Kelsky, 2001 p. 85).

Others, like the young men described in the following case studies, use this lifestyle as a springboard to realize their aspirations of a life abroad. By immersing themselves in the international subcultures of Beijing and Taipei, they can acquire a cosmopolitan habitus as well as language abilities which, they hope, may catapult them into an academic or professional career in a Western country. In the next case study I will return to Xing, who was introduced in chapter two. I have already described how his growing estrangement from his father and his disdain for his rural relatives compelled him to increase his "quality" (*suzhi*) through education. I will describe how his disappointment with his family members' perceived lack of morality translated into a more overarching disenchantment with China's moral landscape and into a strong wish to leave the country indefinitely.

6.3. Young Men's Disenchantment and Aspirations to Escape in Beijing and Taipei

Xing asked me to meet him at the cafeteria of his university. With its large parks and peaceful streets the campus seemed like a peaceful island within this otherwise busy part of Beijing. Upon entering the cafeteria that resembled an American-style coffee shop, I noticed that the environment was highly international. Many of the student groups gathered at the tables were conversing in English. Most of them exhibited a pronounced urban style that reminded one of the clothes worn by young people in capitals in Europe and North America; such clothes were seen less often in the streets of Beijing. As we

navigated our way through the crammed room, balancing full cups of tea and coffee in our hands, Xing was repeatedly greeted by other students with whom he casually exchanged a few words. It seemed as if he knew most of the young people filling the cafeteria this afternoon. Speaking flawless English, he moved seamlessly within the cosmopolitan environment that made up the campus of one of China's best renowned universities. As we made our way to our table, Xing eased into the conversation with no inhibition. Despite not knowing me well, he appeared unperturbed about a foreign researcher asking him about his private life. Throughout our meetings, I was repeatedly taken aback by the candour with which he told his story. It almost seemed, by narrating his life story, that his resolve to strive for his goals was strengthened. Only when I inquired about his relationship with his family, his eyes darkened. I found out little by little that his strong ambition to realize a career abroad was propelled by an outright rejection of his family's values.

Since Xing's childhood, his father had had extra-marital affairs. As the owner of a successful building supplies agency, he was affluent enough to entertain numerous mistresses for whom he bought several apartments. His mother was aware of her husband's infidelity but as she was economically dependent on him, she did not intervene for several years. Nevertheless, Xing's mother was infuriated by the thought of the amount of money her husband had spent on his affairs -money that could have been invested in Xing's future. When Xing started senior high school, his mother decided to leave the family home to move in with her elderly parents who had come to Beijing. Since then, Xing's father shared his apartment with one of his mistresses. He had never made a serious effort to hide his affairs but he relied on Xing's complicity to save face before relatives and friends. He had informed his teenage son that the woman he was living with and who frequently accompanied them on weekend trips was a younger relative he should call "auntie" (*ayi*). Xing was too tired of his father's lies to question this new addition to his family and tried to accept things as they were. However, he refused to stay the night at his father's apartment and always returned to his student home in the evenings.

Things worsened when his father experienced legal difficulties related to his business that forced him to leave the country. Xing and his mother, still financially dependent on the father, were left without a regular income. Thus, his mother was forced to take action. She tracked down her husband's current mistresses, one in Beijing and another in their rural home city. She also managed to strip them of the apartments and cars her husband had given them as gifts. Unfortunately, their situation did not improve much after this. Knowing that her absent husband's financial resources might run out soon, Xing's mother

struggled to find a way to generate an income. She thus decided to grant private borrowers loans at high interest rates. However, with no experience in the credit business, she was soon cheated by one of her clients and lost most of her investment. Xing added that his parents did not only experience betrayal by business partners but also by close relatives. The relationship with the paternal branch of Xing's family was thus severely strained by their dishonesty and material greed. He especially distrusted his paternal aunt. She had borrowed a substantial sum of money from his father to set up a business before he left the country. However, as she had helped his father solve his legal issues, she felt entitled to keep the money.

Upon his return to China, Xing's father rekindled his relationship with a previous mistress, a young socialite, who pushed him to make investments in her career. Xing, however, was too tired to care about his father's affairs and was more concerned about his mother's psychological well-being. As his parents had been avoiding each other for years, Xing was forced to spend time with them separately during important family holidays. The decision with whom to spend the holidays caused him increasing psychological distress. "I just hate Chinese New Year," he explained, "there was one thing that happened that just makes me feel so bad. One year I spent my Chinese New Year Eve with my dad and my mum tried to kill herself. After I got the call from my *waigong* [maternal grandfather] […] I just ran to my mum and I spent the New Year's Eve with my mum. She cried the whole night."

Xing's great remorse for not having been there for his mother still seemed palpable when he recounted his story. It appeared as if this incident had been the turning point when he decided to escape the moral decay that, in his eyes, defined Chinese society to achieve a better life for his mother and himself abroad.

According to Kleinman, "[r]emorse, regret, and other complexes of emotions and values are strongly influenced by interpersonal relations and meanings that contribute to the building of subtle and elaborated sensibilities that constitute who we are" (Kleinman, 2006 p. 18). Xing's moral self-image appeared to be set against his relatives' unscrupulous and corrupt acts that roused his disdain. "Every time they get a chance to get money, they use this chance," he said as he explained his revulsion for his paternal family members' materialistic characteristics. In attributing their ruthless behaviour to their rural, low educational background, he seemed to be echoing the popular discourse about population quality (*suzhi*) that imbued urban residency with a superior moral quality (Kipnis, 2006). If one conceives of morality in these geographical terms, it becomes apparent that a

permanent move to a Western metropolis could help consolidate his higher moral status vis-a-vis his rural family members.

Xing explained that his ambition was not just to go abroad but *stay* abroad. He had observed that many Chinese students had to return once they had finished their education in a Western country. "I want to stay," he emphasized, "I know it's [...] important for me to find a way to create an environment just like America or other countries. So I started spending more time to join some activities like volunteer work or some student societies and tried to find as many international students as possible. [...] Right now, I have more international friends than Chinese friends. I feel like I finally made it; to create my own environment, to speak English and to get to know a foreign culture even if it's hard in China to do that."

However, he also wanted an independent life abroad to free himself from his parents' desires for him to have a family. "I'm actually gay," he told me upon our second meeting. "I haven't said that to my parents yet, I don't think they can accept it. So what I want to do is to go to America and be individual enough. As long as I can find a way to live on my own, I don't want to depend on them anymore." By becoming financially self-reliant, Xing hoped to be able to establish relationships based on trust instead of on financial dependencies. However, as he was close to his mother, he had defined plans on calling her to the US once he had established himself and to provide for her during her old age.

Kleinman and colleagues point to the "open moral space" that emerged in China after Confucian values and then socialist ideology lost their validity during the political and economic changes of the Cultural Revolution and the reform era (Kleinman et al., 2011 p. 8). They claim that although this moral flexibility was abused to justify reckless business practices and political corruption, it also caused the emergence of a new moral consciousness, especially in the young. Among Chinese youth, they note, there is

> "an increasing awareness [...] of global values and that China must engage in these values. This recognition informs what is regarded as locally legitimate. That in turn can encourage practices that promote real local reform. Both in moral and psychological spaces, individuals push for changes that in the larger political space may not be realizable" (p. 25).

However, it was Xing's recognition of the futility of hoping for permanent changes in the political and societal spheres that drove him out of the country. Moreover, Xing did not appear to have any desire to take part in political activism to change the situation in China. Despite his articulate critique of Chinese society, Xing was almost ostentatiously apolitical

and self-absorbed in his rejection of Chinese values and in his uncompromising focus on his departure.

Yi-chuan, a young web designer originally from the south of Taiwan, resembled Xing in his rejection of societal conventions and a materialistic orientation. However, while Xing's disdain for Chinese values did not rouse any form of political activism, Yi-chuan saw a direct connection between the social pressures in Taiwanese society and the ossified structures of the government. He regularly expressed his anger about the political lethargy and complacency of Taiwanese youth.

Yi-chuan had recently turned thirty and was working for a small branch office of an international marketing agency in Taipei. He told me of his frustrations with the high expectations of his social environment on his professional performance and personal lifestyle. He confessed that he lacked a sense of belonging in Taiwanese society; he aspired to a life abroad which he expected to be less restricted by traditional norms and parental demands. Since having studied for a master's degree in France, he was certain that a Western lifestyle would suit him better than the one he foresaw being forced to assume in Taiwan. However, he was repeatedly disappointed in his efforts to achieve his goal of entering the diplomatic service and he sought escape from his problems by frequenting the expatriate scene of Taipei where he felt liberated from the social pressures of Taiwanese society.

When I accompanied him one night on his usual tour of Taipei's expat bars, I was surprised that he seemed to know most of the guests, mainly international students and American Taiwanese. Over the months I realized, that his romantic relationships and friendships seemed to fluctuate with the waves of language students and foreign English teachers that arrive in Taiwan each autumn and leave the island a year later. Yi-chuan did not seem to mind the instability of his social life. However, he was aware that the time he could lead this liberal lifestyle, freely roaming the fun-filled, fast-paced expatriate scene of Taipei, was limited. This might explain why he regarded a job in the diplomatic service as his only opportunity to pursue his personal aspirations while also fulfilling his parents' demands for a stable career. However, his repeated failure to pass the civil service entrance examination slowly undermined his hopes.

Yi-chuan regarded his current job in the marketing agency with disdain. To him, his workplace exemplified all the shortcomings of the strict office hierarchies typical in Taiwan. He despised the highly competitive atmosphere at the agency, the stifling of creativity by superiors and he often criticized his colleagues for their uncooperative behaviour. Shortly

after I got to know him, he was fired from his position as the result of major cutbacks. Since then, he was working as a freelancer. Losing his job had not hit him hard, he confessed. He had planned to quit for a long time but his mother warned him not to let this opportunity of a stable career go. However, he was able to convince his parents to support him financially during his preparations for the civil service entrance exam which he planned to take again that year. He was not worried about finding a new job for the coming months.

Yi-chuan's mother was especially unhappy about his lifestyle and often criticized him for his unstable career and relationships with foreign women. However, Yi-chuan was not willing to compromise on his romantic preferences to please his parents. He had observed his elder brother getting trapped in an unfulfilling marriage that was burdened by the high demands of his in-laws. Yi-chuan's brother had married a Taiwanese woman a few years ago. Since then he had faced constant criticism from his parents-in-law and had to withstand their demands for a grandchild. Yi-chuan suspected him of having an extra-marital affair as his brother received suspicious phone calls in his presence. He did not want to address the topic as he was not very close to his brother but his marriage served as a deterrent for him. To express his rejection of societal norms, Yi-chuan had even refused to attend his brother's wedding banquet which had caused a great stir among his relatives.

Yi-chuan was not only frustrated with parental expectations but also complained about the demands many Taiwanese women made of prospective romantic partners. He was critical of the common expectation that men would pay the bills on dates and give expensive presents. Yi-chuan had decided not to support a phenomenon which the local media had dubbed "princess disease" (*gongzhu bing*) -a term alluding to young women who expect expensive presents and entertainment from their suitors. However, his strategy to only date Western women turned out to be problematic as well. Due to the fleeting character inherent to most contacts made on the fast-changing expatriate scene, many of his relationships quickly broke down when the women returned home after finishing their language studies or work placements in Taipei.

Brinton and Cook have illustrated the difficulties young Japanese men encountered as soon as the lack of stable employment prevented them from marrying and founding families. Many Japanese graduates who struggle to realize their aspired careers at some point feel forced to take on less prestigious jobs in order not to jeopardize their opportunities of marriage (Brinton, 2011; Cook, 2013). The situation was similar in Taiwan. In their late twenties, young men were expected to have settled into a stable job to create the

foundation for their future family. Even though Yi-chuan was not pursuing marriage, his ardent critique of local dating practices might also partly be based on his dissatisfaction with his diminished competitiveness caused by gendered pressures on men to provide. His constant lack of money also made it also difficult for him to fulfil his obligations to his parents. His mother had expressed her wish for him to send her a certain sum of money each month soon; this was common among young professionals in Taiwan and a major factor in determining a child's filiality. It was thus clear that his parents would not excuse his stagnating career much longer due to his time-consuming preparations for the civil service entrance exam.

A year after I left the field, a change appeared to have taken place in Yi-chuan. First, he had settled into a job at a non-profit organization in Taipei which, despite its international orientation, tied him to Taiwan for the time being. Moreover, his critique of the government became more articulate as demonstrated by his social media posts. It was not uncommon for my Taiwanese informants to voice online their dissatisfaction with the KMT government or the unfavourable employment conditions in Taiwan. Especially on the cusp of the 2014 Sunflower Movement (which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter), critique of the government's strengthening of economic ties with China was a popular topic on social media forums. However, Yi-chuan appeared especially sharp in his criticism. He also mostly published in English so as to make his numerous international contacts aware of the situation in Taiwan. During the protests and occupation of the Legislative Yuan in March 2014, he followed the developments closely and expressed open regret that a business trip prevented him from participating. It appeared as if his disenchantment with Taiwanese society faded with the increasing political agency of his peers. Shortly after the occupation, he hopefully proclaimed on his social media account: "[T]he gov. [*sic*] is making the biggest mistake if they ever underestimate the courage and power of this civil grassroots movement. Feel proud of my folks!" His optimism was not short-lived. In November 2015, more than one and a half years after the occupation movement, his confidence in Taiwan's sovereignty as well as his criticism of the leading party was still fervent:

> "Taiwan is actually quite important geopolitically, u don't find any county in the world [that] has such […] deep connection with [the] 3 biggest superpower / economies in the world. The question is just how we play [our] cards and if we r confident enough, as biggest investor in China, nr 3 Weapon importer of US military-industry importer, and most important partner for Japan we could do it better and get our interest without this ducking president […]."

In contrast to Xing, Yi-chuan transcended his disenchantment with Taiwanese society by way of a newly found hope in a better future that was animated by the political awakening of his generation. He realized that he was not alone in his criticism of the stifling conditions for young employees. Having found common ground with his peers in their critique of the political and economic state of affairs, he appeared to have shed his self-image of an outsider from Taiwanese society.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that young adults are not only greatly influenced by social factors in the way they approach and justify decisions but also in the way they define their range of choices. Having excelled in the area of education, many young Chinese and Taiwanese fall behind rigid social expectations as they approach marital age. Those young people whose stories have been illustrated above are not only connected by their feelings of marginalization and alienation in light of these gendered pressures. They also share a sense of disenchantment about the future that fuelled a strong wish to leave their home societies behind to pursue their aspirations.

Young women in particular experienced that failing to meet gendered norms to marry would not only have an impact on their private relationships but also on their professional careers. The cases of Ma-ling and Wei-xin demonstrate how young single women who did not subscribe to normative life goals were often openly criticized for their choices, looks and demeanour by male and female colleagues and superiors. This often led to fears of having come to a dead-end as they felt obstructed in their professional progress.

