

**BETWEEN COMPLIANCE AND RESISTANCE:  
THE DIVERSIFIED MIDDLE CLASS FEMININITIES OF  
MIGRANT PROFESSIONAL WOMEN IN BEIJING**

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## ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of market reform in 1978, a widening gap has been created between the more marketised and the less marketised regions of China. With the loosening of *hukou* restrictions, people have been permitted to migrate from inland areas to coastal open zones, from rural areas to urban areas, in order to pursue better employment opportunities. There is an increasing amount of research on working-class migrants who float between rural and urban areas. Studies of working-class migrant women have explored how the migration experience changed women's position and gender relations in the family. Little research, however, has been done on well-educated migrant women. This thesis aims to illuminate the way migration transforms well-educated migrant women's gender ideals. Based on semi-structured interviews with 29 well-educated migrant women in Beijing, I investigate themes of young migrant women's career development paths, premarital partner choice, and marriage and childcare strategies. In the specific social and economic context of Beijing, well-educated migrant women either choose to take a conventional role in the family by taking on care responsibilities and relying on their husband as the main family provider, or choose to postpone child bearing, or even abandon marriage and explore new roles in the workplace and in intimate relationships. No matter what their choices are, marriage relations in China remain patriarchal. Migrant professional women in Beijing have adopted different strategies of compliance, co-operation or resistance in order to deal with this gender order, and establish 'feminized professionalism' in a masculinised market economy.

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

## INTRODUCTION

I was born in Hengshui, a small city in China. I am the only child in my family. My parents were born in village peasant families. After they graduated from university in the 1980s, they were assigned a job in Hengshui, where they met and then married. My father worked as an engineer in a state-owned company. My mother worked as a teacher in a public school. Both of them had very similar class backgrounds and social mobility experiences. They benefited from higher education and were assigned jobs as professionals in state-owned sectors, migrated from villages to cities, and successfully acquired urban *hukou*. When I was a child, they kept telling me the importance of education and encouraged me to go to good universities. They told me if I did not study hard, I would end up doing manual work in bad working conditions, which sounds absurd for me now. However, it did leave me an impression that doing manual work is inferior and I should do a job which required a degree. When I was at university, they encouraged me to prepare to do another degree in the UK and apply for an internship in Beijing. Obviously, they never wanted me to come back and settle down in Hengshui after I graduated from university. Beijing was always their first choice, because it is the capital city of China. For me, migration is not a choice; it is something which I have to do. I came to an agreement with my parents on pursuing higher education, having a professional job, and even migrating to Beijing, but I never thought about why we made those decisions and had those thoughts, which was one of the motivations for me to do this research. I wanted to know about the life experience of other well-educated migrants and explore why we made the decision to migrate.

After I finished my Masters study in the UK, I came back to Beijing and started to look for jobs. When I was reading the recruitment advertising online, I found some



companies preferred male applicants. This was when I started to realise that my gender affected my career choices. I had never thought there should be any difference between men and women in career opportunities previously, because when I was a student, it seemed that everyone was given equal opportunities and attention. Gender never made a difference. However, when I was applying to be a journalist, I was not preferred because of my gender. I started to be interested in issues of gender and women, which reminded me about the classes I had on gender when I was doing my Sociology degree at the University of Bristol. There is another reason why I am interested in gender issues. I could not agree with my parents on my career choice. I wanted to work in private or foreign companies, because I would have a high higher salary and better platform to develop my professional skills and work abilities. However, for my parents, the stability and welfare of the job was more important, so they always wanted to help me to find a job in the state sector. My mother told me it was important for me to have a job which was stable and not very tiring, so I could have time for a family. My parents did not expect me to earn much money, because it is the man's responsibility. I felt frustrated because of my gender, and I wanted to explore why such gender discrimination exists.

I went back to read some books recommended in my gender classes while I was working in a state-owned company in Beijing, and I started to read widely about women's studies in China. The current women's studies in China are a product of the changes in women's positions brought about by the recent social and economic reforms after 1987. The first book series on women's studies was published in China in 1986, and the first research centre on women's studies was set up in a university in 1987 (Lin, 1997). In the reform era, the policies and welfare aimed at protecting women's benefits were dismantled. Women became more vulnerable and easily discriminated against in the marketplace. Socialist gender equality cannot be justified in a society which is dominated by economic rationality. Unlike the research and activities on women's problems in the west, which experienced the first, second and third waves, current women's studies in China have a comparatively short history and

must be situated in the particular social background of the reform era. In 1995, the fourth United Nations Women's Conference was held in Beijing. Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women was signed at the conference in order to protect indigenous women's rights (IPCB, 1995). After this, issues of gender inequality and women's problems began to attract wide attention in China. The issues were researched in order to formulate policy advice, the topics covered several aspects, women's work discrimination, health and work conditions of migrant women workers, women's education, domestic violence and family policy, and sexuality and birth control.

Women's problems and gender inequality not only attracted the attention of policy maker and academic researchers, it also raised public discussion by social activists and mass media (Lin, 1997). Even though social activities and media are still strictly regulated by the state, the reform still left some autonomy for discussion and women's self-organisation. In the summer of 2014, I noticed the Beijing feminist summer training school was open for online application. The summer school was held by NGOs. Anyone who was interested in feminism or feminist social activism could apply to attend the summer school. It would teach courses on western feminist theories, Chinese feminist movements in history, and how to apply feminist ideas into everyday practices and social activities. I wanted to know more people who shared my interest in feminism, so I applied. The summer school lasted for 10 weeks, and every weekend, I went to a class. At this summer school, I met Zhang Li (pseudonym), who is now one of my best friends in Beijing. At that time, she was in relationship with a married man. When discussing topics on intimate relationships, she said she might not marry anyone, which was a shock for me because I was brought up in a family which had conventional ideas on sex and marriage. I also met some Chinese social activists, such as Li Maizi, Zheng Churan and Wei Tingting, who were later known outside China because they were arrested in March 2015 for planning to hold an activity on sexual harassment on public transportation in Beijing. I could feel some young women's attitudes on conventional gender relations were changing. Social activists were trying to apply western feminist ideas in practice and change women's

positions, but they were regulated strictly by the state. All those experiences raised my interest in gender studies in the context of Beijing.

Two years' experience of working, living, and learning in Beijing inspired me to do a PhD project about well-educated migrant women in Beijing. I wanted to understand why they migrate, what higher education means for them, their attitudes to gender relations in the workplace and family, and their attitudes towards western feminist ideas and current feminist activists in China. From the macro perspective, I wanted to explore how market reform changed well-educated women's social positions and gender relations. The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 provides a historical context and theoretical framework for researching well-educated migrant women over the past several decades. I briefly introduce women's gender norms, roles and relations in pre-modern China and Confucian traditions, in the Republic of China era, and in the Mao era. In particular, the chapter addresses the influences of the economic reform on three main aspects: women's social positions, the emerging of a new middle class and the rise of labour migration. Studies on well-educated women's migration experiences are few.

Chapter 2 is about the methodology of this study. In the summer of 2016, I did a three-month fieldwork study and conducted 29 face-to-face in-depth interviews in Beijing. This chapter traces back the process of the fieldwork. It discusses how the fieldwork was designed, how the participants were recruited and selected, how the interviews were conducted, how the data was transcribed and coded, and the final writing up process. It also addresses how the researcher's identity, knowledge and interview skills affect the research process and outcomes. This is then followed by three main analysis chapters which examine how the young women interpret and negotiate the social and cultural context they live in and how they understand gender relations and responsibilities in the workplace, premarital intimate relationships and families.

Chapter 3 investigates young well-educated migrant women's career development paths in Beijing. In this chapter, I focus on gender relations in the workplace and in the labour market. The young women were motivated by better work opportunities in Beijing and broke away from the patrilineal-patrilocal family and labour market structure in their hometowns. I discuss how their migration motivation was related to the market reform inequality between mega cities and the women's home cities. Then I analysed how women hunted for their first job in Beijing and their job hopping principles. The workplace in the companies and institutions in Beijing was dominated by hard-driven and profit-centred hegemonic masculinity. I discussed how women adopted diverse strategies from cooperating to resisting workplace hegemonic masculinity in order to become 'professional subjects' in the neoliberal market economy of China.

The next two chapters are arranged chronologically. Chapter 4 addresses young women's premarital intimate relationships. Breaking up has become more and more widely accepted since the 1990s, so there is a period of life when young people are involved in informal romantic relationships and casual sexual relationships. Young well-educated migrant women had diversified expectations of what their personal life would be like in premarital intimate relationships. Some women followed conventional gender expectations and dated middle-class men who showed their sense of responsibility in the relationship, so they had the potential to be the future main family provider. There were also women who abandoned pragmatic intimate relationships and traditional gender perceptions by choosing men with a lower economic status or staying single. However, their strategies could not be separated from the context of a mega city like Beijing.

Chapter 5 focuses on married women. I discuss their gender relations at work and in the family. Even though the average marriage age was later in Beijing compared to small cities, women still started considering marriage because of pressure coming from peers, colleagues and families in their late 20s. Working women faced

occupational discrimination because of their family responsibility of giving birth and taking care of young children. I discuss the strategies they used in tackling the discrimination. I also discuss the role women played in bringing up children in relation to their elderly parents and middle-class husbands. However, when a woman's family role and responsibility were in conflict with their career development, women had a diverse choice in tackling the conflicts.

The Conclusion summarizes the key debates in this research and the contribution I made to the study of well-educated migrant women in reform-era China. I discuss how my findings complement the knowledge from the fields of changing family and intimate relationship studies, new middle class studies and migration studies in reform-era China. Neoliberal capitalism in the context of China has opened up new opportunities and also created new vulnerabilities. By migrating to Beijing, well-educated women were involved in a more marketised environment, and professional women had more autonomy in choices at work and intimate relationships. However, marriage remained dominated by conventional and patriarchal gender expectations. I discuss the diversified strategies of compliance, cooperation or resistance young well-educated migrant women took within this structure and how new exploration was conducted in order to make a change.

## CHAPTER ONE CHINESE WOMEN ON THE MOVE: Locating Middle Class

### Migrant Women in Reform China

Research on migration has focused largely on men, and women were assumed to be family followers or associated migrants for family reunification and not acting in an economic context (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Cranford, 1999). From the 1980s, women migrants began to draw policy makers' and academics' wider attention (Pedraza, 1991). Initially, gender was only added as a variable in order to be measured. However, gender is not a relatively static attribute, but a set changing social relation which influence migration, (Connell, 1987) and gender also changes with migration. A central goal of this study is to investigate how migration impacts well-educated Chinese women's gender ideals.

Before telling the stories of the migrant women in this study, it is necessary to introduce the stories' macro historical and social contexts. It is a study which addresses the intersectionality of gender and class in understanding this cohort of young women's migrant experience. I briefly introduce gender norms, roles and relations in China's history. All these norms and discourses in different historical periods still exist and are reworked in women's narratives. I especially address the economic reform's influences on three main aspects: women's positions, the emergence of a new middle class, and the rise of labour migration. Gender structure is interwoven with class structure. Well-educated women's gender ideal is influenced by their middle class status. The vast majority of contemporary research on China's internal migration omits middle-class women, and focuses on working-class men and women. Migration empowered working-class women in their intimate relationship. The past research on gender, class and migration in the reform era of China provides the foundation for the research on young middle class migrate women in Beijing.

