

**EDUCATION, MIGRATION AND
FAMILY RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA
AND THE UK: THE TRANSNATIONAL
ONE-CHILD GENERATION**

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EDUCATION, MIGRATION AND FAMILY RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND THE UK: THE TRANSNATIONAL ONE-CHILD GENERATION

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2018

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78714-673-0 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-78714-672-3 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-78743-005-1 (Epub)



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standard
ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To the parents of the one-child generation
who supported their child's dream, including mine.

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Acknowledgements

This book is written a year after the completion of my PhD. Most of the material in the book is drawn from my PhD research conducted in England from 2013 to 2014. My life has changed during the writing of the book. I moved from England to China. I left my beloved quiet sweet Canterbury and started an academic post in Shanghai. Having lived in England for seven and a half years, the sudden return to and intense integration into a rapidly-developing China brought excitement and challenge. These border-crossing changes constantly remind me of the difficulties my research participants experienced when they first arrived in England as well as when some of them travelled back and forth between China and the UK in response to career pursuit and family responsibilities.

As I continue to analyse and edit the material, the support and kindness I received during the fieldwork period became vivid during each writing day. I still remember the first time I approached a potential participant for my research, asking her to go out of her way to central London, to spend two hours with no financial return and, more importantly, to tell a stranger about her past, her family, her fear and her hopes. Each time a participant said 'yes' to my interview request, I felt a great sense of responsibility to guard her or his story.

The consent form at each interview gave participants the right to decline questions they did not feel comfortable with, and withdraw at any stage of the research. But no one declined to answer any question, even some of the very difficult questions which may have been considered 'rude' in daily exchanges. Some participants went beyond their role to offer me help and encouragement. For example, Bolin let me stay in her house for two nights so I could do a few interviews in the surrounding area; twice I was late for interview appointment by almost an hour because of delayed trains, Wenbin and Liwen waited patiently for me; Ran's parents took me to a restaurant for a meal after the interview so I did not have to leave during the peak traffic hour with an empty stomach. I thank my participants for their trust and willingness to share part of their lives with me, without whom this book would have been impossible.

My two supervisors at Kent, Professor Miri Song and Dr Joy Zhang, had been my guides when I first entered the field of sociological research. Miri is an inspirational woman and her influence on me goes beyond her role as a PhD supervisor. I am also fortunate to have known Joy, another inspirational and intelligent woman who set a great example of how to tell international audiences the ‘stuff’ about China. I am grateful to have had Dr Johanna Waters and Professor Adam Burgess as my PhD examiners and their valuable suggestions helped to improve the book. Johanna’s on-going work in education-motivated migration continues to benefit me. I would also like to thank Kristina Göransson for letting me use a diagram inspired by her book; and for her interest in my work.

Writing a book while looking for a job can be sometimes frustrating. As most writers would appreciate, a long quiet writing period is heaven. Since my return to China in early 2017 my parents put me up for several months so that I could stay in my former bedroom. It was also the room where I wrote the dissertation for my Bachelor’s degree, eight years earlier. I am grateful that the Department of Sociology at the East China University of Science and Technology opened its door to me. This book benefited from the support of “The Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities”. The Head of School, Xuesong He, and the Head of Department, Hua Wang, were so understanding that they gave me enough time and flexibility to complete the book.

I cannot thank my friends and family enough for their unconditional love. I have, for many years, relied on Michael’s intellectual and emotional support. I was very lucky to have people who cared about me and the project, so the writing process was less lonely. I would like to express my gratitude to Daniel, Titu and Suhasini, Yvette, Lili, Miaodan, Tony, Yan, Cora, Yang, Shanaj and Moon, Judy, Sarah, Jinger, Michael and Margaret, Paul, Merlin and Gilbert, Jan, Carmel, Shirley, Stacey, Kasia, Eva, Veronika and Virginia and Martin.

Finally, I am indebted to my editors, Philippa and Rachel at Emerald for their professionalism and prompt response to my various inquiries. I am grateful for the anonymous reviewer’s comments on the book proposal. I also appreciate the permission from John Wiley and Sons, Springer and Taylor & Francis for me to reproduce some of their published material.

Prologue

Birmingham, UK, 7 June 2014

‘You are more than welcome to stay in my place. I’m making five-spices-slow-cooked beef tonight, the Chinese way!’ Bolin, in her late thirties, led me to her kitchen as she started cooking: I make Chinese food most of the time, even after having lived here for 11 years. Fortunately my husband has a Chinese stomach, and my sons like my cooking, too. I will never get used to British food!

Food is usually a topic which opens conversation in China. Here in Bolin’s Birmingham home, we quickly agreed upon the superiority of Chinese cooking over British cooking; this (perhaps biased) opinion is shared among most of the 33 Chinese migrants I interviewed in various parts of England.

‘So, are you used to other aspects of the British life now?’

‘Well, I’d say yes. My husband is English, my children have become just like any other British children. So I’ll have to adapt. I know many Chinese friends who do not want to change their lifestyle, but I think if you decide to settle in a place, you’d better change yourself to suit the local life—makes life easier’.

Suddenly the front door opened and Bolin’s two sons rushed in, followed by Bolin’s sister-in-law, a young woman with few words who quickly disappeared from the kitchen. The boys were aged 7 and 8, they briefly exchanged school news with their mother in English and then were told to go and get changed. One of them gave me a curious look, smiled and said ‘A-yi! (Auntie)’ before skipping out.

Bolin laughed: “See, that’s the only Chinese word they remember now. My parents looked after them for 5 years, they could speak more Chinese when they were little. Look at them, they are completely British now, there is hardly any Chineseness in them. I tried to teach them Chinese, but they don’t use the language, they forget quickly”.

‘Where are your parents now?’

‘They went back to Shanghai a couple of years ago, after the boys started schooling. It was difficult to renew their visa. Also, the British lifestyle doesn’t agree with them, especially the food and the weather. Eventually they want to retire in a more familiar environment. They miss the boys so badly though, they looked after them since they were born, but I doubt if the boys will remember their Chinese grandparents in the future. I’m the only child. My parents can only see their child and grandchildren on a computer screen these days. Sometimes I feel I haven’t been a good daughter to them. Ai...’ Chinese people often sigh with a long ‘Ai’ when they do not know what to say but still want to express their feeling of disappointment, helplessness, confusion or anger: perhaps a combination of them all. ‘Ai’ is an ambiguous expression, it can be used at the beginning of a sentence to set the tone of what the person is about to say; in the middle of a sentence to indicate a change of meaning (like ‘but’); or at the end of a sentence to politely end a topic, which seems to bring a negative emotion to the conversation. I tried to cheer Bolin up by mentioning her sons: ‘Your boys are lovely, are they enjoying their school?’