Further, many young women described in this chapter felt increasingly insecure when they compared themselves with female peers. These negative feelings were compounded by the critique they received from friends and acquaintances. Moreover, the powerful media of microblogs and online social networking services were highly successful in setting norms and expectations. Many young people regularly post images showing the various forms of entertainment they have enjoyed with their romantic partners. This often intimidated my single female informants since these virtual posts were supposed to showcase success in reaching biographic milestones aspired to; this shut out those who had not yet attained that stage of life. Faced with friends posting details of their romantic dates, wedding preparations and apartment purchases, their desperation increased and they considered looking for a job abroad to escape their increasing social isolation.

However, despite much opposition to their lifestyle choices from more conservative peers and superiors, many parents of my informants were surprisingly understanding of their urge to break free from societal constraints for a certain period of time. Li-ling, who was exceptionally close to her parents, was encouraged by them in her wish to go abroad even though her mother suffered immensely from her frequent absences and increasing wish to leave the parental home. Likewise, Chin-ying's mother and maternal aunt supported her in finding a husband in the US, a plan that would also lead Chin-ying away from Taiwan indefinitely. Xing, though not close to his father, was supported by both his parents to go abroad to study and build up a career. Especially for his mother, who cared for her parents in Beijing, the prospect of being separated from her close confidante for several years until she could join him must have been difficult.

Although I had the impression that my young male informants were usually less exposed to discrimination due to their private lifestyle choices in the professional sphere, they also felt pressure to conform to gendered norms to avoid the criticism of family members and friends. Xing and Yi-chuan, who due to their sexual orientation and relationship preferences rejected marriage and starting a family, told me of the increasingly strident demands of their parents and relatives to enter into a stable heteronormative relationship. However, their desires to emigrate were not only fuelled by this mounting familial pressure. They were also disappointed with their immediate social environment which they perceived as hypocritical and amoral; shortcomings they considered symptomatic of a deeper societal crisis in values.

More than explaining the multiple hopes young Chinese and Taiwanese entertain for the pursuit of their goals in Western societies, this chapter has also shown, that the reasons *why* young people want to leave their home societies are multiple. Some want to escape local heteronormative ideals while others assume that their career chances might be more promising abroad. These rather practical objectives are intersected with moral and ideological concerns which emerged out of their dissatisfaction with the social and political environment in both China and Taiwan. In this sense, my observations resonate closely with those of Schielke, whose account of the multiple desires bound to the migratory dreams of young Egyptian men I described in the introduction (Schielke, 2012).

Although many of their peers shared similar frustrations, the young men and women described in this chapter stand out due to their determination not to settle for compromises but to pursue their personal aspirations by leaving their home societies behind. They were willing to make significant financial and emotional sacrifices and

demonstrated remarkable endurance in the pursuit of their plans. At the same time, it must be noted that all the young adults whose stories have been presented in this chapter were from the higher end of the affluent middle classes of their respective societies. Thus, the risks they took with their endeavours abroad might not have been as huge to them as they may have been to young professionals from less affluent backgrounds. In China, the fathers of Li-ling and Wei-xin were both academics and had relatively well-paid jobs. Xing came from a well-off family of business owners. In Taiwan, the parents of Ma-ling, Chin-ying and Yi-chuan were also university educated and worked as medical doctors and teachers. Their professional backgrounds and international study experiences might have complemented their understanding attitude towards their children's aspirations. As mentioned before, compared to their peers, most of the young adults presented here were surprisingly uncompromising and, except for Ma-ling who was more reluctant, they unswervingly pursued their plans. This was one of the main reasons for selecting their stories. In this chapter, I wanted to present cases which, though rather exceptional, might point to growing trends in both societies: young people who are increasingly dissatisfied with their limited opportunities and who thus choose more liberal, unorthodox life forms and parents who can increasingly sympathize with their children's dissatisfaction.

At the same time, the cases presented here and in previous chapters illustrate the complex impact that individual emotional needs have on personal choices. For some young Chinese and Taiwanese like Wei-xin, Xing, and Yi-chuan previous stays abroad motivated aspirations for a more permanent escape that have to be understood against their individual family backgrounds and childhood experiences; others with similar international experiences, though equally critical of societal values, prioritised being close to the emotional warmth of their families and were willing to compromise personal aspirations. This was the case with Yue-ling, the young Taiwanese woman working in the business of her father-in-law instead of returning to her mother in the US, and Yu-ching who returned to Taipei to live with her parents after having spent several years abroad. Likewise Li-ling, who had spent several years studying and working in Western countries, could not imagine leaving her parents behind in Beijing indefinitely as their relationship was exceptionally close. Hence, emotional needs often trumped international aspirations even among those young people who had already spent several years separated from their families pursuing independent lifestyles abroad. The heterogeneity of their personal experiences and mental dispositions thus had an important influence on how their dissatisfaction with societal values affected their choices.

In the previous chapters, I discussed that due to socioeconomic and demographic factors, young Chinese appeared to have a stronger sense of personal agency and were more willing to take risks. I could not find similar divergences between the young people described in this chapter. One reason for this might be that those who aspire to leave their home societies to settle for an indefinite period in another society might share a strong sense of personal agency and a readiness to take risks. However, it appeared that my Taiwanese informants often had an extended network of relatives overseas that made such migratory endeavours easier for them than for my Chinese informants.

Kajanus notes that since the 2008 global economic crisis, young Chinese have increasingly been returning to China after graduation from international institutions. This might point to a new trend in regard to the desirability of international careers (Kajanus 2015: 84). I observed a similar trend among my Chinese informants who, unlike their Taiwanese counterparts, expected their career options to be more favourable in China (even though the allure of an international lifestyle appeared to remain unbroken). One of them was Li-ling who assumed she might have to return to China to exploit the full potential of her foreign degree. However, first and foremost she wanted to temporarily leave the country to pursue a more adventurous lifestyle unrestricted by societal pressures. Hence, many of those who expected to return to their home countries considered a time-out abroad until societal expectations to marry subsided.

However, in case Li-ling returned home after having completed a doctorate still being single, her difficulties of finding a partner could likely be exacerbated. After acquiring post-graduate degrees and "cosmopolitan competence" at foreign universities, many women realized that these credentials only made their search for a partner more difficult after their return (Zhang and Sun, 2014 p. 122). The stark divergence between the parameters measuring success on the scale of marriage and education thus has an especially disadvantageous effect on young women who sought temporary escape from societal pressures by furthering their education abroad (Kajanus 2015).

A stay abroad did not lessen the desirability as spouses of young men but, in the long run, it made the fulfilment of their filial duties more difficult. For this reason, Xing planned to bring his mother abroad with him once he had attained financial independence; Yi-chuan felt less pressure in this regard as he had an older brother in Taiwan.

In conclusion, the cases above do not only demonstrate young people's disenchantment and frustrations with their families, careers and romantic relationships. They also highlight how international aspirations have to be understood within the context of the limited

niches these societies offer to those who do not follow normative cultural scripts. Many young people in China and Taiwan are dissatisfied with having to follow pre-formulated life paths that leave little room for personal aspirations that go beyond normative biographies; they also yearn for fulfilling partnerships and careers that they feel unable to establish in their current situations. Furthermore, many of them draw direct parallels between their unfortunate situations and what they perceive as wider societal shortcomings in the moral and political spheres.

Chapter Seven - Perspectives of Hope

7.1. Introduction

On a damp afternoon in late November 2012, I met Yi-chuan on a street corner in Zhongzheng district, not far from the Chiang-Kai Shek Memorial Hall. Although the memorial of the deceased KMT leader was a much visited sight, surprisingly popular with the many Chinese tourists who now visited Taiwan every year, he wanted to show me an attraction that only few visitors to Taipei got to see but which, to him, was far more constitutive of Taiwanese identity -the National 2-28 Memorial Museum. The nondescript red brick house, a remnant of Japanese colonial architecture, stood hiding behind green foliage on a street corner in Nanhai Road. With its dull façade and dark entrance hall, it did not look inviting and we understood why few tourists found their way to this hidden reminder of one of the darkest periods in Taiwanese history. In the friendlier looking lobby, two young receptionists - happy that the museum had attracted at least some visitors on this gloomy afternoon - eagerly equipped us with brochures and maps. As the only visitors, Yi-chuan fully engaged in his role as a tourist guide and avidly translated complicated tablets and historical documents to bring this long neglected part of Taiwanese history to life for me. Whenever he could not answer a question, he apologized, explaining that during his time at high school in the 1990s, the 2-28 Incident and the ensuing White Terror had been only a footnote on the curriculum. He criticized that, even today, the events of this time were taboo for many families. Although none of his relatives had fallen victim to the suppression of the uprisings in February 1947, he knew of many people who had only learnt long after the incident that family members had been killed during the White Terror. Especially during the period of martial law, criticizing the government for its brutal methods to crush protest could have caused disastrous repercussions for one's relatives and friends. Thus, Yi-chuan explained, many families chose to be silent about the real reason for the deaths of their loved ones.

As he reflected on these tragic events that took place more than sixty years ago, the tone of his voice grew determined and I was reminded that Yi-chuan was an ardent critic of the then current KMT government. Moreover, from our frequent discussions and from Yi-chuan's regular online postings of articles critical of the KMT's pro-China agenda, I knew that he was a strong advocate of Taiwanese independence. Shortly after the annual anniversary of the event, Yi-chuan commemorated the 2-28 Incident with a comment on his social network profile that highlighted the close connection between Taiwan's national

history and his personal family narrative. Published in English, the comment was clearly intended to raise awareness of this controversial event among his foreign friends:

> "1947 2 .20 my father was born, a week later on 28th of 1947, one of the darkest event in the chapter of Taiwan history breaked out, my father as a baby still in the basket had to hide with my grandparents in the mountains for few weeks. They r afraid that my grandpas working experience for the Japanese (although not voluntarily) will endanger their life. The 228 incident and its consequence let the development of Taiwan fall at least 30 yrs behind and let the most people wake up from their "china dream" […]."[12]

Yi-chuan, like many young people I met in Taipei, sharply criticized Ma Ying-jeou, Taiwan's president at that time, for his promotion of pro-China policies and his lacking interest in the concerns of the young. The Economic Co-Operation Framework Agreement (ECFA) which had been signed under the KMT in 2010 and which was supposed to facilitate and strengthen economic relations with the mainland roused concern in many young students and graduates. Critics of the agreement feared that the loosening of trade restrictions with China "would open a floodgate of cheap Chinese goods" which would increase Taiwan's economic dependence on the mainland and have a detrimental effect on the Taiwanese labour market (Wei, 2012 p. 95). In March 2014, nationwide student demonstrations following the negotiations of a controversial follow-up agreement of the ECFA (CSSTA) culminated in a three-week long occupation of the Legislative Yuan (Lu, 2014; Rowen, 2015; Tiezzi, 2014).[13]

As the previous chapters have illustrated, young Taiwanese were indeed facing a precarious situation. Salaries of college graduate entry-level jobs had not risen since the late 1990s, while at the same time prices on the real estate market had soared, fuelling fears of a housing bubble which rendered the acquisition of property almost impossible for young people who could not fall back on family support (Guilford, 2014). Yi-chuan was fighting ambiguous feelings for his future. On the one hand, he felt an overpowering urge to escape his dreaded situation of unemployment and feelings of estrangement from Taiwanese traditionalism by going abroad. On the other hand, he still clung to his dream of an independent Taiwan and a society more tolerant of alternative lifestyles.

During my fieldwork in 2012, I sensed a general air of hopelessness about the political and economic marginalization of Taiwan among many of my Taipei informants. Few believed

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[12] Quote as in original text.

[13] The protests against the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) were ignited by the KMT's attempt to let the Legislative Yuan ratify the trade agreement without clause-by-clause review by the opposition - an incident that many Taiwanese perceived as the violation of a key rule of democratic governance (Lu, 2014; Pai, 2014).

that the country's political isolation and stagnating economy would be remedied any time soon. Their despair was reflected in the disheartenment with which many of them steered into their future. In 2014, however, the situation was about to change. This chapter will illustrate how several events concerning the quest for Taiwan's economic integrity and national sovereignty dispelled the apparent lethargy of Taiwanese youth and rekindled hopes for the political future of Taiwan and their personal lives. At the same time, I will look at the very different stance of the young Chinese I met and examine the factors that framed their more hopeful outlook for their personal and collective future.

7.2. The Self and the Other in China

It has been argued that young adults in Beijing perceive their futures in brighter colours than their Taiwanese peers, a vision that is fuelled by the CCP's optimistic rhetoric of incessant economic growth and a popular nationalism that promotes China's growing potential to claim it is a global power (Bradsher, 2012; Cary, 2013; Cohen, 1991 p. 101; Hughes, 2011 pp. 602-603; Zhao, 2000 pp. 12-13). Moreover, by contrast to their Taiwanese peers who had the opportunity to openly voice dissatisfaction with their national government, young Chinese channelled most of their discontent towards neighbouring Japan (Chao, 2012; Gries, 2004 pp. 843-847; Hughes, 2011 p. 603). Western nations' criticism of China's dealings with human rights and its minority populations also raised anger that was publically expressed in protests, especially by young people (Rosen, 2010 p. 172; Chao, 2012). In 2012, the strength of young people's national consciousness was once again revealed as they feared China's sovereignty contested. In September of that year, Japan bought an island from a private Japanese owner in the Senkaku archipelago (Chinese *Diaoyu*) over which China, Japan and Taiwan claimed territorial sovereignty (Perlez, 2012). In China, the incident sparked major protests against Japan that took thousands of "angry youths" (*fennu qingnian*) to the streets in a rare moment of unsuppressed collective political action (Chao, 2012; Tisdall, 2012).

These protests evoked memories of those that occurred in March 2008 as a reaction to foreign criticism of China's handling of the uprisings in Tibet. The journalist Evan Osnos has described that in the run up to the Summer Olympics, emotions ran high as "China's young élite rose again […] — not in pursuit of liberal democracy but in defense of sovereignty and prosperity" (Osnos, 2008). In this context, Osnos notes, "a mood of nationalism surged through China" that found its expression not only in protests in front of Western supermarket chains but increasingly also within the virtual world of social

networks and blogs in a new wave of cyber-nationalism (Osnos, 2008; Wu, 2007). These displays of nationalism by "angry young men," Christopher Hughes notes, dispelled previous fears about a "lack in national self-confidence" and shaped a new patriotic heroism (Hughes, 2011 p. 603). In conversations with young students in Beijing, I would be reminded of how deeply these incidents as well as other collective memories of foreign humiliation remained ingrained in the national consciousness.

The self-perception of young people in China of being at the global centre of economic progress contrasted starkly with the feelings of marginalization among young Taiwanese.