## Gender Norms in Chinese History

### Confucianism and Women

In the Western concept, the category of 'woman' is both a biological and a social category. However, in pre-modern China, the term which was used to describe woman was '*funü*'. *Fu* referred to married women or wives and mothers, while *nü* referred to young, unmarried girls or daughters (Rosenlee, 2006). This term concerned the propriety of women's roles in family relations, instead of a sense of universal womanhood or individualised being (Guisso, 1981). A description of the innate quality of 'woman' which went beyond kinship roles did not exist in the pre-modern China gender system (Wolf, 1985). In an eighteenth-century instruction book, Chen Hongmou educated his daughters '[if you start with] a *xiannü*(virtuous unmarried girl) then you will end up with a *xianfū* (virtuous wife). If you are virtuous wives, you will end up with *xianmu* (virtuous mothers). With virtuous mothers there will be virtuous descendants' (Barlow, 1994, p 255). Only by being ritualised within the kinship structure, could a person be recognised as a proper 'man' or 'woman'. This is influenced by Confucianism, the most prominent intellectual tradition in Chinese history.

In Confucian traditions, the gender distinction is correlated with the distinct separation between *nei* (inside) and *wai* (outside), which is often equated with family and state spheres, or private and public spheres in Western culture (Rosenlee, 2006). Men belong to the realm of *wai*, while women belong to the realm of *nei*. According to *Liji* (one of the Confucian classics) from the age of seven, boys and girls were required to be taught different knowledge and skills by their elders. Boys were taught 'six arts, canonical texts, and the deferential behaviour of a mindful subject for officialdom'. This prepared them in the capacity of playing a role in extra-familial

relations, such as acquiring official positions. Girls were taught ‘domestic skills and household management’, which included ‘women’s work of weaving, spinning and embroidering, food preparation for sacrificial ceremonies, and the humble manner of a wife’ (Legge, 1960, p 478-479). This prepared them in the capacity of playing a role in familial relations such as daughter, wife or mother. However, the daughters of wealthy families and knowledgeable elites were often well-educated and developed talents as poets, artists and historians (Ayscough, 1937). Even so, teaching women how to read and write was considered unnecessary (Lang, 1946). Women with advanced literacy had no legitimate access to the real world of *wai*. Only men were able to acquire official positions through participating in the civil service examination. In this sense, women’s lack of formal education was determined by the roles they were expected to play in the *nei* and *wai* realms.

However, unlike in Western culture, in which the family and state or private and public sphere are separate from one other, in the Confucian tradition, family and the political or social order are intertwined with one another; *nei* is the locus of *wai* (Ko, 1994; Mann, 1997; Widmer, 1989). In *Daxue* (one of the Confucian classics), ‘the ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the world, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivate their own persons’ (Legge, 1960, p.295). In this sense, a man also needed to play a role as son, husband and father properly in the family. Through playing the familial role, women were also connected with the male sphere of *wai*. For instance, an empress dowager was responsible for instructing the child-emperor. She had the power to decide political issues. Wu Zetian of Tang even replaced the emperor and became the only female emperor in Chinese history. In this sense, one’s position and power over another person was not only determined by gender, but also by age, generation, marriage, class and so on. The authority of women over their sons is a good example. Even though women’s roles were confined to the domestic sphere, the boundaries of *nei* and *wai* could be negotiated. Through interacting with male members of their family, there



was no shortage of Chinese women who went beyond the limited realm of *nei* and pursuing activities in the realm of *wai*.

Furthermore, because women were bound to the domestic realm of *nei*, their social position was determined by the most important male in the household (Sung, 1981). Women did not have their own name, title or rank in society. Before marriage, a woman's rank was dependent on her father; after marriage, it was dependent on her husband. If her husband died, her rank was dependent on her son, which is called *sancong* in Chinese. Some scholars translate *sancong* as 'threefold obediences or subordination' in order to show women's inferior position in the family (Andors, 1983; Chao, 1937; Tang et al., 2002). However, this translation is criticised. There is a passage in *Liji* describing the propriety of marriage, 'when the bride arrives, the groom bows to her as she enters. They then eat together of the same [sacrificial] animal, and join in sipping from cups made of the same melon; thereby showing that they form one body, are of equal rank and pledge mutual affection' (Legge, 1960, pp.429-430). In this sense, even though women do not have rank, they are respected as their husband, and they are equal to their husbands in privileges and status. *Sancong* should therefore be translated as 'threefold following or dependence' (Chu, 1965; Sung, 1981; Rosenlee, 2006).

Marriage was of significant meaning to their life. In a family, with the help of matchmakers, it was usually mothers who were responsible for selecting a suitable mate for their sons and daughters (Andors, 1983). The aim of marriage was for the continuity of family interests and efficient household management. After women were married, they left the natal family and became a member of their husband's family (Lang, 1946). Confucianism emphasises ancestor worship and the continuity of the family name (Rosenlee, 2006). The male was the sole bearer of patrilineage. The religious belief in ancestor worship, intertwined with the important roles men played in the realm of *wai*, meant that a woman successfully giving birth to a male heir was her most important task as a wife (Stacey, 1983). Only after the new wife produced a

male heir, her position in the new family was stable and secure (Andors, 1983). The failure to produce a male heir constituted one of the compelling grounds for expelling the woman from the marriage (Shek, 2006). Divorce was only the man's privilege. A woman's family role as mother and wife was purely functional. Women had no independent public status or any property rights. Even if the woman earned money from doing work such as weaving, spinning or embroidery, it went to the family property and belonged to the males in the family (Lang, 1946).

Both men and women were highly restricted by the patriarchal family system. The understanding of the separation of *nei* and *wai* in Confucian traditions and women's positions and roles in the *nei* and *wai* realm helps us to gain insights into how traditional thought and ideas on gender continue to influence women's gender identity in modern China. For instance, even though women belong to the realm of *nei*, they also went beyond the limited realm of *nei* and followed pursuits in the realm of *wai* through interacting with male family members. Men were also expected to play responsible and proper roles as sons, husbands and fathers in the family. In this sense, the separation of *nei* and *wai* was very different from the separation of the family and state spheres, or private and public spheres in Western culture. Even though in pre-modern China, we can still see women's own agency used to achieve the benefits they wanted in and beyond the domestic sphere, given the structural limitations imposed on them, they could still not have a social place without entering into a marriage. They had no legitimate access to the realm of *wai* independently, nor did they have the right to decide to enter into or leave a marriage. The situation started to change during the late Qing Dynasty.

#### 'New Women' in the Republic of China

Feminism was initially introduced into China in the early years of the twentieth century (Chin, 2007). It was a period of great social change in China. The imperial

system officially fell in 1912 and the imperial civil service examination system, which had lasted for 1,300 years came to an end. Well-educated men and women became ‘free-floating intellectuals’ who had to make their own way (Hao, 1980). In 1912, the Nationalist government founded the Republic of China, which was announced as being an independent country based on the Western domestic political system. The Communist Party was founded in 1921 and its power continued to increase after this. At the same time, China also suffered from internal conflicts between warlords, and foreign imperialism. Large portions of China were under foreign control in the first half of twentieth century. The intellectuals looked abroad for new ideas and inspirations to reform and save Chinese society.

The thoughts of women’s physical and spiritual rights and their equality with men were introduced into China through public school education by missionaries in the late nineteenth-century (Beahan, 1976; Lü and Zheng, 1990). Missionaries regarded foot binding, arranged marriages, concubinage, and Chinese women’s roles and status in the family as an indication of how ‘uncivilised’ Chinese society was (Kwok, 1992). They tried to improve the condition of Chinese women using the standard of the Christian ideal of womanhood. However, the knowledge taught in mission schools was only domestic and childrearing skills. After they graduated, the roles women could play in the public sphere were limited to work serving women and children, such as ‘school teachers, medical professionals and administrators of schools and clinics’ (Chin, 2007, p 39) in urban areas. Even though the changes brought to hierarchical gender relations in China were few, missionaries did introduce new concepts on the relation between men and women and new cultural resources for women to construct their gender identity. The importance of women’s education was later also promoted by reformers in the early twentieth century. Modern education was regarded as a necessary step to develop a woman’s independent mind, moral character and independent economic status (Goodman, 2005). More non-mission schools developing women’s vocational skills were set up by Chinese groups and the government (Chin, 2007; Goodman, 2005; Lu, 2004).

The term *nüxing* came into use during the May Fourth era of the 1910s and early 1920s. *Nüxing* can be literally translated as ‘female sex’. The intellectuals constructed a ‘new literature’ theory with the intent of modernising Chinese literary writing. Compared with *funü*, which was used to represent women in traditional Chinese literature, *nüxing* adopted a universal, sexological and scientific personal identity, which was based on biological attributes (Barlow, 1994). Women became the ‘other’ of men, instead of an interrelated and dependent social category (Stevens, 2003). It also provided more possibilities and choices for women than playing a familial role in the realm of *nei*. The term ‘new women’ (*xin nüxing*) was invented in order to challenge, reject and break from the concept of ‘traditional women’ under the Confucian gender system. Reformer Hu Shi said that new woman designates a new kind of woman who ‘doesn’t believe in religion or adhere to rules of conduct, yet who is an extremely good thinker and has extremely high morals’ (Harris, 1995, p. 64). With the high intelligence and moral standard, new women participated in public affairs and stood for the nation’s civilization, strength and progress (Stevens, 2003).

However, in this period, feminist ideas were subordinate to nationalism. Women’s rights and women’s demands for equality were subordinate to national interests. As reformers, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao argued, as long as China’s women remained ‘weak and crippled by foot binding and ignorant, unproductive, dependent and isolated in the domestic sphere, there was no hope for the nation’ (Edward, 2000, p. 126). The reformers promoted women’s education in order to make them contribute productively and become economically independent. Their ultimate goal was to strengthen the nation. The discourses on new woman were produced by men, such as male writers, translators and magazine editors (Chin, 2007), with women as the audience they intended to reach. Yue points out that the discourses have much closer links to patriarchal nationalism than the feminist movement in the Western world (Yue, 1993). The discourse of regarding women’s domestic work as unproductive and women’s value having to be realised through contributing to the project of state

building remained influential after the founding of the People's Republic of China.

In order to promote women's engagement in society, women's vocations were provided purposefully. Feminist politicians argued that only by becoming independent labour, would women have the right to participate in government and decide on public issues (Goodman, 2005). About two hundred women intellectuals participated in *Tongmenghui* (Chinese Revolutionary Alliance), led by Sun Yat-sen (Lu, 2004). More than 40 women's associations and groups were formed during 1910s with the aim of striving for women's liberation and political rights (Lü and Zheng, 1990).

Middle-class women who received vocational education and had professional skills worked in banks, telegraph and telephone bureaus, and factories and other organisations as teachers, doctors, merchants, secretaries and journalists.

Working-class women who were not well-educated could only go to factories and sell their labour. The middle-class women had to 'kiss the asses (*pai mapi*)' of the men in charge, and the working-class female factory workers were poorly paid and had to work in dangerous work conditions for long hours (Goodman, 2005). However, the work provided women with the foundation to realise economic independence and help to gain more power and agency in the family. More importantly, female employment challenged the Confucian separation of sexes. Women gained legitimate access to the realm of *wai* independently.