‘Yes, they are doing well in school.’ Bolin’s cheerfulness came back: ‘Especially the younger one, I really want him to become a lawyer. I was a lawyer in China before I came to study in England. I gave up my career as lawyer, but I hope my son will become one, a better one. Well, who knows what they will become in the future?’ Bolin had been a lawyer in China for three years before she decided to do a Master’s degree in Birmingham. She was planning to return and work in an international law firm in Shanghai after the degree. ‘I was naïve, I thought if I could study abroad for a year, my plans will be realised. But life changes faster than plans.’

Upon her graduation, Bolin found great difficulty in readjusting to her life back in China. Her second attempt to leave China was more of a life-style choice.

Later that night, after an extensive 3-hour interview, I asked Bolin if there was any possibility that she may return to China in the future.

After my sons grow up, if my parents become ill and need my care, I will move to China for as long as they need. I will quit my job if it comes to that. However, I need enough savings to be able to do that, and I can’t leave my sons when they are so young. That’s why I’m working hard to pay off the mortgage and to prepare for anything that may happen to my parents.

‘Do your parents want you to return?’

‘Yes and no. It’s very complicated. My parents said they would support my decision. I have always been their centre, I took it for granted that my

parents would always be there for me, all I need to do is to tell them my decision.'

Shanghai, China, 27 September 2014

When I met Bolin's parents in Shanghai three months later, they told me that they had hoped for their daughter's return until the birth of their grandchildren. 'I wish I had another child, so I can keep one near me, then I don't need to worry that much about whether Bolin stays in England or not. Ai...'

Bolin's mother turned away to hide her tears. Bolin's father changed the topic to supper: 'Do you like dumplings? We have many dumplings ready in the freezer. They are not supermarket dumplings, we handmade them with fresh vegetables and pork. Let's boil some—quick and tasty!' He explained to me during supper that they usually make a hundred dumplings to freeze and eat a dozen of them each day: 'We don't bother with a lot of cooking these days. It's just the two of us, not much appetite. We like dumplings anyway.'

Bolin's parents live in a 3-bedroom flat located in a pleasant area of Shanghai. The flat was once owned by Bolin's paternal grandparents. As we were having dumplings, the former owners' portraits, which were hanging on the wall near the dinner table, became a blur in the hot steam. Bolin's father bore many similarities to the man in the portrait: 'My father was a soldier. He was strict, but open-minded. I was also strict with my daughter. I finished high school on June 1, 1966. Four days later the Cultural Revolution began, I couldn't go to university, so when my daughter was born, I swore I'd raise her to the highest standard.'

Bolin has been the pride of her parents since she was a child. I listened to the achievements she made, from winning a writing prize in her primary school to securing a place in one of the top universities in China. I also heard her parent's critical remarks about the sometimes lack of obedience from Bolin to the older generation, as well as their disappointment of not being near their daughter and grandchildren. 'We are most likely to end up in an old people's home here,' declared Bolin's father, who was in his late sixties, 'It's just not feasible that we move to England.' Bolin's mother agreed: 'We can still look after each other, and we have some relatives here. I'm sure they can give us a hand when needed. But everybody is getting old, what would one of us do if the other one dies first? These are the questions for the future. We have no answer now.'

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Introduction

This book is written nearly four decades after China's implementation of the one-child policy in 1979. The policy permitted families in China to have only one child with few exceptions applied to some rural residents and the ethnic minority population. As a result, 65% of the nation's post-1980s generation comprises the only-child cohort (Lin & Sun, 2010). Bolin was born in 1975. Her family was one of the earliest cohorts affected by the policy. Bolin's mother was pregnant in 1978, but she chose to abort the second child because 'there was simply no time to look after another baby'. Both the mother and her husband were working full time; the extended family members were either living too far away or were too busy with their own work and offspring. When the policy was implemented in 1979, a second child was no longer an option.

Since the late 1970s, a small-family culture has been replacing the traditional big-family culture, especially in Chinese cities. Families became geographically dispersed, and the nuclear three-member-one-child-family quickly became the norm. The 2010 Chinese Census showed an average household size of 3.1 people.¹ In the early 2000s, Shanghai's only-child percentage exceeded 80% of all children (Bao, 2012). When talking to one-child migrants and their parents, it was clear that for many urban families, having only one child was the given, while having more than one child was the exception. It is worth noting that such a belief had different levels of pervasiveness in rural and semi-rural areas for a number of socio-economic reasons. Nevertheless, the dominating norm of the one-child family remained unchallenged until a nationwide shift from the one-child policy to a 'two-children' policy in October 2015, ironically, where women were *encouraged* to have a second child in response to a rapidly ageing population. The new policy allowed couples, who were formerly restricted to having only one child, to have a maximum of two children.

Between the implementation of the two population-control policies, China experienced dramatic changes in its economy, environment and international relations. Wealth generation and redistribution led to a new round of social stratification – a process that was previously based on the political background in Mao’s era. In a short period of three decades China was transformed ‘from being one of the most egalitarian countries to being one of the most unequal’ (Biao & Shen, 2009, p. 516). For families caught up among these unprecedented changes the debate of whether to (and somehow bypass the policy) have a second child quickly moved on to the focus of securing a better future for the only child in a highly competitive society – a society that was alien to parents during their upbringing. The competition for educational resources has been a central theme for Chinese families across the social spectrum. The pursuit of children’s success in education at great parental sacrifice is perhaps familiar to readers who have come across writings about parenting in East Asian societies or among East Asian ethnic groups.

However, as the education resource diversified, the former clear objective of ‘a good state school, and then a good university’ was challenged by other options such as private education and overseas education.

The education landscape for the one-child Chinese families experienced drastic changes especially with regard to cross-border education. The reopening of the Chinese border in 1978 also marked the first state-led study-abroad programme. Although in the early years, study abroad was largely state-sponsored and limited to a select few; this feature attached legitimacy and privilege to overseas education (predominately to major Western countries). Hence, study abroad quickly became a magnet that attracted the rising middle-class in China who were the beneficiaries of the wealth redistribution in the 1980s and 1990s.

The outflow of self-funded students was striking in its vast number and rapidly increasing rate. Among students who went abroad annually, the percentage of self-funded students rose from 65% in 1996 to 89% in 2001 (Li, H., 2010) and 92.5% in 2011 (Wang & Guo, 2012). By that time China had become the biggest international student-sending country, and 82.5% of students were funded by their parents (Wang & Guo, 2012). World-leading education providers, such as the UK, witnessed a sharp increase in the number of students from China since the turn of the century. By 2012 Chinese students made up a third of non-EU students in British universities.