7.2. Taiwan - Nationalism on the Periphery

Masahiro Wakabayashi defines Taiwanese national identity as being an outcome of the island's "historical and geopolitical peripherity" (Wakabayashi, 2006 p. 5). Taiwan's history as a neglected frontier that was exploited by various foreign regimes can be traced back to colonization by the Dutch and Spanish in the early 17th century (Wills, 1999 pp. 84-200). The island's peripheral status did not change under Japanese rule. From 1895 to 1945 the Taiwanese were positioned "at the southern rim of Japan's empire" and were subjected to an ambitious agenda of "nationalization" by the colonial power (Wakabayashi, 2006 p. 6). After the KMT's takeover in 1945, the Taiwanese experienced a "second change in nationality," Wakabayashi stresses, as they were remodelled from Japanese imperial subjects to Chinese citizens who were to support the party's plan to project itself as the true bearer of ancient Chinese cultural values (Phillips, 1999 pp. 275-319; Wakabayashi, 2006 p. 6). Already at this time, hope among the Taiwanese rose and fell in tandem with the vacillations of the political sphere. Steven Phillips notes that

> "people talked of 'three hopes'. First, there existed hope (*hsi-wang*) from the time of Japan's surrender through the arrival of the Nationalist administration […]. Next was lost hope (*shih-wang*) that resulted from the performance of the new government. Finally came *chueh-wang* (hopelessness) as the people felt that 'the future was black'" (Phillips 1999: 284).

Shortly afterwards, Taiwan was transferred to a new position of geopolitical "peripherity" as the United States intervened in Mao's efforts to bring Korea under the PRC's sphere of influence in 1950. In the course of these events, the island was made "an outpost in the Cold War;" positioned "in a peripheral position to the United States, the new hegemon of East Asia" (Wakabayashi 2006: 6).

In the following years, as China's political and economic power in East Asia grew, the Nationalist government of Taiwan was no longer able to maintain its recognition as the legitimate Chinese representative in the international political arena. In 1971, it was forced to withdraw from the United Nations and had to cede its seat to the PRC. Shortly afterwards, Taiwan lost its seat in the WHO and, in subsequent years, it also had to withdraw from the World Bank and the IMF (Hickey, 2006 pp. 68-69). In the early 1980s, Taiwan had not only been excluded from most major international organizations but increasingly found itself in diplomatic isolation as global powers recognized China and severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan (Hickey, 2006 p. 69; Jacobs, 2006 pp. 85-109). Being expelled from the international political arena and devoid of diplomatic power, Taiwan now found itself on the periphery of the global geopolitical map. Since the 1980s, the Taiwanese government has not found any effective strategy to lift this isolation and propel itself back into political centrality. Such a project, as several hostile confrontations during recent decades have shown, would undoubtedly rouse the anger of the Chinese government that considers Taiwan as the 23rd province of the People's Republic. "In the view of [...] Chinese nationalism," Wakabayashi explains, "Taiwan should be an extension of the Qing dynasty's rule into the modern era" (Wakabayashi, 2006 p. 7). This explains why the CCP is striving to end what it considers to be an "anomalous" state of affairs that has lasted since the Qing's ceding of Taiwan to Japan in 1895 (ibid.). However, Wakabayashi stresses that, to the Taiwanese, the state of "living in 'anomaly'" has become deeply ingrained in their collective consciousness; it has become one of the defining elements that constituted Taiwanese identity as they conveyed from one generation to the next the hopes and disappointments that each change of regime had brought about (ibid.). Wakabayashi argues that

> "[c]hanges in nationality were forced experiences that imposed ceaseless re-questioning of one's own identity in relation to a new center. [...] Taiwanese nationalism [...] reflects the historical resentment of the Taiwanese people over this "peripherity", as well as their strong aspiration to put an end to a history taunted by "peripherity" (pp. 7-8).

This fear of increasing marginalization manifested itself in the everyday lives of the young Taiwanese I met during my fieldwork in Taipei.

Ma-ling, the young woman with whose travel plans I introduced this thesis, was one of those young Taiwanese who perceived the closer ties with China as a threatening intrusion on her personal life and career. The media company she worked at had recently been bought by an investor who was widely known as a pro-unification sympathizer. Since then,

Ma-ling lamented, the online magazine they published was increasingly turning into a mouthpiece for the popular mainland Chinese media outlet. Ma-ling was harshly critical of this development, not only because the editors were heavily restricted in the processing of news they were allowed to publish but also because of what she perceived as a markedly Chinese working atmosphere that her new superiors were trying to establish. To Ma-ling's embarrassment, she and her colleagues were now supposed to engage in collective morning sports in the form of group dances; these reminded them greatly of the ones one could observe in front of restaurants and beauty parlours in the early morning in Chinese cities. Moreover, she was growing increasingly frustrated with the kind of work she was assigned; it consisted increasingly of processing material that had been supplied by the mainland Chinese branch than designing original work.

Ma-ling and Yi-chuan both felt trapped in a marginalized position of society. As the previous chapter has shown, Yi-chuan attributed his failure to reach his professional goals partly to the ossified structures of the Taiwanese government as well as to Taiwan's peculiar political status that denied him access to jobs at international organizations that could have provided him with an international career. Ma-ling interpreted the introduction of a Chinese office culture at her workplace as an ideological encroachment that roused fears of a slow subversion of Taiwan's democratic freedoms in her. Like Yi-chuan, she did not only feel marginalized politically but she also felt increasingly pushed to the socioeconomic periphery of Taiwanese society. Earning only slightly more than the minimum wage, Ma-ling saw her chances of an economically secure life as significantly curtailed. When I last talked to her in autumn 2014, she was convinced, still single at 31, that she would not marry and would have to care for her security in old age alone, a frightening prospect considering her current salary.

Both Yi-chuan and Ma-ling were torn between aspirations to leave Taiwan to realize their dreams of alternative lifestyles, unbounded by Taiwanese traditions abroad, and the deep connectedness they felt with their home society. This Taiwanese consciousness was not only expressed at moments of crisis when they perceived the foundations of Taiwanese democracy were being threatened but also in everyday life. In Taiwan, as well as in China, the internet played an important part in fostering a national consciousness among the young. Whenever Taiwan was mentioned in the Western media, Yi-chuan and Ma-ling, like many other young Taiwanese I knew, instantly circulated these articles and video clips that discussed topics as mundane as Taiwanese cuisine or travel destinations. It was as if with posting every foreign media acknowledgement of Taiwan's existence, its sovereignty could be reclaimed at least in the virtual world. As the excerpt from Yi-chuan's social network

profile above illustrates, young Taiwanese were not restricted by a national firewall and could thus use international networks like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram which did not only connect them with their local friends and acquaintances but also to Taiwanese abroad and the global online community. By posting and reposting articles, videos, images and personal comments in English, they were effective in letting news and opinions "go viral" globally. As each of their postings generated a multitude of comments and reposts, it seemed as if Taiwanese netizens were aligning to maintain the island's presence in the media as effectively as possible.

The paradox of a deeply felt Taiwanese identity and the urge to flee Taiwan's "peripherity" to countries that were perceived as offering more job opportunities manifested itself in the surge of working holiday immigrants to Canada, New Zealand and Australia (Chung, 2013). Many shared Yi-chuan's and Ma-ling's feelings of "not being at the right place" to realize their aspirations for their private lives and careers. Like them, these young people hoped that a year or two in a Western country could offer them at least temporary relief from the overpowering feeling of marginalization. The unstable working conditions and the prospect of the menial labour involved in those working holidays rarely deterred young adults from the adventure. After all, the monthly wage as a labourer in Australia was on average higher than the salary of a college graduate entry-level salary in Taiwan (Taipei Times a, 2012; Taipei Times b, 2012). Thus, young people flocked to Western countries offering them a work-and-travel visa.[14]

As mentioned in chapter five, the boyfriend of Hui-yu quit his job as an insurance broker to work as a waiter on a temporary contract in Calgary. He hoped to save enough money during this time to marry her after his return. Another young Taiwanese I met also left his girlfriend in Taiwan to embark on a working holiday in Canada. When I met him in Vancouver in 2012 right after his arrival, he looked confidently to the future despite the overcrowded housing and limited jobs open to temporary workers. Two years later, he told me that due to the better salary options in Australia, he had moved to Sydney after a year in Canada and started an apprenticeship as a car mechanic. After returning to Taiwan to open a car repair shop, he was still considering returning to Australia to advance his education. He explained the reasons for his resolve to leave Taiwan again as follows:

> "Taiwan has no resources for a lot of industries and they tend to use very low salary to hire
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> skilled persons. The employers and the government have a very shallow vision on almost

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[14] In 2012, the year of my fieldwork in Taiwan, the number of young people applying for a work-and-travel visa peaked. Almost 37,000 visa applications were lodged of which more than 35,760 were granted (Australian Government, 2014 pp. 13-20).

everything. The wage is low and the living expenses are extremely expensive, so people have no chance to save money if they are not living with their parents […]. "

Both of the young men had strong bonds tying them to Taiwan and it was unlikely that either of them could ignore their responsibilities for their families and partners left on the island indefinitely. Indeed, Hui-yu's boyfriend returned after a year and soon afterward, they married. It was difficult for most Taiwanese to leave their families permanently. However, by searching for an escape from the repressive Taiwanese labour market and the stifling atmosphere of political marginalization, many decided to escape the island for at least a period of their youth.[15]

7.3. China's New Wave of Nationalism

The situation in Beijing was somewhat different. On a crisp autumn morning in 2013, I met Sun-yi in a little park in an upscale residential neighbourhood near her apartment close to the city centre. I described the story of Sun-yi, who had returned to Beijing after she had completed her graduate studies in the US and who was now working in an international company, in chapter five. Whereas Sun-yi projected herself as highly cosmopolitan in conversations with her friends and me, she also felt deeply rooted in her identity as Chinese. Even though she often mentioned her difficulties in conforming to gendered expectations in China and lamented the political corruption at all levels of the government, certain situations made her feel compelled to defend her Chinese identity against what she perceived as foreign, hostile allegations. When I addressed the long-standing resentment to the Japanese that I had sensed in conversations with young Chinese in my interviews, her face clouded over. Forgetting about potential passers-by who could overhear our conversation, Sun-yi became agitated and her voice cut sharply through the morning cold. In her eyes, she explained, there existed a fundamental difference in mentality between the Chinese and the Japanese that was at the heart of the conflict. As an example, she cited a Chinese movie that had made headlines due to its controversial plot a few years ago. This movie, she stressed, illuminated the difference between the Chinese and Japanese from an "anthropological" perspective. While the Chinese were depicted as benevolent and selfless,

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[15] The fact that thousands of young Taiwanese left the island to pursue adventure and temporary job contracts abroad was not well received by all layers of society. During the year of my fieldwork, pronounced criticism was often voiced in the media. Such voices feared that young Taiwanese would be exploited as "cheap labour" abroad. The new trend of working holidays was even mocked as a new exporter of "cheap youth labour" (Shan, 2014; Taipei Times a), 2012). One particular story about a young Taiwanese bank employee who had quit his job in Taiwan to work at an Australian slaughterhouse to pay off his student debts caused a furore during my fieldwork (Yang, 2012).

willing to save the life of an enemy (in this case, a Japanese soldier during the Second Sino-Japanese War), the Japanese were portrayed as a proud people that would not stop at merciless massacres to defend their national pride.[16] This movie, Sun-yi stressed, would illustrate the issues that lie at the heart of the tensions between China and Japan. Despite her extensive experience abroad and her admiration for Japanese art and cuisine, this purportedly "dark side" that she suspected to be immanent to the Japanese people frightened her and made her reluctant to engage with them.

The antipathy to the Japanese that Sun-yi expressed so passionately could be seen as a reflection of a wider nationalist trend observable in China since the beginning of the 1990s. This popular nationalism has its origins less in state-led campaigns than in populist movements fuelled by nativist intellectuals' anti-foreign publications and the media (Gries, 2005 pp. 848-849; Hughes, 2011 pp. 602-603; Zhao, 2000 pp. 12-13).

Before the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, the Chinese intellectual elite were discussing political liberalization as the next step following the economic reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping in 1979. Especially the political and economic restructuring introduced by Mikhail Gorbachov, the general secretary of the CPSU,[17] were closely observed by Chinese intellectuals who envisioned a similar political transformation for the PRC in the latter half of the 1980s. However, in the aftermath of the demonstrations in June 1989, the Chinese government urgently had to find measures to reinforce its claims on power and silence critical voices urging China's democratization (Zhao, 2000 p. 19). Instead of political liberalization, stabilization had now become the prime target of the CCP. In an effort to strengthen the Party's legitimacy, it launched several campaigns that, according to Suisheng Zhao, were to "to impose nationalism on the Chinese people as the collective identity of the state" (ibid.). At the same time, Hughes explains, a growing nativist movement was winning ground among the intellectual elite that criticized Western hegemony and advocated a renewed Chinese self-consciousness. Especially the publication of several books by nativist authors in the mid-1990s that were directed against US-American and Japanese hegemony tapped into this emerging popular nationalism. These works marked a surge in anti-foreign sentiments among the intellectual elite, Zhao notes, as

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[16] The movie Sun-yi alluded to is *Devils on the Doorstep* (*guizi lai le*), (2000) by Jiang Wen. It tells the fictional story of a Japanese prisoner of war whose life is saved by a Chinese peasant during the final months of the Second Sino-Japanese War. The peasant is not rewarded for his benevolent deed. The commander of the captive's camp perceives the peasant's selfless act as a humiliation of Japanese national pride and takes revenge by burning down the village. The Chinese peasant is executed by the Japanese. The movie was immediately banned by the PRC's Bureau of Film and Television Censorship because it did not let the Chinese peasants appear sufficiently hostile towards the Japanese enemy (Gries, 2005 p. 835; Net Ease, 2002).
[17] Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

they reinforced a "deep-rooted feeling of cultural superiority and resentment of foreign efforts to belittle or humiliate China" (Hughes, 2011 pp. 602-603; Zhao, 2000 pp. 12-13). Even though those "anti-foreign impulses" were consistent with the official nationalism of the CCP, the strong reactions that this growing nationalism evoked in the public were soon perceived as a threat to the Party's hegemony (Gries, 2004 p. 20; Zhao, 2000 p. 23). Peter Hays Gries highlights that in the Chinese intellectual discourse, the publication of these works is seen as constitutive of a "first wave of Chinese nationalism" that was mainly anti-American. This wave reached its height during the protests after US intervention into the Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996 and the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 (Gries, 2005 p. 848). The "second wave" of Chinese nationalism, by contrast, was centred on increasing anti-Japanese sentiments. The emergence of this wave coincided with the growing popularity of the internet which came to play an integral part in the distribution of information and the exchange of opinions. Thus, this anti-Japanese outgrowth of popular nationalism was more successful in its efforts "to convert popular opinion into political action" as it exerted uncomfortable pressure on the government's foreign policy-making (ibid.).