Reformers and women activists also strived for more rights in the domestic sphere.

Young women took action to oppose family arranged marriages and end loveless marriages (Lu, 2004). Some of them even ran away from home or committed suicide to show their attitude of resisting a marriage they did not want. Love and independent will was regarded as important in a couple relationship. In the 1930 Marriage Law enacted by the Republic of China, monogamy was established, the couple had their own right to decide to enter or leave the marriage, and a wife could have her own property in the marriage (Lu, 2004). In this sense, women not only gained legitimate access to the realm of *wai*, they also had more power and agency in the realm of *nei*.

However, the law only applied to a very limited area. At the same time, women's traditional roles as good wives and virtuous mothers were also encouraged by some intellectuals (Chiang, 2007). The ideas of regarding traditional customs as uncivilised, independent will and economic status, love and women's importance in participating in public social life provided rich cultural resources for women today to construct their identity in China.

### 'Iron Girls' in the Mao Era

After the Communist Party founded the People's Republic of China, the discourse of the liberation of women and criticising tradition continued. In 1950, the People's Republic of China published its first marriage law. It intended to abolish the feudal marriage system and customs such as arranged marriage, marriage by sale, concubinage or polygamy, and replace it with 'the new democratic marriage system' (Eagel, 1984). The law encouraged women's free choice of partners. Different historical periods have their liberation discourses about women, among them, the most influential and widespread ones were during Mao's Cultural Revolution: 'Women can hold up half the sky' and 'times have changed, men and women are the same, and whatever men comrades can achieve, women comrades can achieve, too' (Jin, Manning, and Chu, 2006). The Iron Girls were the most famous women's role models during this era. The slogans and rituals reflect the essence of how the CCP understood gender equality during the Mao era. My participants were born in the 1980s and 1990s. Their parents were born in the 1950s and 1960s. The slogans and campaigns of the Cultural Revolution shaped their gender perception to a large extent. The perceptions were passed on to the next generation and adjusted to the new environment and context in a neoliberal China.

The rise of the Iron Girl campaign was related to labour shortages in villages. Women were purposefully organised to participate in agricultural production while men were

away working on agricultural infrastructure development, in the industrial sectors or in the army (Jin, Manning, and Chu, 2006). In urban areas, women were mobilised to work in heavy industry and physically demanding occupations. During this period, the government practiced equal pay for equal work, but it was undermined by gender segregation. Women could get the same work points working on the same job compared with men. Women's brigades were established and women acquired a gender-based identity rooted in increasing confidence in their work abilities and strength (Jin, Manning, and Chu, 2006; Gao, 2007). They competed with male workers in order to show their value at work. The brigades which performed well would receive official recognition and be elected as model groups. Through participating in the agricultural and industrial production, women not only acquired the sense that they contributed to the socialist state, they also won the social respectability which had previously only been enjoyed by men. The most influential contribution the campaign made to women's liberation was challenging women's physical weakness and inferior position at work compared with men, and it also challenged the traditional gendered division of labour. The Iron Girl campaign imbued women with a certain sense of empowerment.

In the 1960s, more and more women worked in the fields or in heavy industry, but their housework load remained the same. The state's mobilisation of women was not accompanied by encouraging men to take more responsibility at home. Women were naturally 'born to be mothers' and had the responsibility of doing housework at home. The ideal wife should 'strike a balance between sacrificing to support her husband and acquiring masculine skills associated with entry into the world of public affairs' (Evans, 2001, p.338). Women took the responsibility for doing housework and served their husband at home in the name of the public good, but wives also had to go beyond the domestic domain and serve the state. Housework and childrearing became the 'family burden', which advanced women should overcome and defy in order to succeed (Jin, Manning, and Chu, 2006; Honig, 2000). In urban areas, the situation was better, because work units provided them with public services such as maternity

leave, childcare and breastfeeding breaks in order to support women's participation in work (Jin, Manning, and Chu, 2006). The double burden was serious, especially for married women in rural areas where sufficient social welfare was lacking. In this sense, there was a gap between married and unmarried women. Only young women had the equality to earn work points the same as men and contribute more to the socialist production. We cannot ignore the age and class characters which diversified women's experience in Mao era.

After the feudal marriage system and customs were abolished, marriage should have been a 'relationship of equality and companionship without regard to gender' (Evans, 2001, p. 337). They could be revolutionary couples who could discuss political issues and participate in revolutionary activities together. Even though arranged marriage had been abolished, unit leaders and colleagues acted in the role of matchmaker for single women. After the Communist Party took measures to eliminate private economy, all urban citizens were allocated with a job in a work unit (*danwei*) which is centrally controlled by the party-state (Wu, 2002; Zhou, 2004). Units also intervened in family life, such as mediating family conflicts, extramarital affairs and divorces (Liu, 2007, Woo, 2006). Even though women had the right to choose to divorce, unit leaders still had the responsibility for maintaining harmony within families. Marriage was the only legitimate framework for sexual relations. Loss of chastity before marriage was taboo. Young unmarried girls who were too close to boys or paid too much attention to their appearances were criticised as indecent or living a bourgeois lifestyle (Zheng, 2001). Marriage was viewed as a natural process of adolescence and should be expected by all women. Individuals who did not marry were viewed as abnormal. A good sex life was regarded as essential to a harmonious marriage (Evans, 2001).

However, women's contribution to the family was devalued. Women who only stayed at home and did not work outside were criticised as lazybones and relying only on husbands (Gao, 2007). They were seen as the representation of ignorance,



backwardness and as not yet liberated (Jin, Manning, and Chu, 2006). Women were encouraged to realise their value by participating in the socialist production and increasing family income. It was regarded as the only way for women to raise their social status in society and achieve gender equality. The discourse of devaluing housework and housewives continues for women in China nowadays. The model of 'iron girl' and the slogan of 'men and women are the same' were used as a strategy aimed at encouraging women to take traditional male occupations. The essence of women's liberation of the Mao era was actually based on gender sameness and encouraging women to take men as the norm, so it was still a male-centred system in which men were seen as superior to women (Jin, Manning, and Chu, 2006). Men's authority in the family and in the workplace was never threatened.

### **Women in the Reform Era**

In 1978, China started a transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy. The rapid expansion of higher education in China created a new generation of middle class. Hoffman (2008) argues that the abandonment of the job-assignment system and the widespread idea of career success helped to establish a new form of 'professional subject-hood' in the reform era. The state's neoliberal strategy of governing through freedom transformed individuals into 'desiring subjects' (Rofel, 2007). Women freed themselves from the socialist state and constructed a new form of gendered sexual identity. However, Liu (2017) argues that the eroticised culture of the market economy actually reduce 'white-collar' women to their appearance and sexual functions and consolidated the symbolic violence of masculine domination at workplace. Even though professional women benefit from education reform and have more opportunity to access to higher education compared in the Mao era, they still have to deal with this new form of gender inequality at work. The reform also generated massive migrant population from inland areas to more marketized coastal

cities. Yan (2003) argues that the increased geographical social mobility in the reform era promoted the individualization of Chinese society. Through acquiring a new identity at work, migration experience empowered migrant working class women in intimate relationship and promoted their status in domestic sphere (Beynon, 2004; Fan, 2003; Gaetano, 2015). Even though both working class women and professional women migrated, there is little research on how migration transformed professional women's gender ideals.

### Changing Gender Relations

In the reform era, as a gender category, *nüxing* (female sex) came back into public discourse. *Nüxing* helped young women in the post-Mao era to acquire a legitimate sexual identity (Zheng, 2001). Built on the scholarship on neoliberal subjectivities which delineates the rational techniques of the self to driving from the neoliberal economic life, Rofel (2007) argues that 'desire' is the most powerful realm for constructing subjects in post-socialist China. Sexuality is one of the sites which desire is imagined. Women thought they unshackled their innate gendered and sexual self by freeing themselves from the socialist state. Maoist feminism is blamed for making women become too masculine and suppressing their 'natural' humanity.

In the political sphere, women were becoming more and more disadvantaged with regard to their political representation. The proportion of woman cadres at the basic-level decreased dramatically since the 1980s (Wang, 1999). Maoist egalitarian ideology was replaced by the principle of equal opportunity when selecting cadres. The principle of gender equality was rejected. The quota system was under attack because it was against the equal competition principle (Wang, 1993). Instead, a cadre's 'ability' was emphasised with regard to cadre selection, regardless of gender. Ability is measured by certain standards, such as educational level and work

performance. However, because women had comparatively lower degrees, and women suffered more from work and family conflicts, women were in a disadvantaged position for political representation. In this sense, the cadre criteria was intended to be gender-neutral, the interpretation of ‘ability’ was actually according to male standards. Female was regarded as the weaker gender according to the standard (Hou, 1993; Dong, 1993). Women’s voices were less likely to be heard in the political sphere, and women’s rights and interests were less likely to be represented. However, the female cadres who were well-educated and had good work performance still had better opportunities to be selected and promoted nowadays compared with in the centrally-planned political environment. The change of women’s political representation in the government is one aspect which can reflect the losses and gains women have experienced in China’s transition to a market economy. Women were more vulnerable to the pressures of a competitive workplace; however, they also enjoyed greater independence from patriarchy and state control (Zhao and Jackie, 1999).

Women’s position as paid labour also changed to a large extent. In the Mao era, the party believed that women’s emancipation would be realised through their participation in paid work. So they mobilised women to leave home for the workplace. Government used a quota system in order to ensure women would make up a certain percentage of workers in every industry, which also include heavy industries (Jiang, 2004). However, in the reform era, the policy of encouraging women to do heavy physical labour was criticised as neglecting women and men’s physical differences (Rofel, 2007). The assigned employment system was also criticised as suppressing women’s individual potential so the work efficiency was low (Jiang, 2004). With the advent of market reform, enterprises were encouraged to make their own decisions on selecting employees. Individuals were empowered to pursue their career development and choose what they wanted to do. This caused unemployment for the women who had low working skills and knowledge. Middle-aged and older female labour workers in state enterprises were more likely to lose their jobs (Liu, 2007; Perry and Selden,

2000). The data from the Ministry of Labour statistics of 1997 shows that women accounted for nearly 61% of the laid-off population (Rosenthal, 1998). They were laid-off and unemployed during the economic restructuring of the 1990s. The young women who were not well-educated had to work in manual factories as labourers (Pun, 2005).

However, there are women who actively sought new opportunities in the reform era and went back to school for higher education after the resumption of the university entrance examination in 1977. Studies show that more women than men returned to higher education (Hannum and Xie, 1994). In 1998, female students made up 38.4% of students in universities, the number continued to increase gradually, while in 2016, 52.4% of university students were female (National Bureau of Statistics of the PRC, 2017). The improvement in women's education and the development of information technology provided women with more professional work opportunities in urban China (Ding, 2001). In the new information technology industries, professional skills and knowledge are more important compared to an employee's gender. Compared with men, women have advantages in some industries due to the professional skills they have. Data from the second survey on the social status of Chinese women shows that in 2000, women outnumbered men in 'wholesale and retail sales, social services, education, culture and health', and the number of female workers was almost the same as male workers in 'finance and insurance, scientific research and general technical services, party and government agencies and civic groups' (as cited in Jiang, 2004, p.212).