The rapid increase of Chinese students from the late 1990s coincided with the coming of age of the one-child generation. It is difficult to separate the one-child identity from the 21st century Chinese migration. The one-child generation refers to the people who were born around or after

the implementation of the one-child policy in 1979 until shortly before the relaxation of the policy in 2015. Children born a few years before 2015 may have a sibling or remain an only-child depending on the parental *voluntary* decision.

However, the earlier cohorts remain the only generation that was born and grew up when a *compulsory* one-child limit was in place. This generation includes people who were born before 1979 but remained an only-child as a result of the policy (like Bolin), as well as those who were born after 1979 but had sibling(s). Regardless of being an only-child or not, people who were born between 1979 and 2015 are affected by the one-child policy. However, 'generation' is an ambiguous term. The rough designation of the 'one-child generation' based on the year of the individual's birth does not necessarily reflect a shared experience: childhood in the 1980s hardly resembles childhood in the 2000s.

In this book the 'one-child generation' consists mainly of people born in the 1980s (with slight extensions to the late 1970s and early 1990s). The post-1980s children were the earlier cohort produced by the policy which has been the focus of media and academic attention. From the 1980s into the early years of the 21st century, the one-child generation has been predominately perceived as a 'problem' by the media and by the general public. In the 1980s, as the first cohort of the one-child generation started their schooling, the dominant discourse of the one-child policy shifted, both in China and in the West, to the 'danger' of the 'spoiled' one-child generation. The only-child cohort was commonly labelled as 'little emperors'. The 'selfishness' found among them was referred to as the 'little emperor syndrome' as if it was a disease.² In 1987, the Chinese state made a film titled *Little Emperors of China* with the then leading Chinese actors addressing the claimed problems of the 'spoiled' one-child generation.

As the one-child generation was still in the relatively early stages of their lives when the film (and other coverage about the cohort) came to the public's attention, the active agency of these individuals was easily overlooked. The young age of the one-child generation made it impossible to carry out satisfactory studies in the previous decades. Today when we are well into the second decade of the 21st century, the earlier cohort of the one-child generation, in their twenties and thirties, have started taking the central role in the society. The (possibly) misunderstood and under-researched life experiences of the adult one-child generation deserve an up-to-date investigation.

As the one-child generation reaches adulthood and even parenthood, a more diverse profile emerges. Their activities go beyond not only the social boundary of home and schools but also the physical boundary of national

borders. Overseas education has been viewed largely as parental investment on a better future for their only child. In this book we will go beyond the child's education and look at the evolvement of the Chinese family system as we make inquiries into the one-child generation migrants' motivation to study abroad, analyse their decision to remain in the UK, and observe how the family dynamic changes as the one-child migrants become parents themselves. The adult one-child experience in this book is a continuation of the existing understanding about the post-1980s children and a way to talk back to the previous literature which focused on this generation.

The One-Child Generation in the World of Migration

It is time to reveal my identity: I belong to the one-child generation. My upbringing was not in any way extraordinary. I grew up in a southeastern coastal city in China. My parents worked as professionals and I had a fairly well-provided childhood. Following the completion of my undergraduate course, I moved to the UK for a Master's degree in Nottingham in 2009. After my graduation I applied for a post-student work (PSW) visa, which allowed me to stay in the UK for two years to work. I found a job at an international trade company, which imported goods from China to be sold in the lower-end market in the UK. The company was founded by a one-child Chinese migrant from Shanghai while he was doing a PhD course at Exeter in the early 2000s. I met several other Chinese staff who were in the same situation as me: having completed a Master's degree at a British university and who held a temporary work visa. Our ages ranged from the early twenties to mid-thirties. Not knowing exactly where our lives were going, we were a little anxious about the temporary nature of our migration status, but at the same time hopeful about our future in the UK.

A shared background quickly encouraged us to learn about each other's stories. What struck me was that under the seemingly similar migration pattern, our upbringing, motivation to study abroad, and outlook in this country were very different. I met Qiaolin (female, 36), from a city in Western China, Qianqian (female, 27), from Beijing and Bao (female, 31), from Shanghai. Qiaolin and Qianqian both had siblings while Bao was an only-child. Qiaolin was born in 1978, and having an older sister she escaped the restriction of the one-child policy. Qianqian was born in 1987 and had an older brother; her parents had to pay a large fine for her birth. Qianqian was sent away to live with her aunt when she was five because her parents, who had their own business, had no time to look after two children. Bao, however, said she wanted to escape the attention

and pressure given by her parents; the study abroad was her way to protest against her ‘over-protective’ parents.

In October 2011, when we had our last dinner together, Qiaolin was starting a family with her British partner. Bao was given financial help from her parents and was looking for a property to buy. Qianqian had just started her job with the company, and I was applying for a PhD course. When I went to visit them for my research two years later Qiaolin had a one-year-old daughter. She and her partner were trying for a second baby. Bao had moved to her new house and was under great pressure from her parents to get married. Qianqian was disappointed by her career potential in the UK; she was contemplating moving back to Beijing.

As my fellow one-child generation migrants and I continue our separate lives and navigate our future routes, I start to re-think the century-old questions that have been asked by many migration study scholars:

Why do people migrate?

What happens to people after their migration?

What is the impact of migration?

More than a hundred years after E. G. Ravenstein’s early attempt to generate ‘the laws of migration’ (1889, 1885), it has been claimed that we are now in ‘the age of migration’ (Castles & Miller, 2009) where few countries are indifferent to the opportunities and challenges of international migration, and more individuals are on the move than before. While the number of low-skilled migrants in OECD³ countries increased by 12% during the first decade of the 21st century, the highly skilled or educated migrants increased by 70% (OECD, 2013).

Migrants have been viewed primarily as skill-bearers to be exploited for the host country’s economy, and hence the common divide of ‘high-skill’ and ‘low-skill’ migrants in research and migration policies. However, a migrant’s life is multidimensional. Apart from being a worker, the individual is also a son or daughter, (maybe) a spouse or parent, possibly a property owner, who perhaps owns a business, and who is likely to be a member of several social networks. Furthermore, people are not *born* a migrant, they *become* a migrant at a certain point in their life. The earlier part of their lives before leaving home inevitably shapes their migration decisions and their experiences after migration. There is no uniformity to migration.

In today’s migration studies field few scholars are prepared to make a claim on a set of generalized ‘laws’ of migration, unlike the classical migration theorists in the 20th century (e.g. Massey et al., 1998, Stark, 1991, 1984). Migration research has moved away from system building

to more specialized divisions, for example, region (e.g. intra-EU migration), legal status (e.g. refugee studies) and motivation (e.g. education-motivated migration).

The concept of migration generates different emphases depending on the perspective of the researcher: migration can be treated as a *result* following a cluster of factors; a *process* which leads to certain consequences, or a *field* which contains interacting agencies and networks at all levels. These approaches to the concept of migration allow us to open different windows and gain some insight into the various aspects of the moving population.