As numerous incidents during the last decade have shown, anti-Japanese aggression has constantly simmered under the surface only to re-emerge when China's political status is contested. As a response to its citizens' increasingly hostile sentiments, the Chinese government displays an increasing assertiveness towards Japan's challenges to its territorial sovereignty in the East China Sea. At the same time, the state-led media are further perpetuating Japan's image as a violent aggressor with the regular airing of documentaries and shows that keep the collective memory of Japanese wartime atrocities alive and fuel claims for retribution for the suffering inflicted (Gries, 2005 pp. 849-850; International Crisis Group, 2013 pp. 12-15; Ramzy, 2014; Sevastopulo, 2014; Zhang, 2012).

My conversation with Sun-yi made me recall one I had had with Chao and several other students of politics and economics at their local university shortly after my return to Beijing from Taiwan. Knowing that I had recently conducted a follow-up study in Taipei, they eagerly questioned me about the differences between my experiences in Taipei and Beijing. While we had tea at their campus cafeteria, I told them that many young Taiwanese held a deep admiration for Japanese culture. This manifested itself in fashion trends, tastes in music and the adoration of Japanese movies and celebrities. While I answered their questions, the face of Chao darkened. He threw in the comment that he did not like the Japanese. His paternal grandfather had told him about the atrocities his family members and fellow villagers had to endure during the Second Sino-Japanese War. After hearing his

gruesome account, he started to feel deep hatred for the Japanese. Especially the Japanese government's reluctance to acknowledge the wartime atrocities committed by their soldiers in China enraged Chao.[18] However, when I probed more deeply into his repulsion for anything Japanese and asked if he would feel the same way towards a Japanese exchange student he might encounter at university, he conceded that he might feel less hostile as that person was not even born during the war. However, I was left with an impression that Chao, like Sun-yi, conceived of the Japanese as intrinsically different from the Chinese.

As the above vignettes illustrate, under the CCP's rule Chinese nationalism had mostly defined itself against a foreign, external "other". First, the US and then Japan have been constructed as the "other" in different waves of nationalism since the 1990s. In Taiwan, by contrast, nationalism was conceptualized against different ruling minorities that constituted the "other" throughout most of the 20th century (Suzuki, 2007; Wakabayashi, 2006). Taiwanese nationalism was also directed against the forced imposition of new cultural identities, first by Japanese colonialists and then by the mainland Chinese KMT. Only in recent decades has China, with its growing economic and political dominance in the region, emerged as an external entity against which Taiwanese nationalism was defined.

Moreover, while during the 1950s and 1960s, the CCP succeeded in creating a collective vision for the future in the form of a communist China, the KMT failed in convincing the Taiwanese of its agenda to retake the mainland. In having to bear the economic burden of maintaining the military and the government apparatus, most Taiwanese were reluctant to support the leading party in its ambitious project (Roy, 2003 pp. 9, 61; Wachman, 1994 p. 58). Instead of demanding political activism and deep commitment in the creation of a new society like the CCP, the KMT only required acquiescence and offered limited options for collaboration to its citizens. As a consequence, a vision of a political future of Taiwan that was formulated *against* the leading party slowly emerged in the underground opposition (Chan, 1985 p. 6; Gold, 1994 p. 49; Hughes, 1997 pp. 35-40).

Meanwhile in China, the CCP was cementing its autocratic rule under the strategy of political inclusion and the creation of a political utopia that appealed especially to the lower social classes. Baogang Guo notes that by conveying a feeling of liberation to the peasants

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[18] According to Shogo Suzuki, "the fact that many prominent Japanese politicians and public intellectuals continue to deny their imperialist legacy results in a 'knee-jerk reaction' which reminds many Chinese of Japan's atrocities and reproduces an image of Japan as a 'victimizing Other'" (Suzuki, 2007 pp. 38-39). Moreover, when asked what the Japanese reminded them of in a 1999 Yomiuri/Gallop poll, the greatest number (39.2 per cent) of the Chinese respondents thought of the Sino-Japanese War or the Anti-Chinese War. Surprisingly, these categories also attained the highest scores among the younger participants within the 18-29 age range (ibid.).

and workers, the CCP could generate substantial support and hence "[t]he gratitude and affection people showed towards their new leaders provided the strongest moral capital for the new government" (Guo, 2003 p. 10). Seemingly answering the yearning of the masses for socioeconomic equality, the CCP was thus more successful in rallying popular support and cementing its political legitimacy.

The distinct trajectories of Chinese and Taiwanese nationalism and the visions of the future designed by the state illustrate the following: in China, the CCP has been successful in creating a deep sense of Chinese identity that currently defines itself strongly against foreign powers and is confident in its claim of being a global power; Taiwanese nationalism, by contrast, first had to overcome its peripheral position imposed by a ruling minority - it now has to define itself against China's rising authority that increasingly challenges Taiwan's status in the international political arena and global economy.

In which ways are these differences in national consciousness reflected in Chinese and Taiwanese young people's vision of the future and sense of agency? Why did young Chinese living in an autocratic state have a stronger sense of self-efficacy than young Taiwanese growing up in a democratic system?

7.4. Rhetorics of Individual Agency in Beijing

On a rainy afternoon in October, I joined Ming-yue and Chao for a hotpot meal at one of Beijing's underground shopping malls. I introduced the young PhD students in chapter two where I talked about their problems of integrating their obligations to their rural families with their aspirations for a career in the city. The shops and restaurant off the narrow basement corridors were crammed with students seeking bargains in the small boutiques or a meal at one of the inexpensive restaurants. The two students led me into a crowded restaurant where we were given a table in the midst of lively, chatting groups of young people. This meal was a special treat for them, they explained, as they were not able to leave the campus often due to their heavy workloads as PhD students. While we were waiting for our order to arrive, the conversation turned quickly to those lavish banquets that took place at Beijing restaurants at the other end of the price scale. In that autumn in 2013, President Xi had caused a stir with the introduction of a harsh anti-corruption campaign that especially targeted the widespread practices of gift-giving and special treats for officials (Oster, 2014). Chao joked that if these campaigns proceeded, many Beijing restaurants that catered to the notorious "gift economy" would go bankrupt. When I asked

if he feared that the problem of corruption would get worse in the future, he shook his head. He was confident that with time, the government would resolve the problem. After all, Chao argued, the CCP's leadership was relatively young compared to the long history of China.

As a party member himself and aiming for a career in the government, Chao, like several other young people I talked to with similar aspirations, was critical of the ongoing corruption but rarely voiced any critique of the form of governance itself. But what about the offspring of wealthy officials, derogatorily called "second generation rich" (*guan er dai*), who often caused scandals due to their irresponsible and arrogant behaviour? Was it difficult for them, I wondered, to see the offspring of affluent and well-connected families being privileged in the education system and in their careers? Ming-yue thought a while and answered that even though she had many friends who came from well-connected families, she saw them working just as hard for their degrees as she did. Both of them believed that familial background could only take one so far but that with hard work, they could achieve success on their own account. However, Chao and Ming-yue also agreed that in their rural hometowns, personal connections were still very important. However, they were confident that in Beijing they would be able to achieve success based on their personal talents and efforts.

Chao and Ming-yue's opinion was shared by Yi-an, a young professional who worked for a Chinese fashion label. In early December 2013, I met her in a more upscale shopping mall during her break. Amid the kitschy coulisse of a snowy winter landscape with American Christmas songs blasting from the speakers, we had lunch in the trendy food court that offered imitations of Western meals. Our conversation quickly turned to a recent argument Yi-an's parents had had with the family of her maternal uncle. Yi-an's well-connected parents had tried to get a younger cousin fast-tracked for a highly competitive job through their contacts with the hiring committee. The cousin only had to pass the initial written exam to be forwarded to the interview round with the hiring committee. However, as Yi-an complained, her cousin had not invested much effort into the preparations and failed the exam. Afterward, her cousin had asked Yi-an's mother again to help her secure another job. Yi-an was enraged by her cousin's lack of determination and lack of agency. However, when I remarked that she might also have had a good start to her career due to her parents' contacts, Yi-an became agitated. She had achieved success in her career without her parents' help, she asserted, omitting to mention that her parents had been able to secure important references and paid "sponsorship fees" to enrol her in elite schools. She insisted that, unlike her cousins who had all relied on her family's connections for their careers, she had

made it on her own. Even though she did not deny that her parents had often helped her in her choices, she was adamant that her academic and career achievements resulted from her determination to work hard rather than from her family's privileged socioeconomic position. Her parents' contacts, she was convinced, could not help her in Beijing - hard work would catapult her into the life she imagined for herself.

Accordingly, among my Chinese informants, a high sense of empowerment and efficacy was palpable, not only among rural students whose experiences of progressing from a village school to a Beijing university had demonstrated to them the legitimacy of their belief in hard work as a key to success. Like Yi-an, even those from more affluent families who did not have to bridge such wide socioeconomic gaps on their way to first-tier educational institutions and professional careers drew self-affirmation from explaining their success by way of their personal efforts and sacrifices. Moreover, a belief in a merit system, despite the blatant corruption at schools, universities and in the government, was still very much alive among the young people I encountered in Beijing. Consistent with Hansen and Pang's observations among rural Chinese students, my urban interviewees rarely justified failures at school or in their careers by referring to their disadvantaged socioeconomic situation – it was mostly attributed to their perceived lack of personal effort (Hansen and Pang, 2010 p. 60). How can this strong belief in self-efficacy be sustained in a society riddled by corruption and experiencing a widening wealth gap?

Insight into this phenomenon may be gained by taking a closer look at the transformation of the individual's role since the CCP came to power in 1949. Whereas superficially, the CCP appeared to eradicate any personal autonomy, the individual was gradually pushed to the fore during collectivization and government campaigns that targeted traditional family and community organization (Yan, 2010 pp. 492-493). Yan explains that during the Mao era, "the individual was called upon to participate in party-state-sponsored political, economic, and social campaigns in public life and to reinvent herself/himself as a citizen of the nation-state instead of merely as a member of the family" (p. 493). Thus, by stressing the individual's role and responsibilities in the collective and highlighting the importance of personal sacrifice, self-critique and improvement during the struggle towards an ideal society, the Chinese were forced to conceive of themselves as detached from those main social structures that had created personal identity before (Guo, 2003 pp. 9-11; Rene, 2013 p. 15; Yan, 2009 pp. 119-122). With the stylization of model citizens, such as the story of the young soldier Lei Feng who sacrificed himself for the communist cause, the CCP created effective myths about the importance of each individual's contribution to the common goal. These exemplary tales of individual effort were also supposed to enforce

personal reflection on one's qualities as a revolutionary and possible ways for improvement (Chan, 1985 pp. 60-62).

In the reform era, the individual's role in the achievement of a better society was brought to the fore again -this time to realize Deng Xiaoping's ambitious agenda of market modernization. Personal effort was now required to skilfully navigate the emerging free market. With hard work and entrepreneurial skill, so the propaganda declared, the Chinese would be able to exploit the new economic opportunities and lift themselves gradually out of poverty. The new economic pragmatism was introduced with slogans with which the party tried to rouse materialistic impulses among the people in order to awaken an entrepreneurial spirit (Chen, 2005 pp. 45-46; Kelliher, 1991 p. 321).

Throughout the various eras of its rule, the CCP has thus continuously invoked the importance of individual agency and responsibility in the realization of its ambitious agendas. This ideological strategy may have contributed to the strong sense of personal efficacy that I observed not only in the Chinese young people of today but also in their parents. At the same time, this ideology may have averted a more encompassing structural critique of the political system.

On a brisk evening in mid December, I met my former colleague Liang on a street corner near the Tuanjiehu Park to join him for a family dinner at his home. The temperatures in Beijing had recently fallen below zero and a sharp wind was blowing through the streets that night. A few months before, Liang's girlfriend had got pregnant unexpectedly. Liang was not happy about this and appeared troubled by the obligations parenthood entailed. Moreover, in order to be able to register the baby, he had agreed to marry his girlfriend; another commitment he never wanted to make. While I tried to keep up with his fast pace, Liang confessed that he felt bad for not spending more evenings with his mother. Busy with his job at the consultancy and the renovation of his flat, he rarely found the time to eat with her at night. After a few minutes' walk, Liang stopped in front of a drab-looking apartment building. His mother had already moved out from the fourth-floor flat into the basement of the same block to make space for her son and his wife. Liang's face looked sombre as he asserted once again that the child had not been planned. He felt guilty for his mother's relegation to a draughty, run-down flat because he could not afford to buy his own house in Beijing.

We entered the dark concrete corridor and Liang opened the door to a bleak-looking flat. His mother greeted us warmly and, relieved to escape the evening cold, we entered the hall. The walls of the rooms were a bland grey and, despite the paintings that decorated almost

every bit of the walls, the flat appeared cold and damp. I could understand why Liang felt guilty about his mother, who was now in her seventies, spending her old age in this humble dwelling. However, Mrs Xi's warm and affectionate appearance stood in stark contrast to the atmosphere of the flat. Upon entering the kitchen, she welcomed us joyfully and immediately urged us to eat the food her maid had already prepared. After dinner, she showed me around the rooms. Telling me the stories behind her son's paintings and drawings, Mrs Xi seemed thriving. I followed her through the little music room she had arranged at the back of the flat. From there, we proceeded to a small living room and the adjacent bedroom that was not much more than a storeroom with a lounge. Every inch was covered by Liang's works and she enthusiastically explained the different subjects and techniques. While Liang stood to one side looking slightly embarrassed, Mrs Xi praised the extraordinary artistic talent of her son. Liang had studied art at prestigious schools in China and abroad and even though he could not apply his talents in his current job, his international education had nevertheless landed him a prestigious position. In her eyes, his future looked bright.

Later, when his mother had gone to bed, Liang asked me bemused if Taiwanese parents were as obsessed with their children as Chinese ones. Having worked as his colleague for three months, I knew that his prospects of carving out a career at the consultancy were rather dim. Due to the unexpected pregnancy of his wife, he had to abandon his plans to go abroad to further his career as an artist. However, his mother was brimming with confidence that Liang's talent would be recognized in the future. Even though her personal living conditions had worsened due to Liang's inability to afford a flat on the overpriced real estate market, she appeared to interpret this as a sacrifice on the way to her family's success. As she later told me, she had managed to work her way up in Beijing's competitive classical music scene despite the interruptions in her education due to the Cultural Revolution. Liang, by contrast, had been able to follow his education without interruption and, having observed his talent unfold throughout the years, Mrs Xi believed in her son and was eager to support him on whatever path he chose; even if this meant that he would go abroad again.