Youth and beauty became valuable for women when looking for employment opportunities (Chen, 2003; Hanser, 2005; Liu, 2017; Rofel, 1999; Zurndorfer, 2015). The research on women's disciplined body at workplace can be driven from Foucault's theory on body and sexuality. He argues that modern sexuality directly engages the self in the processes of subject forming (Foucault, 1978). Only women's bodies with disciplined and obedient performances of sexualised femininity could be

regarded as productive bodies which represented China's bid for capitalist modernity (Hanser, 2005). This is especially true in service work. The 'rice bowl of youth' (*qingchunfan*) has become the new employment trend since the early 1990s. The rice bowl of youth refers to 'the urban trend in which a range of new, highly paid positions have opened almost exclusively to young women, as bilingual secretaries, public relations women, and fashion models' (Zhang, 2000, p. 94). Gender norms, practices, and identities are powerful resources for managerial control, in the sexualized workplace, as Salzinger argues, the 'good worker' and 'desirable woman' become indistinguishable, sexualized femininity becomes productive (Salzinger, 2003, p. 583). In the Chinese context, Hanser (2005) conducted research in three urban Chinese retail settings in 2001 and 2002 and found that the youth and beauty of women workers had become integral to the organisation of service work regimes. Physically attractive young women with light makeup and disciplined clothes worked in high-class, luxury department stores. Their salary was twice as much as the aging women workers in failing state-owned stores, whose bodies were regarded as unattractive and unproductive. The trend also led to the appearance of 'gender careers', which refers to jobs to satisfy the needs of male consumers and clients (Jiang, 2004; Liu, 2017). Fashionable young women eat, drink and dance with potential clients in order to facilitate business activities (Zhang, 2000). In order to cater to consumers' desires and needs, they are trained to learn new skills to use their bodies to do emotional work, such as the way of observation and new facial expression (Otis, 2011). However, this creates a dilemma for professional sales women who want to be reputable and also have to socialize with male clients (Liu, 2017). They carefully control their clothing and invoke their family role such as using family emergency as an excuse to avoid business socializing events.

Liu (2017) argues that the eroticised workplace culture actually grounded in the objectification of women (Zurndorfer, 2015). When women were reduced to their appearance and sexual functions, the symbolic violence of masculine domination limited women's potential to resist men's bureaucratic power individually or

collectively. The symbolic power of masculinity is considered naturally legitimate. The interplay between gender and sexuality consolidated power inequality. Liu's (2017) research was conducted among professional women who worked in a state-owned foreign trade company in Jiangsu province. Through telling sexual jokes, women workers were regarded as by their male colleagues and superiors as an instrument to stimulate the atmosphere and boost morale for the company. Male workers who were good at telling sex jokes were considered as good ice-breakers by their senior male colleagues, which enhanced their career development ultimately. Even though women benefited from the education system and acquired white-collar jobs, they still suffered from this new form of gender inequality at work.

There are a large number of empirical studies on the links between China's market reform and gender-based employment disparities. One hypothesis is because a market economy honours efficiency and productivity, rather than ascribed traits such as gender, the transition to a market economy has positive implications for gender equality. There are also other perspectives which argue that marketisation has negative implications for gender equality in employment, because women are already at a disadvantage because of inequality in access to education or political connections, and women also have family burdens and reproduction responsibilities. However, there is empirical evidence which shows that the earning gap between men and women remained stable in the pre-reform and reform periods (Bian et al. 2000; Shu and Bian, 2003). However, this has been criticised for not considering the declining female employment rates in China (Chi and Li, 2014). Chi and Li took unemployed men and women into account and used Heckman's selection-correction model when estimating the gap size. The results showed that the gender pay gap had widened in the past two decades.

Shu and Bian (2003) tried to examine how market-related characteristics influenced the gender pay gap in urban China. The study was based on survey data from the 1988 and 1995 Chinese Household Income Projects and city level data for 1995. They

found that market-related characteristics, such as education, occupation and industry placement, explain a larger proportion of the gender gap in earnings in 1995 than in 1988, and more marketised cities shows more significant changes. By contrast, the contribution of redistributive economy-related characteristics such as affiliation with the state sector, Communist party membership, and seniority reduced. The study shows that for young people, the gender-based earning gap is more influenced by the accumulation of human capital in more marketised cities, such as Beijing. In less marketised cities, such as the migrant women's hometowns, the earning gap is more decided by the accumulation of political capital, such as *guanxi*.

Zhang, Hannum and Wang (2008) analysed data from the China Urban Labour Survey/ China Adult Literacy Survey conducted in 2001 and investigated possible explanations for the gender gap in employment and earnings. The results tell us that for single men and women, no great differences in employment and income were shown. However, a difference was shown between married men and women. Even if the human capital and political capital they have is the same, married men still have higher income compared with married women. Married women's earnings are only 77% of married men's. While for men, their marital status does not influence their employment and earning. Married women's earnings are 67% of women who are not married. It is marital status which influenced the gender gap in employment and earnings in urban China. A qualitative study in Beijing in 1998 finds that for dual-earner couples, wives still need to spend more time on housework than husbands (Zuo, 2003). There is a new trend that young women with small children chose to stay at home to educate and take care of the children (Parish and Busse, 2000). The emphasis of women's role as the educator in the family and the lack of state support for children's education adds a double burden to the young working mother. Many new mothers choose to be housewives voluntarily in order to escape from this double burden (Xiao, 2010). The qualitative and quantitative data shows that it is married women's family burden and responsibilities which cause the greater gap in employment and earning compared with single women and married men.

In the reform era, the responsibility for social reproduction and care has returned to the household, especially married women. In the Mao era, the responsibility for social reproduction and care was provided by the state or work unit in urban areas. The state provided female employees with social services, such as state-sanctioned paid maternity leave, childcare, and extensive healthcare and medical care (Kane, 1976). In order to improve the work participation of its women workers, Tianjin Auto Factory provided them a 'household duties team to help with some of their domestic responsibilities' and established the 'protection system for pregnant, nursing and menstruating workers' (Robinson, 1985, p.39). The state provided childcare services in urban areas (Hare-Mustin and Hare, 1986). Women could concentrate more on their careers. In the reform era, because of the emphasis on marketplace competitiveness, enterprises see welfare as costly and resulting in lower profits (China Daily, 1987). The state policy suggested that women have important duties in childcare and family education. At the 12th National Party Congress in 1982, Hu Yaobang, then General Secretary of the Communist Party's Central Committee said, 'Women are not only an important force in national economic construction; they also have a particular significant role to play in the building of socialist spiritual civilization' (as cited in Robinson, 1985). Public policies support women's primary role as being at home instead of in the workplace. 'Virtuous wives and good mothers' became the new models for Chinese women (Weeks, 1989). The social security a woman has is directly linked to her labour market outcomes (Cook and Dong, 2011). Women's withdrawal from the labour market was also a solution to rising unemployment in urban China in the late 1990s (Yee, 2001). Enterprises were less willing to hire women because female employment involves additional costs, such as maternity leave and women are distracted by their domestic responsibilities.

In this sense, in the reform era, women faced a dual burden of taking care of families as well as participating in production at the same time (Bear, 1986). Instead of relying on social services provided by the state, working women have to seek help from



commercialised domestic and care services. Because of the cut in government funding for social services in childcare, many public care facilities were transformed into commercial organisations. Between 1997 and 2006, the number of publicly funded nurseries fell from 157,842 to 55,069, private nurseries accounted for 57.8% of the whole number of nurseries (Ministry of Education, 2007). In urban areas, middle and upper-middle class family paid for commercialised domestic and care services, such as cleaning, cooking and taking care of children (Hu, 2010). Migrant women workers have to rely on informal day-care commercial organisations so they can go out to work (Cook and Wang, 2010). The government believed that technology and modernisation could help to take care of domestic work for households. More state funds were used to support factories producing goods for daily use instead of heavy industries, such as factories producing washing machines, refrigerators and bicycles. The greatest percentage increase of all consumer products was washing machines. In 1978, the production of washing machines was only 0.336 million. While in 1982, the number reached 2.5 million. The use of washing machines and other consumer durables at home diminished the time women spent on domestic labour. It was seen in China as a way of liberating women from the household and motivating them to participate in production (Robinson, 1985). The government's investment in increasing the production of consumer durables was a replacement for the investment in social welfare and services. It provided the individual household with another method to solve the problem of domestic pressure, so mothers and wives could work outside. However, it was still middle or upper-middle class families in urban cities who could afford the more expensive 'liberating consumer goods' and commercialised domestic and care services. In addition, it is still women who learn to use new technologies and worry that their children's education is not good enough. Therefore, middle or upper-middle class families are more willing to spend money on goods and services in order to differentiate themselves from working-class families and rural families.

Even though women enjoyed a higher level of gender equality in education, they still experienced gender discrimination in the workplace and took more responsibility for

child-care and domestic work. Faced with the uncertainty of the labour market, they could not rely on social welfare; instead, they looked for men who would provide better economic conditions for them. Sexual relation is more based on pragmatic concerns and regarded as a method of realising social mobility for women. Farrer (2002) researched the sexual culture and marriage of young women in Shanghai in the 1990s. He discussed how the changing culture of romantic love was related with the structure of capitalist labour markets and consumer markets. He found that premarital sex was becoming more and more acceptable, young women had more freedom to engage in short-term relationships and break them off before marriage. The purity of sex was not judged by some material end, but feelings for each other. However, Farrer sees the choice of partner as a difficult balance between 'material conditions' and 'romantic feeling'. 'Feeling' and 'condition' (or 'love' and 'money') are not, he maintains, opposite motives, they are paired rhetorical opposites which 'the increased emphasis on one entails the compensatory emphasis on the other (Farrer, 2002, p.15). In the market economy, men are expected to provide their women housing and economic security once provided by the welfare state in the socialist era. Masculinity is tied to their 'ability' (*nengli*) to prove their economic strength and sexual attractiveness. The men with strong earning power and career success, but without romantic charm are 'big money' (*dakuan*), and they are the object of women with mercenary sexual strategies.

Another phenomenon which reflects the pragmatic concerns of couple relationships is having a second wife. The earlier research on second-wife phenomenon explores how migration and economic disparity framed the intimate sexual relations between Hong Kong and Taiwan business men and their inland Chinese mistress. Lang and Smart (2002) argue that when choosing mates, the effect of men's economic resources is maximized when women have low mobility chances. This is especially true for inland working-class women who are not well-educated. In southern China, the economic reform in China generated two migrations from Hong Kong and inland areas. The reform allowed Hong Kong businessmen to become wealthy by exploring business

opportunities in coast areas. It also created insecure migrant labour force, especially disadvantage village women. It is common for married Hong Kong men who do business in southern China to maintain a second household with young migrant women from a rural area. Lang and Smart (2002) explained this polygynous relationship with the 'female choice' model. With very limited human capital, migrant women have little chance to achieve upward social mobility. As manual workers in factory, these women are disadvantaged and economically insecure. Through engaging in relationships with wealthy Hong Kong businessmen, they can stop doing manual work, and are also provided with a house to live in and stable source of living expenses. Their benefits from the relationship are high compared with marrying men from a similar social background as themselves, so they are willing to be the second wife of Hong Kong men and even raise children for them. This form of relationship is supported by the young women's family in villages because they can also benefit from it economically or even have the chance to migrate to Hong Kong (Johnson, 1993). It is also supported by Hong Kong businessmen because attracting young women is a way for them to show their masculinity as successful businessmen. Those men without girlfriends in China have been teased by their friends (Tam, 1996). This is also true for Taiwanese business men who work in the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) of mainland China (Shen, 2008). Through sexual 'play' in China, Taiwanese business men displayed their superior class status and Chinese women were constructed as immoral 'others' who were excluded from certain business decisions.