However, just as few countries are immune to the impact of international migration, few fields can satisfy inquiries about migration without borrowing from other fields. The increasing presence of international students further complicates our understanding of migration as well as the role of education in individual (physical and social) mobility. When Qiaolin, Qianqian and Bao made their decisions to have children, to change jobs and to buy property, to what extent did their former international student experience shape their post-student decisions? Furthermore, for one-child migrants like Bao, how is their migration journey different from non-one-child migrants like Qiaolin and Qianqian, and how is their relationship with parents different from the only children who live much closer to their parents in China?

Defining Study Abroad and Migration

Are international students migrants? This question has been the focus of discussion since the then British Prime Minister David Cameron announced the ‘migration cap’ in 2010 (Prince, 2010). He proposed to reduce the number of net migration to the UK from ‘hundreds of thousands’ and keep it under ‘tens of thousands’. Students were included in the net migration count. The number of net migrants in 2010 was 256,000 and has failed to decline significantly, with the most recent count in 2016 being 248,000.⁴ Since the ‘migration cap’ is a political goal and was used to target the ‘less popular’ foreigners such as low-skill workers, then why are international students included in the net migration count?

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the definition of an international migrant is stated as follows:

While there is no formal legal definition of an international migrant, most experts agree that an international migrant is someone who changes his or her country of usual residence,

irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status. Generally, a distinction is made between short-term or temporary migration, covering movements with a duration between three and 12 months, and long-term or permanent migration, referring to a change of country of residence for a duration of one year or more.⁵

Different definitions of migration are used by different government resources,⁶ but they tend to share criteria such as country of residence/birth and length of stay. Facts like these help data collectors to find reliable starting points on which they can base their calculations. However, seeking a clear-cut migrant categorization compromises the data's ability to reflect the real picture, which is flexible and fluid.

Going back to the debate about whether to include students in the number of net migration, among the evidence of socioeconomic benefit international students bring to the UK, and the local public service pressure that comes with it, it is the argument about the *temporariness* of students (i.e. will students remain after their study?) that is central to the debate (The Migration Observatory, 2015). In theory each student-visa holder is open to the option of switching to other visa types such as work visa or family visa, thus making them potential long-term migrants. In reality, however, the level of difficulty for students to switch to full-time employment in the UK has become greater and the number of successful visa-switchers has dropped massively since 2012.⁷ Therefore, do we call a foreign-born student a 'migrant' as soon as she/he crosses the border of the UK with a student visa, or *after* that person switches from student status to a more permanent basis? And what counts as a 'more permanent basis'? How is a three-year work contract more permanent than a three-year studentship?

With these questions in mind let us turn to scholarly work for some insights. Having devoted 'a lifetime of his scholarship to tracking and explaining the various cycles of Chinese migration and settlement' (Huang, 2010, p. 1), Wang Gungwu describes the 'delayed' migration among international students as *migranthood*: the condition of a migrant in the space 'between that of a student and that of a migrant' (Wang, 2007, p. 167). Wang distinguishes student-turned-migrants from traditionally defined migrants who leave 'their home without intending to return', thus students are not traditional migrants. But being a student may lead to 'delayed' migration. Wang argues that the post-student migrants are flexible and unpredictable because they respond to the global demand for skills. In the meantime, post-student migrants are also 'the product of economic and technological globalisation' (Wang, 2007, p. 176).

However, time is a concern. Study abroad and migration (assuming they are two different processes) – which happened first? Is overseas education used as a means to long-term migration or is long-term migration inspired by overseas education? Empirical research on the Chinese overseas students or migrants shows the co-existence of both processes. With studying abroad becoming easier and other means to enter a Western country becoming harder, there has been a growing phenomenon of individuals applying to study in an overseas language school with low entry requirements as a way to ‘buy a visa’ (Fong, 2011, p. 115). This cohort tended to come from less well-off families with a poor academic background, and their objective was to work in the host country under a student visa. Very few made it to a degree course or a professional job and faced the possible risk of failing to extend their visas (Fong, 2011). Since the early 2000s, a small percentage of UK language schools (estimated to be 10% in 2006) have abused the visa system and faced closure (Watson, 2014, BBC, 2006, 2005).

At the other end of the spectrum, well-off Chinese families, particularly from Hong Kong and Taiwan (more recently, from mainland China [Liu-Farrer, 2016]), were found to have joined the citizenship of developed Western countries, typically the US or Canada, so that their children can have better access to locally provided education (Tsong & Liu, 2009, Huang & Yeoh, 2005, Waters, 2005, Ong, 2003). A common pattern found among the trans-Pacific Chinese families was characterized as an ‘astronaut family’; the term referred to the process where one parent accompanied the child to the host country while the other parent (usually the father) stayed in the home country to earn money; he would travel regularly between his family and work. Similarly, widely used terms like ‘Pacific shuttle’, and ‘parachute kids’ (Ley, 2010, Tsang et al., 2003, Zhou, 1998) also reflected an education-motivated, child-centred trans-Pacific migration arrangement. In this scenario well-informed parents played the dominating role of decision-making, and children were found to leave their country of birth at a relatively young age, typically in their early to mid-teens.

The latter pattern is usually referred to as ‘education-motivated migration’ (e.g. ‘astronaut family’). I would call the earlier ‘buying a visa’ process ‘migration-motivated study abroad’. Compared to the highly calculated feature of these two migration/study abroad processes, a more common process was found among the mainland Chinese post-student migrants in the UK: the tendency of switching to ‘migranhood’ emerges towards the end of their study abroad where uncertainty and changing perception of self, family and space impact upon the student/migrant’s decision-making process.

Although ‘migranhood’ captures the flexibility and fluidity of migrant-in-transition, it is an underdeveloped term. Wang Gungwu did not indicate when, or whether, ‘migranhood’ ends, nor did he explain how or whether post-student migrants identify themselves with such a ‘state of being’. For example, is Qianqian’s status (arrived 3 years previously, renting, single) more like ‘migranhood’ or is Bolin’s (arrived 11 years previously, property owner, married with children)?

The lengthy discussion about the concepts of study abroad and migration serves the purpose of demonstrating the complexity of the real picture. Drawing on his insight in study abroad research, James Coleman criticized the existing attempt to ‘achieve significant generalizations’ which resulted in a ‘sometimes distorted reality by narrowing our definitions and our measures, and by leaving crucial information unconsidered or even unstated’ (2013, p. 17). The life-changing experience of study abroad deserves an approach which examines its long-term impact. This research follows a framework that captures an individual’s evolving mobility trajectory as it unfolds with changing circumstances at different levels which not only takes place in a relatively more changeable period of a person’s life (from education completion to career/family establishment) but is also embedded in a transnational context.