Even though Liang had told me that his mother had sometimes voiced fears of loneliness, it appeared as if realizing the success she had envisioned for him counted at least as much to his filial duties as being physically present in her old age. Liang seemed to be embarrassed by his mother's passionate praise of his talent but he had not given up on his dream of a career in creative arts either. Despite his mounting responsibilities, he had

opened a small studio to further his career in his free time and had still not given up on his dream to go abroad again soon.

Mrs Xi's confidence in her son's ability to achieve success seemed to resonate with the accounts other Beijing informants gave me about their parents. It appeared as though parents and adult children did not always agree on their wishes for the future but both parties were confident that the future looked brighter than the past and reassured each other that the huge sacrifices they had made to pursue a better life would pay off one day. In this sense, Chinese parents seemed to look to the future with more optimism than their Taiwanese counterparts who often tended to relate to the younger generation with a mix of disappointment and frustration and who had a rather grim outlook on the future of Taiwanese society.

7.5. Reluctance and Resistance among Youth in Taipei - A "Strawberry-Generation" with Revolutionary Potential?

As the previous chapters have illustrated, compared with their Chinese peers, young Taiwanese seemed to have a rather weak sense of personal agency. This was even more surprising with regard to the achievements of their parents and grandparents. After all, they had realised - in less than a generation - a transition from an agricultural society to a flourishing industrial economy. Moreover, they had set an example; thanks to continuous underground political activism, that an authoritarian government could be pressured into democratizing itself and into allowing an opposition to exist (Roy, 2003 pp. 152-182; Rubinstein, 1999 pp. 367-402). So why had young Taiwanese lost the self-confidence and determination that their parents and grandparents must have displayed at their age? I was not alone in asking that question - the topic of the lethargy of youth had been discussed by the media for several years. Whereas the Chinese youth had earned themselves the title of "angry youth" (*fennu qingnian*) in defending their national pride, the Taiwanese generation born between 1981 and 1991 was widely mocked and criticized in the media for being a "strawberry generation" (*caomeizu*); comparing the softness and vulnerability of the fruit to Taiwanese youths. Their apparent lack of ambitions and reliance on parental support far into adulthood was at the heart of this criticism (Lu, 2014; Schott, 2008).

In recent years, numerous articles surfaced in the Taiwanese media that warned against the country's decreasing economic competitiveness due to the alleged missing initiative and weak risk attitude of its youth. In October 2014, a top Taiwanese negotiator to China

warned that Taiwan might encounter difficulties in maintaining its competitiveness due to China's growth if the Taiwanese did not increase their assertiveness and entrepreneurial spirit. The parental generation was soon targeted for "spoiling" their offspring and "steer[ing] their adult children to look for safe jobs and schools and providing little inspiration" (Jenning, 2014). Although many grandparents and parents had engaged in risky ventures during the economic boom in the 1960s and 1970s, they seemed to have failed to pass on that entrepreneurial spirit to their children (ibid.). Another article in the *Taipei Times* warned that Taiwan was now quickly falling behind China in technological innovation and that young people have become increasingly reluctant to set up new businesses (Sui, 2013). At the same time, participation in the civil service exams has doubled in the last decade as more people compete for government jobs that are expected to offer more income security (Jennings, 2014).[19] In the wake of an international opinion poll measuring future expectations where Taiwan ranked as one of the nations with the least optimistic outlook, the *Taipei Times* dubbed the Taiwanese a "nation of nay-sayers" (Lin, 2013).

According to Lin Cho-Shui, a cultural policy expert from the National Taiwan University of Arts, Taiwan's economic success in earlier decades has caused unrealistic expectations in the population - these unrealistic expectations are responsible for the current gloomy mood. Moreover, he links this pessimism to a national identity crisis and argues that "[i]f you don't know where you are, you can't think very optimistically about the future" (Lin, 2013). These fears were not only reflected in my conversations with my young informants - members of the older generations also told me of their disappointment in their children and grandchildren for not being able to emulate their parents' success stories.

The grandparents of Yue-ling told me their family story upon my visit at their home in Taichung. The family was doing well and had just recently built a new, spacious home which was attached to the factory that housed the family business. This new building was shared by Yue-ling's grandparents, two of their sons and one of their grandsons with his family. While at first glance, their multigenerational household evoked images of a harmonious Taiwanese family overseen by a powerful patriarch, this first impression was deceptive. Yue-ling had already told me that her grandfather was hugely disappointed in his sons. Her uncles, as Yue-ling put it, were effectively "unemployed," since the formerly

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[19] As has been mentioned in chapter three, in China, by contrast, participation in the civil service entrance exam has decreased in recent years. This development is attributed to the increased crack-down on corruption, in particular the ban on bribes, which shuns people away from employment in the government. The more lucrative options other employment sectors offer might however also play a role in this phenomenon (Riley, 2015; The Economist, 2015).

successful family business had not generated any profit since the 1990s. Only Yue-ling's aunt had fulfilled her grandfather's expectations as she had been able to marry into a wealthy family. Hence, Yue-ling advised me, when talking to her grandfather, I should not probe too deeply into his relationship with his children as this would upset him too much. However, he was surprisingly eager to recount his disappointment in the younger generation when he told me his life story that afternoon.

Comfortably resting in his armchair, Mr Lin was obviously pleased that a foreign researcher had come from Taipei to listen to his story. He answered my questions in great detail and, looking back on his own life path, he portrayed the choices he had made as "self-evident" but emphasized the need for hard work as key to success. Born at the beginning of the 1930s, he had grown up under the Japanese occupation. At the age of 12, he quit school. The curriculum newly introduced by the KMT was taught in Mandarin and it was difficult for him to understand his teachers who spoke mainland dialects. Moreover, the KMT had raised tuition fees and his parents were thus no longer able to finance his education. At that time, he had no aspirations other than being able to make a living. He first worked in a noodle shop, later he traded in sesame oil, bricks and garments in Taipei, moving from one job to the next.

After marrying, Mr Lin bought a food stall for his wife. He taught her how to make noodles - a skill he had learned in his first job - and together they sold noodles and *mantou* (traditional pastries). He was lucky, he said, to have chosen a wife from a poor farmer's family who was used to hard work and did not complain about their dire financial situation. They made a good team. At the same time, he was building up a transport company. However, not all of his businesses flourished. A few years later, he bought some land to set up an apple plantation. At that time, apples were popular luxury goods sold at high prices on the Taiwanese market. However, shortly before he set up his business, the Americans had signed a new trade agreement with the KMT to import apples at low prices. Thus, Mr Lin had to abandon this business before he had made any profit. However, he did not let this failure discourage him and soon afterwards, he tried his luck as a real estate agent. He bought some farmland that the state had converted to building plots and sold it as soon as prices started rising. He bought new land with the profit. He then pooled money with other family members and they invested in office buildings which they rented out to businesses so as to make the fortune on which he could build his future success.

Mr Lin had wanted his children to inherit his entrepreneurial spirit and extend the family's success into the future. Unfortunately, the light-bulb factory had not been able to match

previous success stories. Yue-ling told me later that he dreaded getting involved in the regular comparisons of their offspring's success stories that his friends and neighbours liked to engage in. Other family members tried to console him by encouraging him not to measure his personal success as the father of his children but as the grandfather of his university-educated grandchildren. However, he had only found peace since realizing his dream of building his own home at the age of eighty. Indeed, when I asked him what had been the best time of his life, he replied "now" - he owned his own house and enjoyed economic security.

Nonetheless, Mr Lin emphasized, he had experienced hardship and had "eaten bitterness" (*chi ku*) - unlike today's youth, he also knew the value of money. Today's young generation, he complained, only spent their parents' money but had not experienced hardship in their lives. He worried: who would plant the rice in the fields once the older generation was gone?

Mr Lin's life story and his opinion of today's younger generation were not unusual. The grandfather of two young women I befriended in Taipei recounted similar experiences. Their grandfather was from a poor Hakka family in Miaoli County, He had to quit education after primary school and migrated to Taipei to make his living as a shoe shiner throughout his teenage years. Despite his humble upbringing and the ruling KMT Mainlander's discrimination against native Taiwanese in higher ranking professions, he worked his way up to become a bank employee at one of Taiwan's biggest banks, thus rising from peasant to a member of Taipei's middle class. During his first ten years at the bank, he was confined to clerical positions. Speaking only Japanese apart from the Hakka dialect (*kejia hua*), he was relegated to serving tea to his superiors. Now, he claimed, times had changed so much that his life was worlds apart from that of his children and grandchildren who had grown up in the capital. In his eyes, today's youth was too dependent on their parents, splurging cash on luxuries and enjoying the wealth their parents and grandparents had accumulated. For him, his happiest memory was when he was promoted and he could offer his wife and children financial security. Having learnt to rely on himself and having achieved success as a result of years of personal sacrifice and hardship, he found young people's passivity and their reluctance to stand on their own two feet hard to understand.

These two elderly men were not the only ones who lamented the younger generation's lack of agency. During my fieldwork, the death of several young men that occurred as a consequence of excessive computer gaming caused media outrage in Taiwan and sparked off new public discussion of the apathy and social withdrawal of young Taiwanese. These

young, mostly male, adults, who spent their time in their rooms or internet cafes and who preferred the world of online gaming to social interaction in the real world, were derogatively called *zhainan*. My female informants used the term to specify the kinds of men they would try to avoid as romantic partners.

The *zhainan* (stay-at-home boy) is the Taiwanese counterpart to the Japanese *otaku* - a young person who isolates him- or herself from most social contact to escape into the virtual world or an obsessive fan culture (Niu et al., 2012 p. 714).[20] The phenomenon of social seclusion by the young has assumed dramatic dimensions in Japan, a society that in many ways closely parallels Taiwanese society. The social phenomenon of the *hikikomori*, a young person who deliberately shuts themselves away from society to spend their time isolated at home, has increased since the Japanese socioeconomic system underwent major restructuring in the 1970s (Furlong, 2008 p. 315). However, the *hikikomori* did not receive wide media attention until the 1990s when Japan was hit by the Asian-Pacific recession that had a severe impact on the structure of the labour market and caused a sharp increase in youth unemployment and the casualization of the workforce (p. 318). Japanese youth responded to diminishing career opportunities by adopting a desolate, hopeless perspective on their future. Michael Zielenziger, who has researched the phenomenon of the *hikikomori*, found that the roots for the rising number of youths who choose to withdraw from society may be found in Japan's rigid social system that allows for few alternatives besides the normative life path (Zielenzieger, 2006). When the economic crisis suspended such opportunities, young Japanese started to despair. Zielenziger notes that

> "[t]he most ominous aspect of Japan's long stagnation – far beyond the obvious symptoms that regularly crowd the business pages – is the plight of its people. Young Japanese today face their own forms of adjustment disorder and concoct disturbing new ways to escape a society that annihilates their hopes and washes out any promise of self-realization in a torrent of rootless materialism" (p. 8).

Some psychological studies suggest that social withdrawal is partly a result of parents being overprotective. As most cases of *hikikomori* come from highly educated middle-class backgrounds, high expectations of future success play a pivotal role in developing coping patterns to avoid interpersonal conflicts and failures in social interaction (Furlong, 2008 p. 314; Umeda and Kawakami, 2012 p. 126).

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[20] In contrast to Japan, where *otaku* can describe a male or female person, I have only encountered the male term *zhainan* in Taiwan (*zhai* is an antiquated word for "house," *nan* means "male"). My informants were bemused when I asked them if they knew about any *zhainü* (*nü* means "female") within their circle of friends and acquaintances. Although some young women also escape to a virtual world in Taiwan, there was no special term to describe this. Hence, the phenomenon of the *zhainan* was widely perceived to be male.

A resemblance to the situation that young Taiwanese face today cannot be denied. However, public opinion about the younger generation changed dramatically when university students, civic organizations and NGOs from all over the island gathered in Taipei to protest against the signing of the CSSTA in March 2014. Accusing the government of having tried to let the CSSTA secretly pass to committee for approval by the Legislative Yuan without further review, thousands of students took to the streets to protest. Eventually, a group of students rushed into the Legislative Yuan and occupied it for three weeks - this forced the government to promise a comprehensive revision of the CSSTA (Rowen, 2015). Even though it is still unclear whether the Sunflower Movement (*taiyanghua xueyun*)[21] as it is often called will be successful in reaching its aim of a revision or even an abandonment of the CSSTA, the young protesters have effectively communicated their opposition to China's "one country, two systems" formula to an international audience and forced China to readjust its stance. The movement has also inspired the recent pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong (the Umbrella Movement, *yusan yundong*) that employed "symbols and rhetoric similar to the Sunflowers" (Cole, 2014).

In the following months, interest in national politics remained high and reached a zenith with the local elections in November 2014. Many of my informants welcomed the crushing defeat of the KMT by the pro-independence DPP (The Economist, 2014). The night the election results were announced, Yi-chuan published the following appeal on his social network profile that was "liked" or reposted by dozens of his friends:

> The messages Taiwanese folks send tonight: 1. On your face! Xi! Now you can save your China dream for yourself! We don't want to get involved with it. 2. Hong Kong, we are with u, please keep having hope. […] And my message: Taipei folks u win my heart, after so many years living here, I will never say I am living in China town again [alluding to the fact that Taipei was governed by the KMT until the local elections in 2014, while his southern hometown had been under DPP administration since the mid-1990s]. Congrats, Taiwan people, we are finally another step forward."[22]

The newly sparked hope palpable among young Taiwanese might not only be an effect of the empowerment they experienced in the collective endeavour of the Sunflower Movement (even if its actual success is contested); it might also be a result of discovering their potency of communicating their anger across the Taiwan Strait and to an international

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[21] According to Mark Harrison, a supporter of the protests took sunflowers into the occupied Legislative Yuan as a symbol for the light needed to bring more transparency to the negotiations between the KMT and the Chinese government. Instead of using the Chinese term for sunflower (*xiangrikui*), the literal translation from the English word (*taiyanghua*) was used. This alludes to the international orientation of the protesters (Harrison, 2014).

[22] Quote as in original text.

arena. By inspiring Hong Kong's protests for democracy, young Taiwanese's national self-consciousness seemed to have strengthened in the rising awareness that a challenge to Chinese hegemony might not be out of reach after all.

7.6. Conclusion

The aspect of hope within the context of societal change and an uncertain political future has attracted increasing anthropological interest in recent years. Especially the transition from socialist planned economies to market economies and the societal consequences of this have become the focus of anthropologists interested in topics such as hope, doubt and uncertainty (Bartha, 2013; Pedersen, 2012; Zigon, 2009). Pedersen has noted that by maintaining a hopeful stance towards the future - despite financial hardship and lacking career opportunities - his Mongolian informants were able to create stability and meaning when faced with the unpredictability which accompanies major societal transformations:

> "Their repeated experiences of failure [...] does [sic] not make them reach what at first glance is the only logical conclusion, namely, that there is nothing they can do about this state of affairs (short of bringing about radical political change). Far from accepting that the best they can aim for is to muddle pragmatically through the hardships of the so-called transition from state socialism to market capitalism or to indulge fatalistically in passive daydreaming of a better life, my friends continue to act as if tomorrow will be a better day [...]" (Pedersen, 2012 p. 137).