Xiao (2011) further researched the second wife's roles in the relationship with inland businessmen. He took a relational approach to study the construction of masculinities and highlight women's roles in constituting men's identities. The second wife of business men are expected to attend public social activities together with their partners and help their partner to keep a positive public profile. In order to meet their partner's expectation of a proper mate, they need to work on their appearance and body image, such as wearing fashionable clothes and heavy makeup. Attractive women are regarded as successful businessmen's trophies (Osburg, 2008). Through

having attractive women with them, the male business elite tried to construct a public image as desiring and desired male subjects. In a pragmatic couple relationships, the working-class second wife takes on family responsibilities as a career, while for the businessmen's second wife, their consumption tastes and sexual attractiveness are more important.

In the sexual relationship which is based on unequal power relations, women are objectified. Business men's consumption of female sexuality constitutes their way of constructing distinctive forms of elite masculinity and are important means of group selection and male bonding with men with same social status backgrounds (Osburg, 2008; Tam, 1996; Zheng, 2006, 2009). The sexualized masculine 'play' among Hong Kong, Taiwanese and mainland Chinese business men is deeply integrated into capitalist operation (Shen, 2008). This reinforces the global capitalist expansion as a masculine project and excluded professional women from having the chance to participate in business socializing events in bars, nightclubs and other entertainment venues, which constrain professional women's career development (Shen, 2008). However, for the working class women who want to benefit from engaging sexual relation with 'big money', it is a mercenary strategy to realize social mobility (Farrer, 2002).

### Rising New Middle Class and Gender

With the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the work units provided work opportunities and social welfare, and social and occupational mobility was highly controlled by the party-state (Tang and Parish, 2000; Shi, 1997). The assignment tended to be fixed for life, and almost all the employees spent an entire career with one employer (Davis, 1999). The party adopted unified job assignments for college graduates and assigned them a job in a work unit (Chen, 2013). An individual's educational and occupational advancement were determined by their

political loyalty to the CCP (Cao, 2001). The emphasis on political loyalties ‘contributed to the processes of political consolidation’ (Shirk, 1984, p. 59). The ambiguous criteria gave superiors the authority to decide the advancement of their employees (Chen, 2013). The state also controlled the distribution of consumption items, such as housing, social services and daily goods (Whyte, 1975). The middle-class lifestyle which existed before 1949 was also criticised by the party as counter-revolutionary and bourgeois (Chen, 2013). Middle-class intellectuals and professionals could not show their distinct lifestyle or consumption tastes during the Mao era. Intellectuals, which included professionals, cultural elites and technocrats, lost their autonomy and were completely organised into the party-state system (Kraus, 1981; Davis, 2000).

In the post-Mao reform era, China experienced three stages of economic privatisation, which brought about profound change in the patterns of social stratification. In the first two stages (1978-1983 and 1984-1992), the state allowed small and individual businesses and private enterprises to exist and operate within the limits prescribed by law (Chen, 2013). The enterprises provided limited working opportunities, consumer goods and services. In the third stage, China opened up to market forces and foreign capital since Deng Xiaoping made his southern tour in 1992. The socialist market economy was first officially recognised as China’s goal of reform (International Finance Corporation, 2000). The state started to reform State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) from the 1980s. In 1995, the state decided to turn most of the medium and small SOE or collective enterprises into private or share-based cooperatives (Dittmer and Gore, 2001). The data from China’s National Bureau of Statistics (2013) shows that in 1985, the Gross Industrial Output of state-owned enterprises accounted for 64.9% of the total Gross Industrial Output of the enterprises in China, and their workers accounted for 41.9% of the total industrial workers. While in 1995, the Gross Industrial Output of state-owned enterprises accounted for 34% of the total Gross Industrial Output of the enterprises in China, and their workers accounted for 31.6% of the total industrial workers. In 2013, workers in state-owned enterprises only

accounted for 3.4% of the whole industrial worker population, while workers in private enterprises accounted for 46.1% of the whole industrial worker population.

More middle-class positions were created by the inflow of foreign capital from the 1980s. The state provided lower tax rates, simplified administrative procedures and duty-free import of components (Naughton, 2007). Open coastal cities and open economic regions were especially designed by the government for attracting foreign investment. In the early 1990s, foreign firms which produced and exported goods which needed a high labour content were especially successful (Harvey, 2007). From the late 1990s on, the foreign corporations, such as IBM, Microsoft, Intel and Oracle hired skilled and inexpensive professionals and set up research centres (Buckley, 2004). Chinese enterprises and the government learnt new technology and managerial skills from foreign enterprises. Indigenous high-tech companies, such as Huawei, Lenovo, Baidu, Tencent and Alibaba have also developed rapidly since the late 1990s. More than 10,000 engineers worked in Huawei. Its high-tech products are sold in more than 40 countries (Buckley, 2003). Enterprises shifted from a labour-intensive export-oriented industry to service industries. The number of employees in service industries surpassed that in the manufacturing industry and accounted for 43.4% of the total employed population (Han, 2017). The development of service industries provided forces for the rise of the middle class. The reform and privatisation of SOEs, the inflow of foreign capital, and the development of indigenous private or share-based cooperatives helped create more middle-class job opportunities in China.

Since the 1980s, SOEs were gradually granted more autonomy in many aspects of management. One aspect was that the chief manager had more freedom to decide whom to hire 'without consulting a municipal labour plan or obtaining the approval of their own government superiors as had been general practice since the late 1950s (Davis, 1999, p.28). In September 1992, a new policy was announced in order to give individuals more freedom to choose their jobs and employers. The policy announced that all employees could 'move at their own discretion between state, private and

collective enterprises' (Davis, 1999, p.28). Therefore, people could change jobs between different enterprises, industries and regions. They could also start their own business or enterprises. Even in the state sector, political loyalty was becoming a less important factor in deciding an employee's advancement (Cao, 2001; Parish and Michelson, 1996; Walder, Li and Treiman, 2000). University degrees, professional training, work experience and other evidence which showed human capital became more important (So, 2003). It was clear that managers and professionals were better paid than the manual workers who were not well-educated, but had higher social status and prestige in the reform era. The accumulation of knowledge and pursuing higher education provided people with a lower social class background with more opportunities to achieve social mobility (Davis, 1992; Lin and Wen, 1988).

The rapid expansion of higher education in China affected the characteristics of the new middle class. Having a higher education background became one of the important characteristics of the new middle class in China. Lin noticed that before the mid-1990s, the middle class mainly constituted the old middle class, which referred to private entrepreneurs. They became rich by forming small-scale businesses and did not have high educational qualifications. However, from the late 1990s, higher education certification became essential for joining the middle class ranks (Lin, 2006). Education is the accelerator of the formation of the new middle class. The Chinese government has provided funding to develop higher education since the late 1990s. In 2001, the total number of colleges and universities was 1,225, while the number increased to 2,409 in 2011 (State Statistics Bureau, 2012). The Chinese government also started expanding university enrolment in 1999. In 1995, the total enrolment of higher education students was 29,060,000, the number increased to 156,180,000 in 2005 (State Statistics Bureau, 2006). However, the national university entrance examination (*gaokao*) is still highly competitive. In 2008, only 57% (5,990,000) of the candidates could be admitted to universities, only 10% were able to attend tier-one universities (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). In the 1980s, only 2-4% of the age cohort attended university, while in 2009, more than 23% were admitted (Lin and Sun,

2010). Higher education has been an important criterion for middle-class status. More and more women have opportunities to access higher education. In 1980, only 23.4% university students were female, while in 2005, female students accounted for 45.4% of total university students (State Statistics Bureau, 2006). However, hidden gender inequality in higher education still existed. The research conducted by Guo, Zeng and Ding (2007) shows that that in 2005, women accounted for 62.4% of students in humanities departments. In social science departments, the difference was not obvious. Women students accounted for 52.2%. In science departments, 57.48% of students were male. The most obvious difference existed in engineering departments, where 77.31% students were male. In general, in China, humanities departments are female-dominated. Engineering departments are male-dominated. There is no obvious gender difference in science and social science departments. The situation influenced well-educated women's position in the labour market.

Hoffman (2008) studied the job-search process of new well-educated graduates and argues that the abandonment of the job-assignment system and the widespread idea of career success helped to establish a new form of 'professional subject-hood' in the reform era (Hoffman, 2008, p.173). Professionals no longer needed to sacrifice their own benefits for the nation and their skills no longer belonged to the state. Professional skills became a form of capital, which was owned by individuals. The young graduates expressed a wish to find a job which would match their degree, so they could develop their work abilities and accumulate good work experience. Compared with good opportunities for professional development, the stability and salary of the jobs were regarded as less important for them. They were the decision-makers who were responsible for their skills, and no one else should be blamed if someone failed. The neoliberal rationalities of self-responsibility were embedded in these practices of making choices on a good job, a successful career, the life they pursued, and exploring who they really were. In the reform era, human capital and talents were important resources to develop the new economy. The market mechanism was regarded as the best way to distribute these resources.



Self-responsible autonomy and choice is also a part of the governing process. The regulation and management of subjects actually happens through freedom. This self-responsible professionalism has become another important character of the middle class in post-Mao China.

Chinese intellectuals and elites borrowed the concept 'class' and 'middle class' from the west. However, there is no single definition of social class in the west. For Marx, class is defined in terms of ownership or non-ownership of means of production. However, Marxist theory does not deal with how a 'middle class' can arise (Saunders, 2006). For Weber, class situation is identified with market situation. It is the market which distributes life chances according to the resources individuals bring to it. The resources not only include property or the means of production, but also include professional skills and other assets and services. Skills and educational credentials are the two basic elements of class formation (Weber, 1978). Middle class refers to workers with formal credentials. Bourdieu developed the notion of capital and included four forms of capitals in deciding individuals' social positions: economic, cultural, symbolic and social capital. Bourdieu's approach of studying class focuses on the role of cultural tastes and consumption pattern in identifying the middle classes (Bourdieu, 2013).

In the reform era of China, the party no longer commits to class struggle based on Marxism. New social blueprints have been created, such as 'harmonious society'. According to the new social blueprint, the majority of the population in China will reach middle-class living standards through a harmonious approach. The change of political discourse also influenced social class research among Chinese academics. They abandoned Maoist class analysis and Marxist principles which emphasises a class's relationship to processes of production and exchange, and its exploitation and domination relations with other classes. Instead, they replaced class analysis with 'stratum analysis' (Guo, 2009). A strata is different from other strata on the basis of income, occupation, education, consumption, and so on. In order to imply harmony,

the structural relationships, conflicts and tensions are simply ignored. Even though 'middle class' is already widely used in China, there is still no universally accepted definition as a sociological concept.