Education and Migration to the UK

Chinese settlement in the UK started relatively later than that in the Asia-Pacific regions. The UK’s first Chinese visitor was recorded in 1681 (Benton & Gomez, 2011). However, large-scale migration from China to the UK began after the mid-19th century. The early Chinese diaspora originated mainly from Canton and Hong Kong (Benton & Gomez, 2011). Such migrants generally came from a poor background and did menial work (Liu, 2011). A most common early pattern among this wave of migrants was the objective to make money in the UK, and return home for retirement. A shift from sojourner to settler occurred from after World War II and the following several decades; a period also marked by the unstable political and economic environment in China (Benton & Gomez, 2011).

From the 19th century to the early 20th century the UK Chinese diaspora experienced changes of business openings and opportunities. The various niches have been summarized by scholars as ‘salt-soap-soya’. This designation refers essentially to the seafaring groups of the late 19th century, the laundry business in the early 20th century and the catering industry from the mid-20th century (Benton & Gomez, 2011). There are later signs of the

Chinese diaspora's economic activities expanding, which indicates their attempts to break away from the narrow catering niche, and their seeking greater social mobility. The percentage of Chinese workers (regardless of place of birth) working in the catering industry fell from an estimated 90% in 1985 to slightly more than half in 1991 (Chau & Yu, 2001). Recent research shows that a larger number of Chinese can be found working in the business sector and health and education service (Knowles, 2015).

Meanwhile, the early diaspora's second generation, the British-born Chinese, have developed a very different profile; they have enjoyed greater social mobility, and are not prepared to be bound by their ethnic identity. They are better educated, and culturally more assimilated to British society than their parents were. British-born Chinese are more likely to have professional jobs and have become middle class, rather than continuing in their parents' take-away business (Benton & Gomez, 2011, Song, 1999). This group of the Chinese diaspora tends not to identify itself only as Chinese, but as having 'segmented identities', where being neither *Chinese* nor *British* dominate unconditionally (Parker, 1995).

The migration from China to the UK sharply increased between the 2001 Census and the 2011 Census (see Fig. 1). In 2012, 40,000 Chinese migrants arrived in the UK, and China ranked the top of migrant-sending countries to the UK for the first time (ONS, 2013b). The arrival of the new Chinese migrants from mainland China has changed the Hong Kong (Cantonese) dominating profile of the UK Chinese. The percentage of people from mainland China among the ethnic Chinese population in the UK rose from 13% in 1991 (Cheng, 1994) to 40% in 2011 (ONS, 2012).

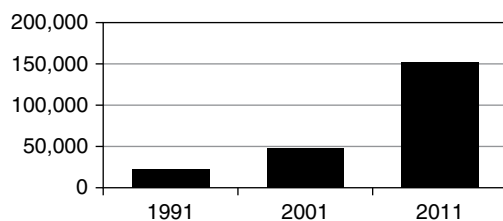


Fig. 1: China-born residents in the UK (Census).
Source: ONS (2013a).

The demographic profile of the new arrivals has been consistently found to be younger (Biao & Shen, 2009). The large number of recent young arrivals reflected the high proportion of students: students aged 16 and over comprised 45% of the Chinese who arrived between 2001 and 2011 (ONS, 2013a) and the number has been increasing. The student-dominant

feature distinguishes the current wave of Chinese migrants from the previous wave (Hong Kong migrants in the fifties to sixties) who tended to be part of a migration network based on relatives and clans (Watson, 1977). Although there is no statistic that shows how many of the 21st century arrivals belong to the one-child generation, it is safe to infer from their age that the majority of the student arrivals does. Most students were funded by their parents; thus, they reflect a largely middle-class family background.

The students who remained after their studies were commonly found in professional jobs. Having limited connection with traditional Chinese communities, the 'elite' Chinese migrants may have benefited from their personal, social and economic networks both at home and in the host countries. What the 'elite' Chinese migrants had in common with the traditional Chinese diaspora was the significant role of the family in generating and sustaining their transnational networks. However, the one-child transnational family represents a unique form of family: it is the combined product of socioeconomic changes in and outside of China.

The Transnational One-Child Family in Time and Space

One-child Chinese migrants are at the centre of several intense relations. As individuals their migration took place during one of the most uncertain stages of their lives: important life events such as completing education, starting a career, getting married and becoming parents, tend to happen to people in their twenties (although starting a family is sometimes deferred). Each life event is intertwined with the on-going decision about return migration or re-migration to another country. Yet the longitudinal feature of the migration decision-making process has not been given much attention. As migrants whose social, economic and cultural lives are divided between the host country and China, they are very sensitive (and vulnerable) towards any policy and social changes in both countries. Therefore, the question remains whether overseas education and migration will lead to transnational advantages or transnational compromises. As the only child in the family, crucial aspects of a migrant's life, such as care, emotion, and expectation are intensified; thus making the one-child transnational family a unique 'transnational social field' (Levitt & Schiller, 2004) to investigate how family and migration impact on each other.

To put this micro-level family dynamic in the bigger picture of time and space (Fig. 2), we see the continuity and discontinuity of intergenerational relations, as well as the family (physical and social) space divided between China and the UK. When viewed from a vertical (time) perspective, family

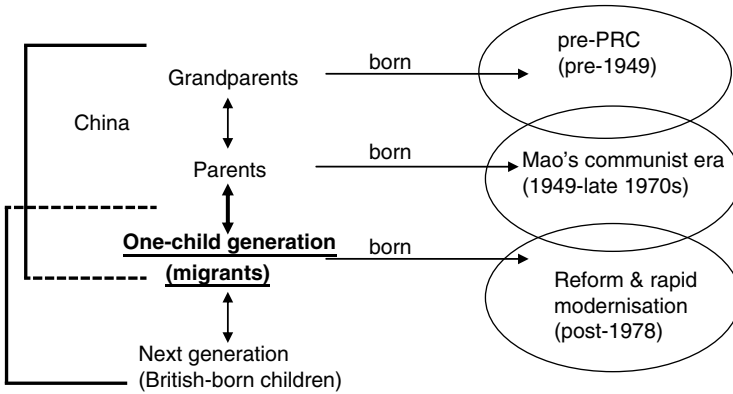


Fig. 2: Intergenerational relations in the one-child family in space and time.

relations can be influenced by the intergenerational relations of the previous generation; likewise, family relations can also influence the obligations and expectations between the current and the next generation. When viewed from a horizontal (space) perspective, family relations were subject to changes according to the changing physical and social space in which parents and children found themselves. When combined with these two perspectives, the transnational one-child family constitutes the cohort that experienced the most intense space and time changes within two generations; historically, the family members experienced the most radical political upheavals and drastic economic reforms⁸ in modern Chinese history. Structurally, these nuclear families were made up of the 'baby boomer' generation⁹ and the 'one-child' generation; geographically and socially, only-children and their parents lived separately in the 'West' and the 'East'.