Even though my Chinese informants did not embrace economic transitions "via a systematic unwillingness to plan" - quite the opposite - they appeared remarkably removed from the complications that executing their plans might involve for themselves and their families (p. 148). Just like the Mongolian youths described by Pedersen, young Chinese at times tended to blank out the realities of their personal situation as well as the societal and political barriers that might hinder the realization of their aspirations. Remarkably, far from "living in the moment," a spirit Pedersen sensed among young Mongolians, young Chinese seemed to live mostly for the future, willing to accept temporary hardship in the hope of it being rewarded later on (ibid.).

Whereas the young Mongolians Pedersen describes lived in poor socioeconomic conditions and appeared to have rather vague ideas of how to reach their goal of success and affluence, the aspirations of the young Russians interviewed by Zigon demonstrate striking similarities to my Chinese informants. Having come of age in a post-socialist society, these young Russians expressed hope in a way that was, according to Zigon, more reminiscent of "agency" than of a utopian definition of hope (Zigon, 2009 p. 257). Like Pedersen, he

argues that his informants maintained a state of hope in a situation which seemed rather hopeless in order to be able to "live a sane life in a specific social world" (p. 267). Their rather conventional aspirations such as a stable job and marriage, their conviction that hard work would eventually be rewarded as well as the occasional "denial of contingency" are highly reminiscent of my young Beijing informants (pp. 253, 261). Like those young Muscovites, they "are working toward the fulfilment of their hope. They are actively hoping […] in a situation of potential hopelessness" (p. 267). Even though my Beijing informants' futures may indeed have seemed more hopeful than those of Pedersen's and Zigon's informants, an awareness that a sudden course change of the regime or personal stroke of fate could destroy their future plans often resonated in their deliberations on the future. In telling me their families' stories, reflecting on their parents' and grandparents' memories of war and persecution and the arbitrariness of political campaigns, they were highly aware of the contingencies that could endanger their future plans yet were still full of confidence that they could overcome any potential obstacle.

In contrast to my Chinese informants and those of Pedersen and Zigon, Taiwanese youth doubted their efforts would yield material success. Similar to Brinton's observations among young Japanese, many of my Taiwanese informants complained to me that their parents still clung to the conviction that hard work would be rewarded (Brinton, 2011 pp. 13-19). For this reason, they tended to attribute their children's difficulties on the labour market to a lack of effort rather than the detrimental economic and political situation of Taiwan. Like the young Japanese who, crushed by parental expectations, increasingly despaired of reaching normative goals like a stable career and family, many young Taiwanese wanted to find a way to withdraw from the pressures of society. However, the 2014 student protests and subsequent demonstrations in Hong Kong fostered hope in many young Taiwanese that their voice could have an impact within the political sphere after all.

Even though young Chinese also often complained about feeling disconnected from their parents due to their fundamentally different experiences while coming of age, many of them shared in their parents' conviction of being able to create a better future for themselves and their families. Unlike their young Taiwanese peers, they were convinced that hard work and perseverance would yield positive results. This belief, reinforced by party propaganda, kept personal and communal hope alive and strengthened their optimistic future outlook.

Conclusion

My thesis set out by asking how the shared cultural traditions yet different demographic, economic and political landscapes of China and Taiwan affect highly educated young people's visions of the future and their life choices. Would their hopes and aspirations differ due to the distinct political systems and levels of economic development to which they were exposed while coming of age? Or would common cultural values, unaffected by different state ideologies, have more weight in young people's plans and hopes for the future?

In chapter one, I analyzed the family backgrounds of my informants with the help of life history interviews. I found that my informants in Beijing had grown up more autonomously from parents than their Taiwanese peers. This was due to a prevalence of childcare facilities and boarding schools in the reform period that were a remnant of the *danwei* system in the Mao era. In 1980s' Taiwan, by contrast, it was more common for women to take up informal employment after marriage, often in family businesses, which allowed them to also take care of the household and childminding. The different family propaganda disseminated by the leading parties during parents' youth might have contributed to these particular modes of division of labour within the household in China and Taiwan. Whereas ideological discourses in China during the Mao era supported women's full-time employment and children's early independence from parents, the KMT on Taiwan tried to sponsor a conservative Confucian family ideology through its cultural campaigns from the 1950s to the 1970s. My interviews suggest that the parents of my informants appeared to have been influenced by these different ideological discourses and transferred them to their child-raising methods.

In this chapter, I drew on the work of Evans, who traced the experiences of different generations of mothers and daughters in Beijing, as well as on Kuan's recent research on the psychological effects which the high-pressure educational environment has on young pupils in Kunming (Evans, 2008; Kuan, 2015). Like Evans, I found that in Beijing, yet also in Taipei, mothers' relationships with their adult children were riddled with conflicts that stem from the different experiences made coming of age as well as from diverging expectations with regard to marriage and future living arrangements. However, by contrast to their Beijing counterparts, the childhood experiences of Taiwanese mothers were not as dramatically affected by past ideological turns. For this reason, notions of the parent-child relationship appeared not to have changed as dramatically from one generation to the next. Hence, even though also young Taiwanese wished for more understanding from their

parents, conflicts did not arise as much about the underlying tenets of parenting ideals but more about parents' failure to recognize that societal transformations made the realisation of certain filial ideals more difficult. Like their Chinese peers, also young Taiwanese struggled with the immense pressure caused by the requirements of the education system and the labour market. This constituted a major source of conflict within families.

Kuan's research describes the fatal consequences which the achievement pressure evoked by families and the education system has had on the psychological health of Chinese children in recent years (Kuan, 2015). My interviews with young adults in Beijing and Taipei showed that already in the late 1980s and early 1990s school children were exposed to a significant amount of pressure to excel. However, by contrast to the parents interviewed by Kuan, my interviews show that the negative effects this could have on young children seem to have been rarely acknowledged by parents and schools at that time. Despite the fact that not all my informants perceived this as having affected their lives negatively in the long run, most young adults I interviewed talked about the discomfort which feelings of insufficiency and exhaustion had caused in them during childhood. Overall I found in this chapter that early feelings of gratification or despair that my informants experienced as the consequence of their educational achievements or failures came to make an important impact on the formation of aspirations and the ways chosen to pursue them in young adulthood.

In chapter two, I have illustrated how the prevalence of boarding schools in China compared to Taiwan further reinforced the different degrees of children's autonomy from parents. It also shows that the specific demographics of China require most rural informants who pursued the goal of higher education to be accepting of an extended spatial separation from their families. In Taiwan, the young people I met mostly lived with their families at least until entering higher education, regardless of their urban or rural background.

Of particular concern in this context were the different conceptualizations of separation in China and Taiwan. Here I referred to Stafford's work on the traditions of separation in northern China and Taiwan, as well as to Johnston's argument about the moral and geographic factors that work as contradictory forces in the realization of filial duties in China (Johnston, 2013; Stafford, 2000 b). I found that at both locations, separation could be conceived of as beneficiary to a family's future well-being, a phenomenon Johnston and Stafford also observed in China. However, the aspect of temporality was decisive in

determining what was regarded as acceptable within the realm of filiality among the families of my Chinese and Taiwanese informants.

Chinese parents tended to be more accepting of their children's indefinite absence from home due to educational and professional reasons than the parents of my Taiwanese informants. In particular, parents from rural Chinese areas appeared not to want to risk their children's career options by calling them back to their home villages and home cities where employment options were not as promising as in Beijing. Absence from home thus seemed to be not as much associated with the neglect of filial duties among the families of my Chinese informants, as long as children strove to realize their academic and professional potential. Some parents even actively supported their children's pursuit of a foreign citizenship despite not being certain if they wanted to follow their children abroad. In Taiwan, my case studies demonstrate that a longer absence from home had to be justified by the promise of a significant improvement of the status of the family. As a relocation of the whole family abroad was rarely intended, parents seemed to expect their children to return to Taiwan after they had completed their education in another country.

Important to the interpretation of these differences might be that many families of my Chinese informants could look back upon a long history of migration. Their families had often fled their home places during the Second Sino-Japanese War, they had been allocated work far away from their home places during the Mao era, or they had left the countryside to seek employment in the cities in the reform era. Hence, the separation from family members and a certain degree of spatial mobility has been a part of the Chinese family life for decades. Even though a few of my Taiwanese informants had mainland Chinese grandparents who had come to Taiwan in the 1940s, most families appeared to be more bound to their home places. If parents and grandparents had experienced separation from their natal families at a young age, this mostly occurred as they left their rural home places to seek better opportunities in the cities during Taiwan's economic boom. These separations appeared less severe as the distances on the relatively small island were easier to bridge. Again, these different experiences and attitudes towards separation and filial obligations might have contributed to the greater decision-making autonomy I observed among my young Chinese informants compared to their Taiwanese peers.

Chapter three has shown how these different degrees of autonomy manifest in young adults' decisions on their professional future. Unlike many Taiwanese informants, young Chinese had often already surpassed the academic and professional successes of their parents which, combined with their relative spatial independence, provided them with a

powerful bargaining tool in making important decisions. Even though they did consider parental wishes, they appeared less compromising in pursuing the careers they aspired to than young Taiwanese.

An important aspect discussed in this chapter was the gendered expectations placed on young men and women in the working world and the frustrations they caused in their early careers. Whereas young women felt that expectations of marriage and childbirth curtailed their career options and expectations of their professional achievements, young men felt pressured by the high demands in terms of income and social prestige their job should convey.

Moreover, both young men and women in Beijing and Taipei saw their career choices having a direct impact on their marriage opportunities as well as their fulfilment of filial obligations in the future. They were of the age at which most educational choices had been already made and now had to be translated into achievements on the job market. Finding a career that satisfied personal expectations and at the same time those of their families was one of the major conflicts that I could observe most directly being played out during my research in Taipei and Beijing. Moreover, due to the short time window open for marriage, many young university graduates, male and female alike, felt stressed by the expectation of having to find a suitable match at the same time as they entered the job market.

In chapter four I have examined how the differences in decision-making autonomy were reflected in the informants' choice of marriage partner and post-marital residence. Young Chinese, often living far from parents, had more autonomy in the choice of partners and form of residence whereas young Taiwanese felt more inclined to consider parental demands concerning these aspects. Moreover, despite the strong ideal of living independently after marriage, patrilocal residence appeared to be a more dominant expectation among Taiwanese parents than among Chinese ones.

My analysis in this chapter centred on recent research about changing concepts of premarital relations and marriage by Davis and Friedman as well as Farrer (Davis and Friedman, 2014; Farrer, 2014). Farrer's study points to an increasing delinking of premarital sexual relationships from marriage in urban China (Farrer, 2014). My findings in Beijing and Taipei suggest that despite the increasing liberalization of sexual relationships in both societies, certain practices that allow people to test compatibility before marriage, for instance premarital cohabitation, were however more common among my Chinese informants. Moreover, my case studies have shown that premarital sexual relationships might have been common but not entirely accepted for women in both societies.

Further, I found that despite the significant transformations to which the concept of marriage has been subjected in both societies, intergenerational obligations still played a major role in the choice of marriage partner and the planning of married life. This trend has also been noted by Davis and Friedman with regard to marriage in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. (Davis and Friedman, 2014 pp. 26-27). However, these concerns were especially pronounced in Taipei where post-marital patrilocal residence was still more common than in Beijing. Nevertheless, whereas the realization of filial duties might have looked different among young Chinese and Taiwanese, both sets of informants appeared highly aware of their responsibilities toward ageing parents. Moreover, as also observed by Davis and Friedman, parenthood was only considered desirable within the realm of marriage among both groups of informants (p. 21). Even though Chinese informants seemed to benefit from a more liberal attitude towards gender roles and marriage ideology, this did not include the aspect of parenthood.

Chapter five has taken a closer look at decision-making processes. I found that Taiwanese female informants needed more reassurance from external sources than their Chinese peers when making decisions that did not conform to normative expectations or ran against long held personal aspirations. Further, they appeared more inclined to apply divination to arrive at decisions and justify their choices. The young Chinese women I interviewed did not usually apply such methods and appeared in general to be more confident about making independent decisions and taking risks. I compared the problems my young informants faced with phenomena observed among young adults in other societies in transition. Brinton's and Cook's analyses of the problems faced by young Japanese men in establishing their careers and making choices for the future closely parallel the experiences of my female (and also male) Taiwanese informants (Brinton, 2011; Cook, 2013). In both cases, the insecurities of the market translated into worries about one's personal future -this weakened my young informants' self-confidence in decision-making and their sense of personal agency.

Young Chinese women, however, appeared to be more hopeful -for the Chinese economy as well as their personal future. Their positive stance towards the future bore many similarities with Pedersen's description of young Mongolian men who hoped to profit from the country's transition to a market economy (Pedersen, 2012). Even though the young Chinese I met seemed to have more promising opportunities than Pedersen's informants, their firm belief in a better future encouraged them to take risks that, in comparison with their more reluctant Taiwanese peers, appeared rather bold and impulsive. Moreover, having grown up to parents who were willing to invest their relatively scarce resources into

the education of their children, they were more accustomed to financial uncertainty and risk-taking than their Taiwanese peers who mostly had grown up in greater material affluence. I could observe that these different experiences coming of age had an important impact on the way major life choices were approached. Young Chinese women seemed to hold stronger beliefs that taking risks would pay off in the future and appeared to have developed a greater resilience against uncertainty compared to the young Taiwanese women I met in the field. For this reason, they seemed to be more willing to take comparatively heavy risks in both their professional and private lives.

Overall, the findings presented in this chapter suggest that young Chinese women seem to have a stronger sense of self-efficacy than their Taiwanese peers. They presented themselves as convinced they could realize their ambitious objectives despite structural constraints like financial hardship and parental disapproval. The young Taiwanese women introduced in this chapter were comparatively cautious in their expectations of future success. These findings parallel those of Bandura who claims that past experiences of achievements and the overcoming of obstacles have a decisive impact on an individual's sense of efficacy and willingness to take risks (Bandura, [1995] 1999). Moreover, I have highlighted the impact that sociocultural aspects have on decision-making in terms of important life choices in the realms of one's education, career or romantic relationships. In particular, I have illustrated that perceptions of self-efficacy are closely tied to the socioeconomic and political realities of each of the locations. I have also shown how structural changes in the political and economic spheres are linked to perceptions of the choices available and to individual strategies to deal with contingency.

In chapter six, I have told the stories of the young Chinese and Taiwanese people who, for various reasons, have not attained normative life goals and who - disenchanted by society's lack of acceptance of and understanding for their situation - tried various strategies to realize a marriage or career abroad. This chapter has demonstrated that despite the increasing urbanization, modernization and delay of age at first marriage and childbirth in China and Taiwan, alternative lifestyles are still limited for those that miss important biographic milestones. At the same time, it has shown that Chinese as well as Taiwanese parents appear to be increasingly open to the alternative strategies their adult children apply to reach their goals; this observation might point to important changes in gendered notions of success as well as in intergenerational obligations in both societies.