The most essential and frequently used index for defining middle class is income. Li (2003) does not use any universal household income criteria to determine the population as a whole. Instead, she defines the income middle class as the group whose income was above the average income of the local regions. Unlike Li, Li and Zhang (2009) define a middle-class family as a family which has a household income from 14,001 to 35,000 *renminbi* a year. Another index to judge if someone belongs to the middle class is consumption. The middle classes distinguish themselves from the working-class by having comparatively high consumption power and they also distinguish themselves from the new rich by having good taste in goods (Miao, 2016). Li (2003) used the ownership of durable consumer goods such as television, phone, computer and car as the criteria to determine the consumption middle class. Education and occupation are also crucial to most schemes. Middle class should at least go to technical colleges or have a bachelor degree and work as professional workers and managers, such as white-collar workers (Li and Zhang, 2009). Li (2003, 2010) also included low-wage white-collar into the middle class and named them as 'marginal middle class' because of their lower education background and less promising career development.

The best known and most theoretically elaborated scheme within Chinese class analyses is that of Lu Xueyi and his colleagues (Guo, 2009). Lu (2002) draws upon neo-Marxist measurements and uses four dimensions to classify social class, which include means of production, position in authority structure, possession of skills and expertise, and position within or outside the government system. Following this, Lu identifies ten social classes by occupation: administrative personnel of state and social affairs, managerial personnel, private entrepreneurs, professionals, office workers, self-employed individuals, service workers, industry workers, peasants and

unemployed and semi-unemployed. Among these, the middle class includes managerial personnel, private entrepreneurs, professionals and office workers. Administrative personnel of state and social affairs monopolise political resources, while the lower social class, which includes service workers, industry workers, peasants and unemployed and semi-unemployed, possess no means of production or do not have a stable occupation, so they can only use their labour at work. The middle class has some amount of cultural, political and economic capital. Managers and professionals are referred to as the 'new middle class'. Professionals are characterised by the possession of human capital, such as specialised skills and knowledge. According to a national survey by Lu, professionals accounted for around 5.1% of the population (Lu, 2010). Even though the definition of middle class varies, my research on well-educated migrant women borrows idea of 'professionals' and 'middle class' from Lu because I intend to explore how well-educated educational background and professional jobs distinguish this group of people from other groups, and how it is related with their identity construction.

Lu (2002) argues that the unique characteristics of the new middle class in China is they can be separated into two groups, which include the middle class who work within the government system, and the middle class who work outside the government system. The middle class who work within the government system refers to managers in state-owned enterprises, professionals in public organisations and staff members in government and party agencies and public organisations. The middle class who work outside the government system refers to managers in private and foreign-related enterprises, professionals in the non-state sector, self-employed people and white-collar office workers in non-state entities. The differentiation is brought about by the marketisation and privatisation processes of China's economy. The well-being and advancement of the new middle class in the government system is heavily affected by the state (Chen, 2013). They enjoy the redistribution of power, such as housing allocation, better childcare and pension insurance, and children's education. The advancement and welfare of middle class employed in the non-state

sector is more determined by the working of the market (Nee and Matthews, 1996). In a survey conducted in three cities in 2007-2008, 60% of the middle class worked in the state sector, while only 40% worked in the non-state sector (Chen, 2013).

When considering gender, one characteristic which distinguishes the middle class from the working class is its comparatively lower occupational gender segregation rate. Based on data collected by three census surveys in 1982, 1990 and 2000, Wu and Wu (2008) look at the change of occupational gender segregation rate in the non-agricultural labour market. The results show that the segregation rate of new middle-class (management and professional) occupations was lower, and also decreased rapidly compared with the rate of working-class (manual labour) occupations. The results of the surveys show that male-dominated, non-agricultural occupations (female employees account for less than 30% of total employees) decreased from 51% in 1982 to 39% in 2000. Gender-integrated non-agricultural occupations (female employees account for more than 30% and less than 70% of the total employees) increased to 51% in 2000. However, the percentage of female employees in the manufacturing industry decreased rapidly. The manufacturing industry is becoming more and more male-dominated. Women left manufacturing as more work opportunities became open for them in business and the service industry (Li and Xie, 2015). By contrast, most professional occupations were male-dominated in 1982. In 2000, most of them became gender-integrated occupations, for example, accountant, editor and TV programme maker. Li (2009) further discussed female employees' proportion of different kinds of middle-class work. She separates the middle class into three groups: managerial personnel, professionals and office workers. The percentage of female professionals continued to increase from 1982 to 2000. In 2000, the total number of female professionals exceeded male professionals (51.8%). However, women were still less likely to be promoted to managers, even though the number increased, female managers only accounted for 21.4% of the total number. In general, middle-class women had more equal job search and career development opportunities compared with working-class women.

The middle class has become one of the prominent social groups in society for its high income and high consumption, which reflects the changing status order of the PRC. China is no longer characterised by its concern about the welfare of a revolutionary working-class. Instead, in order to promote the marketisation of the economy, the party needs creators of wealth and consumers. In advertisements, the image of the middle class is primarily associated with consumption and a high quality lifestyle (Guo, 2009). Owning particular goods and a certain lifestyle, such as private cars and jewellery, and going to pubs, has become one of the most influential ways of identifying the middle class in China. In this sense, the social status of the working class has declined. It is through participating in consumption that the middle class is able to define their individual status and identities. The rise of the new middle is led by the reforms conducted by the state. It benefits from the reform. The middle class supports social stability and state policies (Li, 2011).

Zhang (2010) examines how urban middle-class professionals and entrepreneurs construct their class identity and pursue social distinction through consuming private commercialised houses in gated communities. In 2017, Chinese spending on housing constituted 22.4% of total consumer spending. It was the second largest amount of spending compared to other items (State Statistics Bureau, 2018). This consumption practice has profoundly changed the physical and social landscape of urban China. Working-class people who live on fixed incomes usually live in lower-income neighbourhoods, which are referred to as *gongxin xiaoqu*. The houses are poorly constructed and funded or directed by the state. Middle-class neighbourhoods are constructed by real-estate companies. They are clean and well protected with security guards and the environment is attractive. People who live in middle-class neighbourhoods have different social backgrounds. However, the one thing they have in common is their consuming power. The house prices in middle-class neighbourhoods are much higher than in working-class neighbourhoods. In addition, in order to validate their middle-class status and gain respect from their neighbours,

middle-class residents also need to engage in proper consumption, such as having a private car, luxury furniture, shopping for expensive food and drink, participating in decent entertainment activities and sending their children to expensive personal skill and lifestyle training courses. The emergence of commercial housing estates and gated communities provided 'the physical and social ground on which the making of the new middle classes becomes possible' (Zhang, 2010, p. 3).

Owning a high quality private commercialised house is especially linked to middle-class men's construction of masculinity. Real estate has become a bride price which should be given by the man to his future wife's family before marriage. A man's ability to purchase a house of his own proves his ability to be the main breadwinner in the family. It is also linked to his sense of respect and self-worth as 'a real man'. A man without a private house in the family experiences a sense of inadequacy. Even if he can live in his wife's house, he feels inferior within the household and still has the responsibility to buy a private house. 'Masculinity in post-socialist China is increasingly being defined by one's entrepreneurial ability and the power to provide and consume' (Zhang, 2010, p.185).

The fieldwork for Zhang's research was conducted in Yunnan Province; this idea of the house and masculinity is also shared by white-collar men working in Beijing. White-collar husbands also feel they have a responsibility to provide a suitable middle-class lifestyle for their family (Hird, 2009). Educationally and economically advanced young urban professionals also construct their middle-class identity by consumption. Hird (2009) argues that white-collar men in Beijing reshaped existing notions of Chinese masculinity. They started pursuing consumerist goals and paying more attention to their appearance and bodily hygiene. More money was spent on attractive clothing and brands. They also cared more about personal habits and having a sophisticated demeanour, such as eating and drinking healthily and being gentle to women. Embracing a 'hedonist' lifestyle of big city eating, drinking, bars, cafés and beauty salons was also part of their self-construction project. The metrosexual is a

product of consumer capitalism. Professional middle-class men separate themselves from less cultivated or poorly educated men. Hird (2009) argues that white-collar masculinity is not a single, stable and coherent identity, it covers a range of diverse subject positions that are incoherent, conflicting and non-unitary. Their quest for individual success not only refers to high social status which associated with the global professional class, but also engages with locally-embedded notions of masculinity.

This idea of dressing and professionalism is also shared by white-collar women. For them, wearing western brand dresses can make them look more professional in the workplace. Spending money on luxuries 'can keep their fighting spirit and encourage them to achieve personal success in the future' (Zheng, 2016, p.74). However, in the workplace, because women's gender is regarded as embedded in a sexual way, it is the woman's body which is monitored and controlled. White-collar women are required to wear feminine but not sexual clothes at work (Liu, 2017). The idea of self-achievement and individual success is in contrast to the communist collectivism in the pre-reform era. Middle-class women also spend money on cosmetic surgery, such as breast enlargement and eye lifts. The improvement of body image increases their confidence and makes them more valuable in the marriage market (Zhang, 2010; Zheng, 2016). In this sense, the body work middle-class men and women do through consumption makes them more identified with their class identity and it could also be used as a form of capital which helps to enhance their competitiveness in the workplace and marriage market.

By focusing on the consumption of men's lifestyle magazines in China, Song and Lee (2010) examine the construction of consumerist, middle-class, gendered identity. The magazines employed the discourse of 'good taste' to attract their consumers. Anyone who follows the lifestyle in the magazine can define themselves as successful people. By pursuing highbrow culture, urban white-collar young men seek their status by distinguishing themselves from low-income working-class and the 'explosive rich'

who are not well educated. Song and Lee further analysed the content of the magazines and found that the lifestyle they are pursuing is actually a superficial copying of an imagined western lifestyle. Westernization was connected with modernization. Erotic bodies are common to see in the magazines. By presenting attractive and sexual female bodies, women are objectified and their body is regarded as something which can be consumed by men. Beautiful women are best rewards and indicator of successful men's status. The magazines also present the sexual body of men. Reinforced by consumerism, middle-class men show the capital they owned by having a healthy and attractive body. Male's body become an object of desire. Women are consumers of these men's magazines and acquiring the features of what an attractive male's body should be like. Both men and women's bodies are objectified and commercialised in market economy.

Young professional women's changing attitudes towards marriage have drawn much attention. There is increasing research on *shengnü*, or 'leftover women' (Fincher, 2016; Ji, 2015; To, 2013). '*Shengnü*' is used to describe 'urban professional women who have high educational level, high salary and high intelligence' (To, 2013, p.1), but still remain unmarried in their late 20s. However, according to To's research, they did not intend to remain single or reject marriage. Instead, almost all the 'leftover women' still see marriage as 'something that has to be done', and the reason why they remained unmarried was because they had met obstacles. Because of their high educational background and career accomplishments, they were regarded as over qualified by men, who preferred women less accomplished than themselves. Another reason why women remained unmarried was because they rejected men who had 'harsh patriarchal demands' in the relationship, such as asking them to give up their career and conform to a stereotypical housewife role of staying at home. They felt disrespected and devalued in the relationship. It was patriarchal constraints which hindered leftover women's marriage in China. However, not all of them rejected the patriarchal rules of the marriage market. There were still middle-class women who wanted to look for more privileged and successful men to be their partner. There were



also middle-class women who had given up the main breadwinner type of man and chosen men who did not conform to the patriarchal ideology of being a high earner and had less conventional gender role perceptions. Middle-class women with a high salary and the ability to afford to live in a city did not have to rely on men economically. Their marriage was less for economic reason; they were looking for a more egalitarian relationship (To, 2013; Zheng, 2017) or they preferred to remain single and postpone their marriage plans. Middle-class women's diversified choices on marriage and intimate relationships distinguished them from working-class women, who were left no other choice but to marry for practical and cultural reasons.