The one-child generation, their parents and their grandparents were born in sharply and distinctively different political and economic periods in Chinese history. For the one-child migrants who had child(ren) (or planned to have children) in the UK, their British-born children would be brought up in yet another, different, environment. Will the 'traditional family contract' based on Confucius' teaching survive such significant changes through the four generations? Which elements will remain and which parts will diminish?

Studying One-Child Migrants As One of Them

This is not the first book that looks at the one-child generation in China or overseas, but it is, as far as I know, one of the very few books written

by a one-child researcher about her own cohort. Whether qualitative research is better conducted by an 'outsider' or an 'insider' is open to discussion. This research does not intend to argue that the 'insider' approach was inherently 'superior'. What is important to point out here is that most published qualitative studies on the Chinese one-child generation have been done by 'outsiders'. These 'outsiders' include Western scholars¹⁰ (Kajanus, 2015, Goh, 2011, Fong, 2011, 2004) and Chinese scholars of an older generation¹¹ (Liu, 2008a, b). For the non-Chinese researchers, apart from the culture shock and the language barrier, their 'foreign' identity was a marked feature throughout their research. Such a feature was particularly pronounced in Anni Kajanus' fieldwork in Beijing. Being 'white and Western', Kajanus believed her 'foreign' identity attracted young Chinese people to participate in her research. Consequently, she was 'often treated as a guest', and noted her informants' clear effort to show 'the 'foreign friend' the 'best part of Chinese society and culture' (2015, p. 41).

The outsider identity is not as immediately pronounced among researchers who are Chinese (or Chinese of a Western nationality). However, there was a methodological setback in their research that was mainly to do with sample recruitment. Most of these researchers entered the lives of their one-child participants as their teacher or through schools or universities. For example, Vanessa Fong (2004) offered free English lessons in exchange for access to her students' family lives. Fengshu Liu (2008a, b) worked in a university in China and her participants were recruited through her former students.

However, being an 'insider' does not make the sample recruitment any easier. The word 'invisible' has been repeatedly used in media and in academic research when describing the Chinese in the UK (Barber, 2015, Luk, 2008, Parker & Song, 2007, *The Guardian*, 1993). The mainland post-student Chinese migrants were more difficult to reach than the traditional Chinese diaspora in two ways. First, they were professionally dispersed in mainstream industries (instead of concentrating in the catering business). Such a feature was also likely to lead to the further geographical dispersion of the professional cohort. Second, there was a lack of professional new Chinese migrants in Chinese associations, partly because the established associations were catering for traditional Chinese settlers, and partly because the resourceful middle-class migrants did not feel the immediate need to create and participate in diasporic associations (Liu, 2011, Benton & Gomez, 2011). Even so, at the beginning of the sample recruitment, various Chinese associations (such as the British Chinese Society and the Chinese and Oriental Students Society) and university alumni associations were contacted, but there was no response.

To overcome the above challenge, the internet was used, in addition to the researcher's personal contacts, as another resource of recruitment. I observed active participation of new Chinese migrants on the two major mainland Chinese public forums in the UK: LKCN (<http://lkcnet.net/bbs/index.php?act=idx>) and Powerapple (www.powerapple.com). These two online forums were used as fields of recruitment and produced positive responses. In addition to public forums, social network services (SNS) also gave rise to more specified online groups, such as various professional and academic online groups formed by mainland Chinese in the UK, where the target cohort of this research was more likely to be found. It was relatively straightforward for me to gain access to these Mandarin-speaking forums and SNS groups because of my insider identity.

While the internet recruitment attracted a reasonable amount of interest, the person-to-person recruitment was slow. Most participants did not 'snowball' into a greater number of contacts. The majority of participants indicated the limited social contacts they had with fellow Chinese migrants. Since most of the middle-class Chinese migrants arrived in the UK as students, the initial Chinese friends they made were mostly their fellow students. 'Now they've all gone back' was the most frequently expressed explanation for the lack of Chinese contacts in the UK. Working in non-Chinese companies also limited the participants' opportunities for making Chinese friends, compared to their counterparts who worked in the Chinese catering business.

Furthermore, there appeared to be a lack of active involvement with Chinese communities among the professional Chinese migrants. Being highly educated, fluent in English and resourceful, this cohort clearly had the ability to develop its social circle outside of the Chinese community. Although the majority reported a generally limited social circle in the UK, they appeared to be indifferent or casual about the limited number of Chinese friends but showed more anxiety about how difficult it was to 'make friends with the locals'. This attitude is similar to Knowles' (2015, p. 17) discovery in the latest study on affluent Beijing migrants in London. She found that her informants did not 'lead particularly Chinese lives' nor did they 'live in what is referred to as the Chinese community': they were 'integrated in a London cosmopolitan way'.

A breakthrough in the recruitment of more participants in the UK, was, interestingly, made by contacting returnees in China. Similarly to other members in the cohort I maintained contact with my friends who returned to China after study/work abroad. Through the network of the returnees, a substantial number of UK participants with a variety of backgrounds were recruited. This feature of 'transnational recruitment'

reflected the emerging transnational social field of the new Chinese migrants. Such an adjustment in the recruitment process was also an example of how the profile of participants and recruitment strategy influenced each other during the research process. As Bryman (2008, p. 185) pointed out, snowball sampling is useful in ‘reflecting the relationships between people’. Fig. 3 shows the three channels of sample recruitment (contacts in the UK, contacts in China and the internet) as well as the *limited* ‘relationships between people’.

The diagram shows the variety of sources and the process of recruiting participants. The matching of number and individual participants can be found in the Appendix.

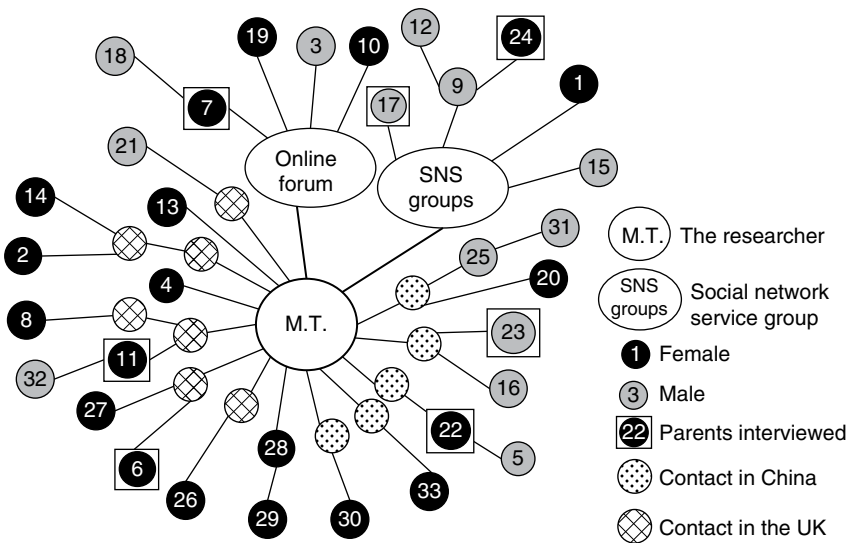


Fig. 3: Participant recruitment network [inspired by a figure used in Göransson’s book (2009, p. 43) and reproduced here with permission from the original author and the University of Hawaii Press].