In particular mothers seemed to sympathise with the problems their daughters had in integrating normative expectations on marriage and childbirth with their personal

aspirations. They facilitated their daughters' choices by supporting them in the search of alternatives that might provide them with the opportunity to buy some time before making a decision or to find ways to combine the realisation of personal and normative goals. Young men appeared to find it more problematic to resist their families' expectations on them, most likely due to traditional expectations on sons to guarantee the continuation of the family line by providing offspring. The young men I described in this chapter both regarded a life abroad as their only opportunity to realise their personal aspirations and to evade local heteronormative expectations. However, they were hesitating to fully disclose their reasons for wanting to leave their home societies. While they received family support in realising their plans, this was mainly based on their parents' hope for their professional success.

In the last chapter, I have taken a closer look at the reasons for the apparent hopelessness among many young Taiwanese, whereas their Chinese counterparts seemed to regard their future as brighter. I found that my Taipei informants' disenchantment with their personal future was largely influenced by the stagnating economy and Taiwan's political isolation that made it difficult for them to meet their parents' ambitious expectations. Young Chinese, however, felt empowered by their personal success stories in the education system and their professional lives in a rising China. Many had exceeded their parents' achievements already by their twenties. In addition, optimistic state propaganda declaring incessant economic growth also encouraged their positive outlook on the future. However, for young Taiwanese, things started to shift thanks to the 2014 Sunflower Movement; they seemed to regain their belief in change and the efficacy of political agency, whereas the very observant and critical among my Chinese informants appeared to feel slightly startled by the unknown political changes that loomed during the time of my research in China in 2013.

In this chapter I have described how my young informants and their families oriented their outlook on the future along the economic and political prospects of their home societies. This became especially apparent in the cases studies of members of the older generations whose expectations on their personal achievements had fluctuated with the ups and downs of the political and economic spheres over the life course. However, both the Chinese and Taiwanese parental generations had high expectations on their offspring. Chinese parents expected their children to succeed in China's growing economy and also Taiwanese parents hoped that their children might surpass their own successes during the economic boom due to the educational opportunities they had granted them. Both young Chinese and Taiwanese found it difficult to convey to their parents the difficulties they encountered on

the highly competitive urban labour market. Nevertheless, young Chinese appeared more hopeful to be able to reach the goals their families envisioned for them as they shared in the collective optimism for a better future.

In touching upon various chapters in the lives of young Chinese and Taiwanese in which important choices had to be made, my work illustrates the great impact that demographic, socioeconomic and political aspects can have on the formation of aspirations, the perception of life choices and the ways in which young people approach important decisions. My study also demonstrates that certain differences in family traditionalism that Whyte and colleagues observed almost two decades ago are still palpable in urban China and Taiwan; in particular with regard to residential choices and filial care practices, Taipei appeared more traditional than Beijing (Whyte et al., 2003; Whyte, 2004). However, as employment structures and family size change at both locations, it is likely that these transformations will also have an effect on family life.

At the same time, I have found that despite these differences, a strong cultural heritage still connects Chinese and Taiwanese societies. These shared cultural traditions become especially apparent in the importance that is placed on the ideal of intergenerational support. All the young men and women I met, even those who felt estranged from their families, were concerned about their parents' future well-being and perceived it as their responsibility to ensure a pleasant old age for them. Even though my Chinese informants lived more autonomously from their parents than their Taiwanese peers and were aware that they might not be able to care physically for their parents in the future, they nonetheless planned to assist them in other ways to express their love and respect. Whereas young Chinese and Taiwanese strove towards a degree of independence from their families that facilitated the pursuit of their personal aspirations, they did not aspire to a radical form of individualism that ignored their parents' needs. In this way, my findings differ importantly from those of Yan who observed a more individualistic streak among Chinese youths (Yan, 2009). Rather than distancing themselves from dominant societal values, most of the young people I met in Beijing and Taipei aspired to reach conventional benchmarks of adulthood -however, they wanted to do so in their own time, with the opportunity to try out options before making choices in their professional and private lives.

That is, in terms of decision-making both groups of informants were highly considerate of the potential consequences of their choices for their families. This means, young Chinese and Taiwanese adults approached decisions in a similar context-oriented way as the students of different East Asian backgrounds with whom Nisbett conducted his

laboratory-based study on cross-cultural decision-making (Nisbett, 2004 [2003]). The different state-ideological and economic backgrounds thus do not appear to have affected the importance accredited to the well-being of the family in the context of life-choices. Nevertheless, it became apparent that many young Chinese show more personal agency than their Taiwanese peers in the pursuit of their aspirations. Specifically, I found that the perception of risk and uncertainty differed between my Chinese and Taiwanese informants; a phenomenon I accredited to their different upbringings and experiences of achievement that affected their sense of efficacy (Bandura, [1995] 1999). Hence, while both groups of young adults tried to pursue personal aspirations while fulfilling parents' expectations on future support, their different attitudes towards risk and uncertainty resulted in notable differences in the approaches they chose to realise their goals.

This leads to another subject my work discussed, namely the changing notions of achievement among highly educated young adults in China and Taiwan. I found that concepts of achievement in China and Taiwan are influenced by Confucian and party ideological ideals as well as by global neoliberal discourses; observations that closely resonate with those made by Long and Moore who highlight the increasing intersection of local and global concepts of success (Long and Moore, 2013). Achievement in the Chinese and Taiwanese contexts is interpreted as the ability to provide for parents and offspring by means of creating economic stability and a harmonic, caring environment that will secure the flourishing of the family line into the future. At the same time, however, modern markers of success, like an international career and urban lifestyle, are highly coveted especially by the younger generations. In China, these different ideals are additionally impacted by the government's concern for highly competitive and patriotic citizens that can advance the country's economic success while remaining loyal to the state (Anagnost, 2004; Hoffman 2010; Kipnis, 2006).

My case studies have demonstrated that often, these diverse ideals of achievement collide. In both Beijing and Taipei the resulting value conflicts create uncertainty and despair especially in young adults who have yet to make a definite decision on their future. Nevertheless, I was surprised to find that young persons' decisions to pursue challenging goals in these urban environments were not necessarily dependent on the economic resources and social networks available to them. Feelings of empowerment created by previous experiences of success in the educational sector or the job market appeared far more important in the decision to hang on to ambitious plans than existing socioeconomic means.

Long and Moore note that "[t]he things that happen when someone achieves are often not what anyone would expect, opening up unforeseen ways of imagining the self, both in its own right and in relation to others" (Long and Moore, 2013 p. 5). For this reason, they suggest that instead of focusing solely on not yet realised desires and aspirations, the experience of achievement itself should receive more attention in anthropological research (p. 11). I found that listening to the accounts of the hard-earned successes and shattering failures of my young informants contributed to my understanding of the experiences on which they based their decisions; in particular in terms of their risk-taking and dealing with uncertainty. Surprisingly, young Chinese who had often experienced more socioeconomic difficulties and setbacks than their comparatively affluent Taiwanese counterparts appeared more persistent in pursuing their ambitious goals. In the course of my fieldwork it emerged that their previous successes in the education system that had eventually catapulted them into universities in the Chinese capital conveyed to them the self-confidence to set high goals and to pursue them despite the high risks involved. Young Taiwanese having attended equally renowned universities, by contrast, seemed to draw less empowerment from their educational successes. They found it difficult to surpass their parents' extremely high expectations in the contemporary economic climate of stagnation. Moreover, educational and professional achievements appeared to be more taken for granted by my Taiwanese informants and their families – an expected payoff of an expensive education with private tutoring and often international student fees – and thus they had a less empowering effect. That is, the experience of academic and professional achievements and the way it impacted self-efficacy was decisively influenced by prior expectations and the reactions of the social environment. These observations resonate with Bandura's finding that "objective economic status" does not have a direct influence on people's sense of efficacy; the decisive factor influencing children's sense of agency is parents' conviction of their children's ability to succeed (Bandura, [1995] 1999 p. 15). In this sense, the investigation of past achievements within their particular socioeconomic context did indeed contribute to a deeper understanding of my informant's dealing with risk and uncertainty and the self-confidence with which they pursued their aspirations.

These findings further indicate that despite the above mentioned differences in the evaluation of success, in both China and Taiwan notions of achievement revolve closely around the fulfilment of filial obligations. Improving the socioeconomic status of the family and thus securing the family's well-being in the future was in the eyes of many parents and their adult children a significant achievement (Fong, 2004; Johnston, 2013). Not reaching this goal due to academic or professional failure could raise debilitating

doubts in young adults, as several of my case studies have shown. Perceptions of failure and success among young adults were thus closely bound to their performance of filiality.

Moreover, the societal atmosphere additionally affected young people's self-confidence in the pursuit of their ambitions. As the previous chapters have shown, what is perceived as a realistic goal is as dependent on an assessment of one's personal skills and experiences as it is contingent upon the collective mood which can either serve as an empowering or debilitating force. Arthur Kleinman highlights this issue in his discussion on happiness in China (Kleinman, 2011). Reflecting upon the general optimistic mood of the population during the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008 he remarks: "[…] no one watching the crowds and observing the people in the street could fail to be impressed by two emotions: *pride* at what China had achieved as a rising power and *happiness*" (p. 266). He reminds the reader that especially the older generations of Chinese look back upon a lifetime impacted by political chaos and uncertainty. To them, he argues, China's current political and economic situation appears stable and affluent and gives rise to a powerful hope for the future. Kleinman asks: "Against this troubled and troubling historical background, isn't the audacity of simply being happy and enjoying life the most remarkable of collective and personal changes?" (p. 267). The hope for political stability and economic progress, as also my work has shown, is tangible among members of all generations of Chinese. That is, the collective achievements over the last decades inform an atmosphere of hope in China that is also reflected in the individual's life goals and risk-taking in their pursuit of success.

Meanwhile in Taiwan, collective feelings of despair and stagnation, resulting from Taiwan's deadlock situation in the global economy and its lack of political sovereignty resulted in a gloomy atmosphere on the island that had a debilitating impact on young people's hopes for the future. They found it difficult to draw empowerment from past generations' achievements; a condition that was worsened by their mistrust of the KMT government as well as its neighbour China that was often mentioned in my interviews. However, with the rekindling of hope by the Sunflower Movement in 2014, many also appeared to feel empowered in the pursuit of their personal goals.

Overall, my comparative analysis has highlighted the impact that economic and politico-ideological discourses have on the formation of aspirations and decision-making on the individual as well as the societal level. Despite similar family values and concepts of filial responsibilities, the life-choices of young Chinese and Taiwanese were importantly influenced by the specific atmospheres of hope and despair in their home societies.

My analysis adds to the previous, mostly quantitative, comparative research conducted in the urban areas of China and Taiwan by providing the qualitative data necessary to understand how complex societal dynamics are reflected in the lives of individuals and families. While Chu, Whyte and colleagues described societal trends by referring to censuses and other statistical records, my work is largely based on observations made in the field and the personal accounts of young people and their families (Chu and Yu, 2010; Chu, et al., 2011; Hermelin, et al., 2003; Whyte, et al., 2003; Whyte, 2004; 2005; Yang and Hu 2012). The life stories of the members of different generations of Chinese and Taiwanese are at the heart of my thesis. As such, my approach is also modelled on the research of Evans that, applying a multigenerational perspective, focuses on the autobiographic narratives of Chinese women. This thesis hence aims to connect Evan's individual-focused approach with the comparative sociological analyses of Whyte, Chu and colleagues. In this way, I hope to contribute to an understanding of how individual aspirations and decision-making change along with other socioeconomic and political transformations across time.

However, at this place I would like to remind the reader that even though the comparison performed in this thesis required the highlighting of certain tendencies in the Chinese and Taiwanese societies, the case studies demonstrate that there was also great variation within the two cohorts of informants. Despite the undeniable influence of the different societal environments, the heterogeneity of my informants' experiences cannot only be explained with reference to the structural factors traced in this work. After all, the groups of my informants consisted of young men and women with very distinct personalities - this was demonstrated in the ways in which they talked about their lives and tried to solve their problems. These differences also affected their relationship towards me as researcher and may have played a role in the topics which they addressed and how much information they were willing to reveal.

In conclusion, behind the different approaches to conceptualizing one's personal and collective future lie complex constructs of ideological, political and socioeconomic differences. These different factors also informed the evaluation of achievements and choices among young Chinese and Taiwanese. The cases presented in this work thus show how the political environment, demographic and socioeconomic structures as well as cultural traditions interact with young people's perceptions of their subjectivity, their sense of agency and their notions of moral indebtedness towards their family and society. Although the Chinese and Taiwanese societies share many commonalities that are reflected in the life goals and aspirations of young people, their different political and economic realities decisively impact on whether and how these aspirations can be pursued.

Chinese Vocabulary Glossary

aimei 曖昧

ayi 阿姨

bu heshi 不合適

caomeizu 草莓族

chenglong 成龍

chi ku 吃苦

chou qian 抽籤

chuzhong 初中

dang duidao 當隊導

danwei 單位

dizhi 地支

feinongye hukou 非農業戶口

fennu qingnian 憤怒青年

fu 符

gaokao 高考

gaozhong 高中

gongchan 共產

gongzhu bing 公主病

guanerdai 官二代

Guanyin (Pusa) 觀音(菩薩)

Guan Yu 關羽

gui yue 鬼月

guizi lai le 鬼子來了

hong lingjin 紅領巾

Hong Lou Meng 紅樓夢

hukou 戶口

hutong 胡同

jia 家

Jia chuqu de nü'er shi pochu de shui 嫁出去的女兒是潑出去的水

jian 賤

jiao bei 玟杯

juewang 絕望

ke'ai 可愛

kejia hua 客家話

langman 浪漫

liankao 聯考

lianyi 聯誼

majiang 麻將

mantou 饅頭

Mazu 媽祖

mei you xiangfa 沒有想法

mian xiang 面相

mianzi 面子

ming 命

nan 男

nü 女

nühanzi 女漢子

pian 騙

qingchunfan 青春飯

renkou suzhi 人口素質

renmin gongshe 人民公社

sajiao 撒嬌

shao xiandui 少先隊

shenghuo hen jianku 生活很艱苦

shengnü 剩女

shifu 師傅

sì 四

sǐ 死

shiwang 失望

suanmingzhe 算命者

suzhi 素質

taijiquan 太極拳

taiyanghua 太陽花

taiyanghua xueyun 太陽花學運

Taobao 淘寶

tiaolongmen 跳龍門

tiefan wan 鐵飯碗

tuhao 土豪

weibo 微博

Wenchang 文昌

Wen Qu Xing 文曲星

wo de xinqing tebie bu hao 我的心情特別不好

xiangqin 相親

xiao 孝

xiangrikui 向日葵

xinfu 新富

xiwang 希望

yali 壓力

yi ben daxue 一本大學

yuanfen 緣分

Yue Lao 月老

yusan yundong 雨傘運動

zhai 宅

zhainan 宅男

zhainü 宅女

ziwo fazhan 自我發展

Appendix

Below the version of the survey I distributed in Taipei is presented. I adjusted it accordingly for my research in Beijing.