### Migration and Women

Market reform not only opened up more job opportunities in non-state sectors, it also created a widening gap between more marketised and less marketised regions. The most rapid and profound reform happened in coastal provinces, for example, the coastal corridor from Beijing and Tianjin in the north to Shanghai and Guangdong in the south (Fan, 1995). In the Mao era, more money was invested in inland provinces on the development of agriculture and heavy industry. In the post-Mao era, policies favoured coastal regions, which are more attractive to foreign investment. In the early 1990s, foreign invested sectors which exported goods with a high labour input achieved initial success (Harvey, 2007). The state opened four special economic zones in southern coastal regions, with fourteen open coastal cities and open economic regions for foreign investment. Rapid urbanisation provided another way to absorb the surplus labour created by market reform in urban and rural areas. Cities funded their own construction projects by selling the rights to develop real estate, such as building first-class office spaces, shopping malls, town houses and commercial apartments. There was intense urban competition among new tier cities. In order to pursue employment opportunities, people migrated from inland areas to coastal open zones and from rural areas to urban areas.

One of the institutional factors which constrains the occupational attainment of migrants in cities is China's Household Registration (*hukou*) System. During the first Five-year Plan period (1953-1957), the state encouraged the development of state industrial enterprises in urban areas. Millions of peasants left their villages and went to urban area to look for jobs in state enterprises (Meisner, 1999). In order to control this massive migration, the registration system divided the population into local and non-local population and agricultural and non-agricultural population. So the state could send migrants back to their home town (State Council, 1986). In the reform era, in order to develop the urban service sector and meet the demands of the non-state market sector for more labour, the government allowed agricultural workers and non-local people to go to other cities for jobs and business opportunities (Wu and Xie, 2003). In 1984, the state allowed migrants to stay and work in cities if they obtained 'temporary residence permits' (Renmin Ribao, 1984). Subsequently, migrants could live in a city as long as they were able to support themselves (Liang, 2001). However, the *hukou* system still persists. Migrants who have agricultural *hukou* or non-local *hukou* are not permitted to work in the state sectors of local urban area, in addition, they cannot access the welfare provided by the local government, such as housing, education, medical care and old-age community services (Christiansen, 1990). For instance, migrants have to pay high 'endorsement fees' if they want to place their children in local public schools (Liang and Chen, 2004), which makes it impossible for migrant workers with low incomes. The people who have moved without a transfer of their *hukou* belong to the 'floating population' (*liudong renkou*) or 'unofficial migrant' (Jacka, 2014). By the end of 2005, the floating population of Beijing had reached 3,573 thousands, which constituted 23.2% of the permanent resident population, ranking third among the cities in China, only behind Guangzhou and Shanghai (as cited in Hou, 2010).

However, there is a two-track migration system operating in China, temporary migrants versus permanent migrants, or *non-hukou* migrants versus *hukou* migrants

(Fan, 2002). The separation results from the migrants' differences in human capital attributes, such as education. Permanent migrants refer to state-sponsored and other selected migrants who were given local urban *hukou* when they migrated. They have the legitimacy and right to live and work in the city. Most of them are skilled, well-educated migrants, such as professionals. Permanent migrants are within the state plan. Their jobs are often assigned by the state, highly paid and with good benefits. Maybe because they are given priority in the labour market, their experiences are not given attention by the public or academic researchers. Most migrant research in China is about 'floating people' and 'migrant workers' who are disadvantaged in the labour market, not well-educated and do not have the chance to receive *hukou* by working in an urban area. Fan (2002) used qualitative accounts from a 1995 village-level survey in Sichuan and Anhui and quantitative data from a survey conducted in Guangzhou in 1998 and researched the differences in temporary migrants and permanent migrants in Guangzhou. She found that permanent migrants are more highly educated and from urban backgrounds. By contrast, temporary migrants are relatively less highly educated and from rural areas. Permanent migrants rely more on formal resources when looking for a job, such as advertisements and work unit recruitments and assignments. The temporary migrants collect job information using informal sources, such as an introduction from a relative. More than half of permanent migrants work for state-owned enterprises, for them the stability of the work is important. The majority of temporary migrants are in new-economy sectors, such as foreign enterprises and private enterprises, and their job turnover rate is much higher. According to policy, attending college and joining the army are the two main ways for people to obtain local urban *hukou* (Huang, 2001). Education is the most influential factor when explaining the differences between permanent migrants and temporary migrants. The *hukou* system functions as a sorting mechanism of the state (Fan, 2002).

Young people's motivation for migration reflects their internalisation of a discourse which regards cities or even mega cities as superior and more modern and civilised

(Gaetano, 2015; Yan, 2003; Yan, 2009). Gaetano (2015) researched female migrant peasant workers in Beijing from 1998 to 2000. For the rural young people, traditional beliefs and practices are 'backward' (Gaetano, 2015). Yan did his fieldwork in Anhui province and Beijing from 1998 to 2000 and the peasants described their daily life in their villages as 'meaningless' and 'boring' (Yan, 2003). The popular discourse of enlightenment in the 1980s and early 1990s constructed the countryside as a wasteland of tradition, while by contrast, the metropolitan and coastal cities were constructed as special portals for overseas connection and modernity (Yan, 2003). The devaluation of rural identity reflects a form of ideological inequality between remote rural areas and coastal urban areas. Yan argues that the post-Mao development violated the countryside and robbed it of the ability to provide its young people with a meaningful identity. Therefore, they had to migrate to pursue a more modern subjectivity.

New and more comfortable houses are built by using migrant money in villages. Village enterprises which apply new technology and skills learnt from cities are established by returned migrants. Rural young people are enthusiastic about the Hong Kong and foreign pop songs which they hear on newly purchased VCD machines or televisions. They are also envious of returned migrants because they can buy more fashionable clothes and shoes in cities. This rural and urban inequality is attributed to a lack of education and human or cultural capital by the villages. The rise of the knowledge economy has placed a premium on education and human capital, which further exacerbated the devaluation of rural culture (Gaetano, 2015). Rural people are seen as uncivilised, ignorant and lacking culture (*suzhi*). Therefore, they strongly need to receive technical training in order to have the ability to improve their social status. The pursuit of a more civilised self, more fashionable consumption and higher social status motivates young people to migrate to cities and even metropolises.

Based on the individualization theory of Giddens, Bauman, and Beck and Beck-Gernseim, Yan (2003) argued that the increased geographic mobility in reform

era promoted the individualization of Chinese society. Yan draws on three main aspects of individualization. The first aspect is what Giddens called 'detraditionalization' (Giddens, 1991) or what Beck called 'disembedding' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), which means individuals no longer work for the sake of preserving cultural traditions of family, kinship, community or social class, instead, they use these traditions and work for their own lives. The second aspect is 'compulsive and obligatory self-determination' (Bauman, 2000) or individual's 'reflective self' (Giddens, 1991), which means after individuals are free from the constraints of traditions, they are more influenced by modern institutions, such as education system, labour market and state regulations in individualized society. Thirdly, because of individuals' dependence on modern institutions, they must construct their own life through the conformity to guidelines and regulations (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). In this sense, according to the individualization theory, there is no genuine individuality in modern society. Yan argues that the individualization process in China is state-managed and without cultural democracy, a welfare state regime or classic individualism. The market force pulled individuals to leave their family, community or work unit to enter the unknown market competition. They are responsible for their own well-being and self-development. The young couple tend to live separately from their parents, which altered the key element of the traditional Chinese family institution. The Chinese individuals are living in an environment where 'a great emphasis on individuality and self-reliance has been created by the market economy and global capitalism in the context of the political authoritarianism of the party-state' (Yan, 2003, p 290). However, unlike the western society in which individualization process relies on the support of the welfare state, such as the system of education, medical care, and employment benefits, the individualization process in China has little institutional protection. Even though all individuals seek new opportunities for self-expression and development, compared with working class labourers, middle class professionals are granted more privileges for self-expression and development. Yan (2003) argues that the state managed to control individual development by maintaining their autonomous identity.

Since the mid-1990s, there have been more and more studies exploring the relationship between population movement and gender. The patriarchal culture, *hukou* system and low educational background imposes constraints on the occupational attainment of female migrant workers in cities. Before entering the job market, compared with male workers, female workers are more disadvantaged because of the lack of education. Because women will eventually marry and become another families' labour, the parents of women's natal families are not willing to invest in the education of girls. According to the One-Percent Population Survey in 1995, 23.2% of the female population who were six or older had never been to school, while the number was only 8.5% for their male counterparts (State Statistical Bureau, 1997). Migration motivation is gendered. In a survey which was conducted in 1996 in four cities in China, researchers found that more male migrant workers than female migrant workers regarded 'higher income' as a motivation for migration, whereas more female workers chose other options, such as 'to get life experiences' (Knight, Song and Jia, 1999). The urban labour market is highly segmented by gender because of the traditional gender division of labour and gender stereotypes (Fan, 2003). Both male and female migrant workers are highly represented in industrial sectors. Male migrants are more concentrated in physically demanding manual occupations, such as masons and plasterers, loaders and porters, carpenters and miners. Female workers are more concentrated in factories and work on labour-intensive and assembly-line type jobs, such as garment workers, seamstresses and knitters. Among services and commercial occupations, the gender proportions are more balanced. However, women are highly represented in domestic work and hotel service.

Because of migrant women's concentration in these particular occupations, the term '*dagongmei*' was used to describe this group of young, poor, uneducated peasant women who migrate from poor inland provinces to coastal open areas for low-skilled, labour-intensive, low-paid jobs (Fan, 1999). Because of the *hukou* policy, peasants have to eventually return to their village. Most migrant women would return to their

village when they reach 'marriage age'. The macro-level surveys which were done in the 1990s shows that the mobility rate of rural women dropped sharply in their late 20s and early 30s. Employers were not willing to hire married women because they had family responsibilities and asked for more time off (Lee, 1995). Another reason why employers targeted young, single migrant women is because young people have better physical strength, which is needed for labour in the factory or in the service industry (Tam, 2000; Gaetano, 2015). For rural men, age and marriage do not limit them, as long as they are healthy physically. Fan (2003) argues that even though migrant work can empower women, the influence is short-lived. It reinforced the traditional patriarchal ideology emphasizing men's 'outside' role and women's 'inside' role.

One of the methods in which these young migrant workers pursue a more modern identity and higher social status is acquiring new skills and qualifications through further education. Cities like Beijing offer migrant workers large amounts of education opportunities which could not be found in rural areas, such as private courses on vocational skills or pursuing a formal degree in college (Gaetano, 2015). After migrant workers have worked for several years or acquired new skills through further education, they aspire to move out of manual labour to supervisory positions, semi-skilled occupations or other more prestigious and less labour-demanding occupations. Even though these jobs are paid no more than menial work, their social status is higher because of the skills and knowledge required for the work.