Interviewing both the child and parents from the same family has been rare in transnational family research largely because of the difficulty in accessing both child and parents in a transnational setting. The recruitment of parents began later than the recruitment of migrant participants. After the completion of each interview, the participants were asked whether they would be willing to connect the researcher to their parents in China. This request was met with three types of response. First, the participant did not want to ask their parents to take part in the research.

Second, the participant asked, but parents declined the interview request. Third, the participant and parents both responded positively to the interview request, and they constitute the seven sets of parents in the sample.

The different types of responses reflect the matter of *trust*. For most parents in this study, taking part in social research was new to them. The parents' generation experienced the Cultural Revolution and were understandably wary of taking part in an 'interview' with a researcher (i.e. a stranger) from a public institution. For example, during an interview with a father from the Inner Mongolia region of China, I was asked several times whether the interview would be 'leaked' to the Chinese Communist Party even after repeated assurances of the confidentiality entailed in the research. Parental suspicion towards 'interviews' was also part of the reason why some participants were reluctant to contact their parents for the researcher. For example, Zhiming (male, 31, sales manager) was recruited through the internet. He was supportive of the research, but when asked about research contact with his parents Zhiming hesitated for a while and politely refused, explaining that his parents might think he had 'got into trouble in the UK' and was subject to 'investigation'.

The Participants

The sample recruited in the UK comprised 20 women and 13 men. There is currently no reliable research that documents the gender ratio among middle-class one-child Chinese migrants in the UK. Consistently, more Chinese women than Chinese men graduated from UK higher education institutions between 2001 and 2011. Women outnumbered men in Master's programmes and undergraduate programmes by a ratio of 1.5 to 1 in 2008/2009 (Iannelli & Huang, 2013). Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that more women remained after education than men. Furthermore, the total number of 40 participants constituted enough variety for the purpose of this research.

In terms of places of origin (see Fig. 4), the participants came from a variety of regions in China. Such diversity reflected what the literature highlighted about the new Chinese migrants: they not only came from transnational coastal migrant regions like Shanghai and Canton (near Hong Kong) but also from inland regions which had not been traditionally migrant-sending places. However, there was no identifiable pattern between participants' places of origin and places of residence in the UK. Participants were distributed in various parts of England. Nevertheless, the concentration of the Chinese population in London is clear.

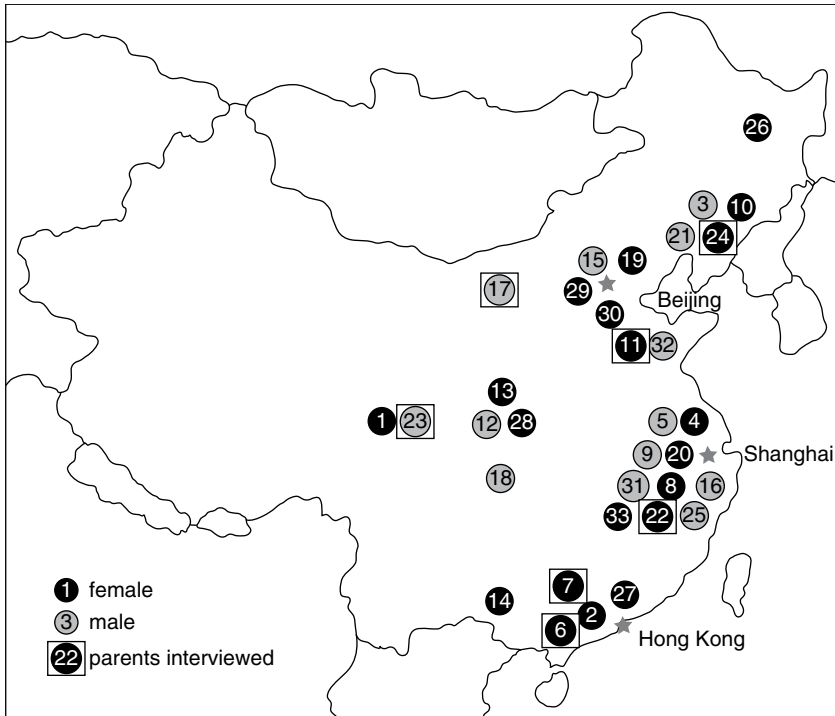


Fig. 4: Participants’ place of origin in China.

Such a London-dominant Chinese population distribution also reflected the latest report of the young Chinese migrants (aged 23–39) in London (Knowles, 2015).

However, Knowles (2015) pointed out that although London had the biggest Chinese population in number, Cambridge had the highest concentration of the Chinese population (the Chinese constituted 3.6% of the population). A relatively high Chinese concentration can also be found in cities with Russell Group universities.¹² Most participants had moved at least once: they arrived in the UK where their university was and later moved to where their job was (if the university was not in London). Job opportunities were greater in London, and nearly half of the participants who lived in London were in finance-related jobs (see the Appendix).

These maps of sample distribution are by no means representative of the one-child migrants’ population. The objective of the study was not to recruit a statistically representative sample but to recruit a sample with a diverse background in order to reduce bias. Major qualitative studies