In Taipei, 23 surveys were returned and in Beijing, 16 surveys were returned.

我是倫敦政經學院人類學系的博士班學生，目前在台北進行我的博士論文研究。我的論文關注是台灣年輕人的決策過程和人生計劃，希望您可參與我博士研究的問卷調查。這將有助於我理解台灣社會和年輕人對人生的看法.如果你有不想回答的問題，可留下空白答案。你的答覆將做保密處理. 如果您有任何疑問，我的電子郵件地址如下： d.remmert@ lse.ac.uk

1. 一般資料 General information

1.1. 名字 (中文/ 英文) name (Chinese/English)

1.2. 出生日期 date of birth

1.3. 出生地點 （市/縣）City/County of birth:

1.4. 居住地點（市/縣）City/County of residence

1.5. 你的母語是什麼？ What is your native language? (請您將正確答案畫底線)

國語 Mandarin

台語 Taiyu

客家話 Hakka

英語 English

其他（請註明）other (Please specify)

如有多項母語的情況下，請說明理由: Please explain reason in case of multiple choice:

1.6. 你與你的父母溝通時使用哪種語言？ Which language do you use when communicating with your parents? (請您將正確答案畫底線)

國語 Mandarin

台語 Taiyu

客家話 Hakka

英語 English

其他（請註明）other (Please specify)

如有多項溝通語言的情況下，請說明理由 Please explain reason in case of multiple choice

2.家庭與婚姻 Family and Marriage:

2.1. 你的父親的出生日期？ Birth date of father

你的母親的出生日期？ Birth date of mother

2.2. 你有多少兄弟姐妹？請註明他們的性別和年齡。How many siblings do you have? Please specify their sex and age.

2.3.你的兄弟姐妹結婚了嗎？如果有，請註明他們的結婚的年齡。Are any of your siblings married? If so, please specify the age they got married.

2.4. 您目前的婚姻狀況 Your current relationship status:

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

a) 單身 single

b) 交往中但未婚 in a relationship

c) 結婚 married (If you ticked this box, at which age did you get married and how old was your partner at that time?)

d) 其他（請註明）other (Please specify)

2.5 你認為台灣女性/男性結婚的理想年齡是？請解釋您的想法。What do you think is the ideal age for Taiwanese women/men to marry? Please explain.

女性:

男性:

2.6. 你認為台灣男女結婚時遇到最主要的障礙是什麼？ What do you think are major obstacles Taiwanese women and and men encounter when planning to marry?

2.7. 你認為台灣男女婚後遇到最主要的障礙是什麼？ What do you think are major obstacles Taiwanese men and women encounter after marriage?

3. Family Planning

3.1. 你有孩子嗎？ Do you have any children?

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

沒有 No

有（如果你勾選此框，請指定你的孩子的性別和年齡）yes (If you ticked this box pleases specify sex and age of your children)

3.2. 您認為有第一胎的理想年齡是幾歲？ What do you think is the ideal age to have the first child?

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

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女方：

男方：

3.3. 你認年輕夫婦養孩子遇到的主要問題是什麼？ What do you think are the major problems young couples encounter when having children?

3.4. 你認為先婚在有小孩很重要嗎？請解釋您的答案。Do you think it is important to be married before having children? Please explain your answer.

3.5. 您對您未來孩子有性別偏好嗎？Do you have any preference concerning the sex of your future child? (請您將正確答案畫底線)

偏好女孩 Girl

偏好男孩 boy

沒有偏好 no preference

4. 家庭 Household

4.1. 您的住宿跟：Are you living with your :

　　(請您將正確答案畫底線)

a) 父母 parents

b) 其他親屬 other relatives

c) 獨立 independently （請註明）

d) 其他 other （請註明）

如果你勾選框 a), b)或 d)請繼續與第 4.2.1.題。If you ticked a), b), or d) please go on with section 4.2.1.

如果你勾選盒 c），請繼續與第 4.3.題。If you ticked c) please go on with section 4.3.

4.2.1. 如果您與父母或其他親屬生活，有多少人住在一起？請註明他們的性別，年齡，和與您的關係。If you live with your parents or other relatives, how many people live in your household? Please specify their sex, age, and relationship to you.

4.2.2.如果有祖父母生活在你的家中，請註明，夫家或娘家。If there are any grandparents living in your household, please specify if these are the parents of your mother or the parents of your father.

4.2.3.您將來打算會保持現在的住宿狀況嗎？請解釋您的答案。Do you expect to live in this household in the future? Please explain your answer.

4.3. 您有沒有<u>婚前</u>和男/女友同居嗎？Have you ever shared a residence with a partner <u>before</u> marriage?

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

有 yes

沒有 no

（如果你選沒有，請繼續與第 4.5.題。）(If you answered with no please continue with question 4.5.)

4.4. 如果你選"有"婚前和男/女友同居，同居狀況是：If you ticked "yes" in the previous question, have you lived/are you living with your partner:

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

a) 獨立居住 in an independent flat

b) 和男/女友家長同居 with your partner's parents

c) 和你家長同居 with your parents

d) 其他（請註明）other (Please specify)

如果您目前的關係狀態是"已婚"，請繼續與第 4.6..題。If your current relationship status is "married" please go on with question 4.6.

4.5. 請問您婚後打算住哪裡？ **Where do you expect to live after marriage?**

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

a) 獨立居住 in an independent flat

b) 和家人同居 sharing a residence with your parents

c) 和太太/先生的父母 sharing a residence with you parents-in-law

d) 其他（請註明）other (Please specify)

4.6. 如果你是已婚人士，你有沒有曾經與父母或親家同居？ **If you are married, are you sharing/have you ever shared a residence with your parents or your parents-in-law?**

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

a) 和父母同居 parents

b) 和太太/先生的父母 parents-in-law

c) 其他（請註明）other (please specify)

4.7. 您認為台灣新婚夫妻最有可能在哪兒居住？請解釋你的答案。**What, in your opinion, is the most common residence for a newly married couple in Taiwan? Please explain your answer.**

4.8. 您認為哪樣才是台灣新婚夫妻<u>最理想</u>的居住狀況？請解釋您的答案。

What, in your opinion, is <u>the most ideal</u> residence choice for a newly married couple in Taiwan? Please explain your answer?

5. 房地產 **Real Estate**

5.1.你有沒有投資過房地產？ Have you ever ever invested in real estate?

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

有 yes

沒有 （如果你選沒有，請繼續與第 5.4.題。）

   (if you answered with no please continue with question 5.4.)

5.2.如果你投資過房地產，你有沒有收到他人的財力支持（可多選）？ If you have invested in real estate, have you received any financial support (multiple choice possible)?

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

沒有 no

父母的財力支持 from parents

兄弟姐妹的財力支持 from siblings

其他親屬的財力支持 from other relatives

男／女伴的財力支持 from partner

其他（請註明）other (Please specify)

5.3. 請問你需不需要還清這筆錢？ Will you have to pay back this support?

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

要 Yes

不要 No

5.4.你覺得擁有房地產（公寓/房子）是你人生重要的一件事？Do you think it is important to own an apartment/house at one point in your life?

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

重要 Yes

不重要 no

請解釋你的答案 Please explain your answer

6. 家庭收入 Household income

6.1.現任職位（可多選）Occupational status (multiple choice possible)

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

a) 學生 student

b)在全職工作 in full-time employment

c)在兼職工作 in part-time employment

d)自僱人士 self-employed

e) 自由職業者 freelancer

6.2. 你每週工作多少個小時？How many hours do you work per week?

6.3. 您每月的淨收入多少？ What is your monthly net income in NTD?

6.4. 您對您父母的家庭收入是否有所貢獻（例如，每月匯款）如果有，請註明您對您父母每月收入貢獻多少？ Do you contribute to the household income of your parents (in the form of monthly remittances etc.) If yes, please specify your monthly contribution to the parental household income.

6.5. 您有沒有收到家人的財力支持？ Do you receive any financial support from your family members (several answers possible)

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

沒有 no

有，父母 from parents

有，兄弟姐妹 from siblings

有，其他親屬 from other relatives

6.6.如果有，請註明多少？ If yes, please specify the amount of the monthly support you receive in NTD

6.7. 你現在的家庭收入每月有多少？ （請算新台幣淨收） What is the total monthly net income of the household you are living in in NTD

6.8. 請註明收入是誰貢獻

Please specify who is contributing to the total income of the household?

7. 教育和事業 Education and career

7.1. 1. 請註明您父親的最高學位 Please state your father's highest degree

(請您將正確答案畫底線))

小學畢業 elementary school degree

國中畢業 middle school degree

高中畢業 high school degree

大專畢業 vocational college degree

學士畢業 undergraduate degree

研究所／碩士畢業 postgraduate degree

博士畢業 PhD degree

其他（請註明）other (Please specify)

7.1.2. 請註明您父親現在的工作. Please state your father's current occupation.

7.1.3. 請註明您母親的最高學位 Please state your mother's highest degree

(請您將正確答案畫底線))

小學畢業 elementary school degree

國中畢業 middle school degree

高中畢業 high school degree

大專畢業 vocational college degree

學士畢業 undergraduate degree

研究所／碩士畢業 postgraduate degree

博士畢業 PhD degree

其他（請註明）other (Please specify)

7.1.4. 請註明您母親現在的工作.. Please state your mother's current occupation.

7.2. 請註明您的最高學位 Please state your highest degree

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

國中畢業 middle school degree

高中畢業 high school degree

專科畢業 vocational college degree

學士畢業 undergraduate degree

研究所／碩士畢業 postgraduate degree

博士畢業 PhD degree

其他（請註明）other (Please specify)

7.3. 你高中念那種學科類組？Which subject group did you study at <u>high school</u>?

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

- 第一類組-文組
- 第二類組（自然組；理工學院為主）
- 第三類組（自然組；醫學院為主）

7.4.如果你有念過大學或專科，請註明 主修科目？ If you studied a degree at university or vocational college, which subjects did you study?

7.5. 請問您的學業過程所收到的財源支持從哪裡來？（可多選）Who supported you during your studies (multiple choice possible)

(請您將正確答案畫底線

父母 parents 兄弟姐妹 siblings

其他親屬 other relatives

政府貸款 government loans

銀行貸款 bank loan

獎學金 scholarship

其他（請註明） other (please specify)

要是有多項選擇，請註明您主要財源支持的來源:

In case of multiple choice please specify your main source of financial support:

7.6.求學時（限高中以上的高等教育），您一個月總共領到多少錢？

How much total monthly support did/do you receive during your higher education?

7.7. 大學時為什麼會選擇您所修的科系？（可多選）

According to which parameters did you chose your subject at university/college (multiple choice possible)? (請您將正確答案畫底線

個人興趣 Personal interes

地點 location

聯考分數 liankao scor

家長建議 parental advice

朋友影響 friends

學校名氣 school reputation

其他（請註明） other (please specify)

7.8. 您對選擇的科系滿意嗎？ Are you content with your subject choice?

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

滿意 yes

不滿意 no

如果您回答不滿意，請說明不滿意的原因和你理想的科系:

If you answered with no, please specify the reason and state your ideal subject choice:

7.9.您的工作和學業領域是否相關？ Do you work in the field of your study?

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

相關 yes

不相關 no

8. 你選擇職業時，有什麼重要因素？（可多選）

What were/would be important factors in your job choice (multiple answers possible)

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

a) 與我學業相關的領域 related to my field of study

b) 薪水 salary

c) 具有挑戰性 challenging tasks

d)地點 location

e) 晉升機會 opportunities for promotion

f) 其他（請註明） other (please specify)

8. 出國 Going abroad

8.1. 你有沒有住過國外（3 個月以上？）Have you ever lived outside of Taiwan (three months and more)

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

有 yes

沒有 （如果你選沒有，請繼續與第 8.5.題。） no (if you tick this box please continue with question 8.5.)

8.2. 您在那些國家居住 3 個月以上？In which countries other than Taiwan have you resided three months or more?

（請註明每單次留居的時間）(Please specify duration of single stays)

8.3. 你當初國外居住的目的是什麼？What was the purpose of the stay?

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

渡假 Vacation

念書 Studying

工作和旅行 work and travel

8.4.您是不是目前居住國外？Are you currently living abroad?

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

不是 No

是 （請註明居住時間和目的） Yes (Please specify length and purpose of stay)

8.5. 您目前有沒有任何計劃居住國外？ Are you currently planning any stays abroad?

　　(請您將正確答案畫底線)

有 Yes

沒有 （如果你選沒有，請繼續與第 9.1.題。 ） no (if you ticked this box please continue with question 9.1.)

8.6. 您停留的目的: Purpose of your planned stay abroad:

　　(請您將正確答案畫底線)

渡假 vacation

工作 study

工作和旅行 work-and-travel

工作 work

婚姻 marriage

其他原因（請註明）other reason (Please specify)

8.7. 你打算留在國外多久？ How long do you plan to stay abroad?

8.8. 你想回台灣嗎？ Would you like to return to Taiwan?

　　(請您將正確答案畫底線)

想 yes

不想 no

請解釋你的答案 Please explain your answer

9. 對未來的人生目標 Aspirations for the future

9.1. 請根據你個人認可的重要性排列以下的人生目標。請從 1 開始排序。

Please rank the following bullet points according the importance you accredit to them in regard to your personal life goals, from most important (1) to least important (7).

優渥的薪資 good salary

具有挑戰性和滿足感的工作 challenging and fulfilling job

擁有房地產 owning real estate

婚姻 marriage

孩子 children

旅遊 travelling

在國外生活 Living abroad

9.2. 您對您現在的薪水滿意嗎？Are you satisfied with your current salary

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

滿意 yes

不滿意 no

如果不滿意，請說明原因 If you ticked no please specify the reason

9.3. 在您看來，足夠大學畢業生在台北獨立生活的最低工資應該是多少？

What in your opinion should be the minimum wage for university graduates that could enable an independent living in Taipei?

9.4. 你曾經參加過社團嗎 如果有, 請註明社團名稱. Have you ever been/Are you a member of a club/society/group?

9.5. 你認為自己是一個快樂的人嗎？ Do you consider yourself a happy person?

(請您將正確答案畫底線)

是 Yes

不是 no

9.6. 請簡單的解釋你對 "快樂" 的定義。Please explain briefly your definition of happiness.

謝謝你!

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