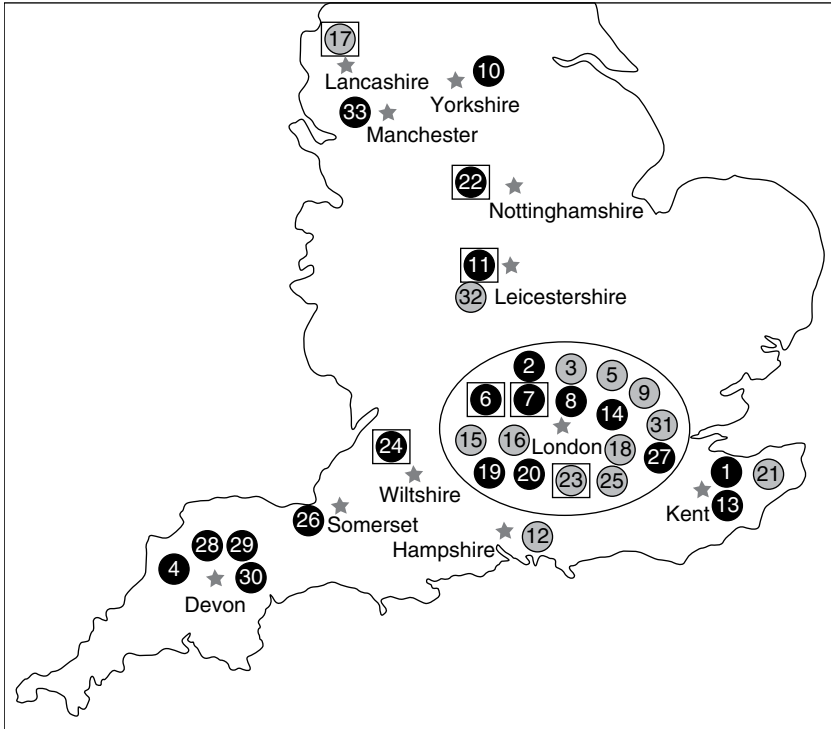


Fig. 5: Participants' place of residence in the UK.

into the one-child generation tended to be limited to one Chinese city (see Kajanus, 2015, Fong, 2011, 2004, Goh, 2011). Although Kajanus (2015) and Fong (2011) followed their participants as they went abroad as students, their research subjects were geographically limited to their place of origin. This study is the first in which qualitative research on the one-child generation contains participants from vastly different regions of China; such regions in China have distinctive cultural and socio-economic features which were likely to shape its people's perceptions. Based on a very limited observation in this study, participants from north China (including Beijing) were relatively more politically sensitive, while participants from south China were relatively more business oriented. Although such an observation is not generalizable, an inclusive one-child generation sample certainly contributed to more balanced data.

Similarly, this research is also the first qualitative research about the new Chinese migrants with participants recruited from different regions in England. The sample included traditionally Chinese-concentrated places

like London as well as the more white-dominated regions like Devon. In a very general sense the participants from London tended to be younger and more career oriented. The non-London participants contained a greater proportion of married women. A common reason for these women to live in locations other than London was because their English husbands were settled in various parts of England.¹³ Such a feature between London participants and non-London participants was only indicative and not generalizable. Nevertheless, if participants had been recruited from a single location, like London, this book may have risked the possibility of overrepresenting the Chinese migrants who remained mainly for jobs and underrepresented those who remained mainly for families.

Chapter Structure

Chapter 1 sets the broad historical, social, political and cultural context from which a significant amount became a legacy for only-children and their parents in both subtle and gross manifestations. Chapter 2 offers a re-visit into four themes: ‘little emperor’, authoritarian Chinese parenting, gender and education. Growing up in a more competitive society, only-children from middle-class families had more resources and choices than did children from less-affluent families. The contrast in the upbringing of the parents’ generation and the one-child generation signals the beginning of a challenging and dynamic intergenerational relationship.

With the coming of age of the one-child generation, both parents and children were about to face a journey of uncertainty to the UK. The country that was once deemed the ‘the capitalist enemy’ in the parents’ generation, now became the destination that would ensure a global advantage for their only child. Chapter 3 explores questions including: To what extent is a migration decision rational? Since more than half of the participants initially intended to return to China, what changed their minds? And what role did parents play in these decisions?

Chapter 4 focuses on the migrants’ lives in the present. I found a predominately parent-to-child intergenerational flow of money and care regardless of the child’s income level and age. It is the first time in Chinese international migration history that a predominately China-to-overseas financial transfer has taken place, especially between family members at home and working adult children in a developed country. The chapter explores the rationale behind this unusual remittance pattern. Chapter 5 shows the simultaneous impact of time and space on filial piety as a guide to the Chinese family contract, as well as the initiatives and compromises made by

family members at the centre of the changes. The final chapter draws the main threads of the book's themes to a conclusion while also offering a selective summary of a few of the cohort members' subsequent stories.

Notes

1. Major figures of the 2010 Chinese Census can be found on the website of National Bureau of Statistics of China at http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/NewsEvents/201104/t20110428_26449.html
2. Even in recent years the 'little emperor' phrase (or 'little emperor syndrome') is still frequently used in mainstream media. For example, see BBC (22 November 2013), 'No Siblings: A Side-Effect of China's One-Child Policy'; *The Independent* (10 January 2013), 'One-child policy: China's army of little emperors.' See Bakken, B. (1993). Prejudice and danger: The only-child in China. *Childhood*, 1(1), pp. 46–61 for the author's critical discourse analysis on the stereotypes of the 'spoiled one-child' generation during the 1980s.
3. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) currently has 34 member countries, including the US, UK, Australia and other developed European countries.
4. For the changes of numbers of net migration during 2010–2016 and their political implications see resource from The Migration Observatory at Oxford University: 'The Net Migration Target and the 2017 Election' (4 May 2017). Available at <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/commentaries/net-migration-target-2017-election/> and 'Net Migration Falls, With Lowest Net Migration from EU8 Since They Joined the EU – But “Tens of Thousands” Target Still A Long Way Off’ (25 May 2017). Available at <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/press/net-migration-falls-lowest-net-migration-eu8-since-joined-eu-tens-thousands-target-still-long-way-off/>
5. See United Nations' website <https://refugeemigrants.un.org/definitions>
6. See Anderson and Blinder (2017) for a comparison of definitions of migrant as represented in government data sources. Available at <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/who-counts-as-a-migrant-definitions-and-their-consequences/#kpl>
7. Apart from the increasing competition in the British job market after the 2008 financial crisis, the state policy has made the UK unwelcoming to non-EU job-seekers. Restrictions on work visas were introduced including the requirements of the minimum salary, the lack of freedom in job choices, and the increasing complex application procedure (Home Office, 2015). Furthermore, with the cancellation of the PSW visa in 2012, the number of students who obtained a work visa after study immediately dropped by 87% (Universities UK, 2014).

8. The parents' generation grew up during the Great Leap Forward followed by the Great Famine (1959–1961) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976); immediately after came the Economic Reform (1978) which transformed the planned economy to a market economy.
9. China's baby boom took place during the early to mid-1960s when the fertility rate increased from 3.3 (1961) to 7.3 (1963) (Poston & Duan, 2000). The majority of cohort members' parents were born between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s.
10. Kajanus is Finnish, Goh was born and raised in Singapore and Fong was born in Taiwan, and raised in California.
11. Liu was born and raised in China.
12. The Russell Group represents 24 leading UK universities. See <http://russell-group.ac.uk> Accessed 12 February 2016.
13. All the participants are heterosexual.