However, Fan, Sun and Zheng's research which was conducted in Beijing in 2008 shows that the sole-migrant model, where married men migrate while their wife stays in the village to take care of the children, has changed (Fan, Sun and Zheng, 2011). Since the 1990s, more and more migrants have taken their spouse to work with them in the cities and their children are left behind. When their children are too young to go to school, the couple often take their children with them. When their children need to go to school, they will be sent back to the villages. They can also take advantage of

village resources. Their parents are willing to provide some help in taking care of their children (Fan and Wang, 2008). Research on migrant women in Beijing shows that more job opportunities are open for rural married women, such as domestic workers, which enables married women to participate in the migration (Jacka, 2014). This is a strategy for the migrant family to maximise their income from migrant work (Fan, Sun and Zheng, 2011). According to a survey in Anhui and Sichuan in 2000, building a new house and paying for children's education are two major expenses for migrants (Lou, Connelly, Zheng and Robert, 2004). Having a new house is a primary symbol of wealth and status in the village. They have to make money to build a house of their own for their family. Even though their children go to state school in the village, they still have to pay school fees. They have to pay higher school fees if they want to send their children to better schools in their village or even in a town. The education of their children was still regarded as important for rural mothers because the better the education the children could get, the brighter their future would be (Lou, Connelly, Zheng and Robert, 2004; Gaetano, 2015). The push factor of economic pressure and pull factor of more work opportunities in urban areas motivated married rural women to continue to work in cities. In the 2006 Beijing floating people survey, 59% migrated with their families, whilst only 41% were solo migrants (as cited in Hou, 2010).

Marriage is still essential for migrant women, because it is a way for them to have a house and viable economic future. Beynon interviewed young, unmarried rural women working in Chengdu. The research shows that adult daughters are expected to marry out eventually and become the daughter-in-law in her husband's family. Therefore, marriage implies a new identity as a member of a new family. Her natal family's home is only her temporary home. Marriage is 'more than finding a partner; it is securing a future place' (Beynon, 2004, p.136). Because migrant workers lack knowledge and formal education, they have to work in low-paid and low-status jobs, which prevents them from achieving real economic independence in urban areas. Rural women's expected roles of looking after parents-in-law, supporting their



husbands and bringing up children are all related to their identity as married women (Jacka, 2014). Marriage is essential for these migrant women practically and symbolically.

Even so, studies show that migration provided these women more options than being a conventional wife and mother in a village (Beynon, 2004; Davin, 1996; Gaetano, 2015; Jacka, 2014). Rural women avoid early marriage and motherhood by migrating for work. They refused to marry early because they would lose their freedom and their world would narrow down to the domestic sphere, which was boring for them (Beynon, 2004). New brides were anxious about the uncertain future after marriage because they might find themselves unable to get along with their in-laws (Gaetano, 2015). The relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is tricky in China. Therefore, migration can open their eyes and make new changes to their life.

Migration is also a method for young, rural, engaged women to avoid or terminate an unwanted engagement. Through earning their own salaries, young women can be self-sufficient and save for their own dowry or provide an income for their natal family, which proves they are not 'useless adult daughters' (Beynon, 2004, Gaetano, 2015). Being a migrant worker also provides these rural young women a new identity through work, other than their expected roles in the domestic sphere. Even though it does not help them to gain real economic status and economic value, it helps to promote their status in the domestic sphere.

Migration raises women's expectation for an ideal spouse and they have no longer have an interest in marrying a peasant who does not have non-agricultural work experience (Beynon, 2004). For women, marriage is an important step in achieving economic and social mobility. Therefore, marrying an urban man is preferable for migrant women. However, because of their low social and economic status, no 'good' urban male is likely to marry a rural woman. For instance, urban men who are disabled, unemployed, divorced or with a single parent family background are more likely to accept a wife from a rural area (Fan and Huang, 1998; Tan and Short, 2004).

Rural women are discriminated against by urban families. Urban men use their higher social status to exert power in the relationship with rural migrant women (Beynon, 2004). Some rural migrant women became rich urban men's mistresses for a better life (Lang and Smart, 2002). Because of the great economic gap between rural men and urban businessmen, migrant women can have a better life by being a rich businessman's mistress than by marrying and giving birth to children for the peasants in villages. They can be provided with money for personal use and a rented apartment in cities. It may also provide migrant women with better opportunities for employment and even career mobility into white collar jobs. However, they have to bear the misery caused by the power inequality in the relationship, such as being tolerant of the urban men's bad temper (Lang and Smart, 2002). 'Marrying up' can bring better material security for rural migrant women. However, it is not always a good choice when considering the power inequality in the relationship.

Another choice for migrant women is dating other migrant workers. They prefer someone who shares similar migrant work experience and has ambitions for upward social and economic mobility (Gaetano, 2015). After marriage, the migrant couple can work in the city together for a better material life together. As both husband and wife are working, the traditional gender norms are changing. With the help of parents-in-law in raising children, married migrant women's burden of housework is much less. In return, they give their in-laws gifts of goods and money and help with housework or farm work when they visit. The work they have affords them higher status with the parents-in-law's family. When a migrant women's husband is unemployed temporarily for further education, they can take the responsibility for earning money for the family and be the primary breadwinner (Gaetano, 2015). In contrast to migrant women who promote their autonomy and power in marriage, migrant men make masculine compromise by 'making concessions on marital power and domestic division of labour, and by redefining filial piety and fatherhood' (Choi and Peng, 2016, p.152). Migrant married couples also negotiate on doing domestic work at home. Choi and Peng conducted research in Guangdong province from 2012

to 2015 on migration and changing masculinity among migrant peasant workers. The study shows that 44% of married migrant men were active participants in housework (Choi and Peng, 2016). They share the housework with their wife by doing heavy work or work which is tricky, which becomes the new way to show their masculinity. With this flexible household and creative division of labour, the migrant family can maximise their economic income and provide their children better education and living conditions. The migrant working class men did not rationalize their choices with the principle of gender equality. They used conventional gender markers attached to manhood to justify themselves. They add emotional dimension and emotional care to the traditional definition of fatherhood, such as men's responsibility of maintaining family harmony. Choi and Peng's concept of masculine compromise provides a theoretical framework to explain how migration can transform the patriarchal Chinese family. Lin (2014) argues that unlike middle-class men and women who display their distinguished and high quality consumer-oriented lifestyle, working-class migrants work hard in order to fulfil relational gender roles in the family. They are limited by a comparatively low income and knowledge and do not intend to achieve high social status by making money through working, instead, they are more worried about the welfare of their family members.

## **Summary**

In the reform era, because of the metropolitan and coastal cities' connection with the overseas market and western culture, they were constructed as superior, and more modern and civilised compared to inland cities and rural areas (Gaetano, 2015; Yan, 2003; Yan, 2009). This regional inequality is attributed to a lack of education and human capital (Gaetano, 2015). Young people who migrate to metropolitan and coastal cities not only pursue better job opportunities, they also pursue a more civilised self and higher social status. Living separately from their parents in mega

cities altered the key element of traditional Chinese family institution. They live in an environment where individuality and self-reliance have been created by market economy and global capitalism (Yan, 2003). However, the individualization is under the political authoritarianism of the party-state, such as through the sorting mechanism of *hukou* system (Fan, 2002).

The past research on rural migrants shows that migration empowered peasant women and promoted their status in the domestic sphere. They have more equal gender division of labour in intimate relationship by sharing domestic work with this husband, and they have more power to decide if they want to stay or leave a relationship, such as avoiding early marriage and motherhood and rejecting marriage they do not want (Beynon, 2004; Choi and Peng, 2016; Davin, 1996; Gaetano, 2015; Jacka, 2014). For migrant peasant men, the research shows that they made masculine compromise by helping their wife to do housework and provide more emotional support for their children (Choi and Peng, 2016). Migration transforms the patriarchal Chinese family structure among working class migrant.

Little research has been done on well-educated migrant women's experiences. Well-educated migrant women are different from working-class migrant women in many aspects. Firstly, well-educated migrant women are more likely to receive a local *hukou* and become permanent migrants because of their work and education background. Therefore, they have the chance to start a family in the city they work in. Secondly, the reason why working class women work hard in the cities is to fulfil their relational gender roles in the family. They are more worried about the welfare of family members. For professional women, personal career success is more likely to be achieved because of their well-educated background and high professional skills. Achieving personal success is an important aspect of their 'professional subject-hood' (Hoffman, 2008). Thirdly, because working-class migrant women have to work in low-paid and low-status jobs, they cannot achieve real economic independence in the urban era (Beynon, 2004; Jacka, 2014). Marriage is essential for these migrant women

practically and symbolically. For the professional women who have the ability to be economically independent, marriage is not essential. More research should be done on how migration experience transforms well-educated migrant women's gender ideals.

## CHAPTER TWO RESEARCHING THE LIVES OF YOUNG

### WELL-EDUCATED MIGRANT WOMEN IN BEIJING: Methodological Issues

In this chapter, I reflect on the research method I used in this study. In order to explore young well-educated women's experience of living in Beijing as new migrants, I conducted 29 face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews with women between ages of 23 and 35, in the summer of 2016. In the summer of 2017, I went back to Beijing and did 10 follow-up interviews. I adopt a feminist standpoint because my research focus is on the diverse experiences of professional women in the rapidly changing social context of China. Every woman's unique experience and idea is respected and valued. The core of feminist ideas is 'there is no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge... the experience of all human beings is valid and must not be excluded from our understanding' (Spender, 1985, p.5). Paying attention to every woman's distinct experience contributes to a more complete understanding of the society, and more accurate and complex knowledge. In this sense, feminist research methods are appropriate in this research.

Semi-structured interviews are viewed as being compatible with feminist research because they help to 'actively involve the respondents in construction of data about their own life experiences' (Graham, 1984, p.112). Unlike broad surveys and questionnaires, which provide surface patterns, qualitative interviews emphasise the 'depth, nuance, complexity and roundedness' of the data (Mason, 2002, p.65). It is helpful for exploring people's knowledge, experience and interpretations, which is important for this research, to talk interactively with people. Knowledge is situational, doing qualitative

interviewing provides the maximum opportunity for understanding the context of knowledge by asking people to talk about specific experiences. In an interview, participants' emotions and body language can also be seen, which can provide important information for the research. Moreover, participants can be given more freedom when interacting with the researcher in the interviews, so their perspectives can be represented more fairly and fully.

Feminist researchers challenge the idea that the identity or position of the researcher is irrelevant to the result of the research (Letherby, 2003). Harding (1991, 1993) argues that because researchers hide their values or assumption in their research, the 'traditional notions of objectivity' are actually very 'weak' (as cited in Letherby, 2003, p. 45). In this sense, in order to achieve 'strong' objectivity, I reflect the influence of my own identity and position on the research process. The chapter is divided into three areas. I start by discussing the preparation work I did for the fieldwork, which includes obtaining approval from the University Ethics Committee, designing interview questions and looking for potential participants. Secondly, I talk about how I conducted my fieldwork. I carefully discuss how I recruited my participants while I was in Beijing and how I sampled participants while I was in the field. I reflect on how my relationship with participants and status as 'insider' or 'outsider' influenced my interaction with participants. I also talk about how I asked difficult questions, did emotional work, and practiced a participatory approach in the interviews. Thirdly, I describe the process after the fieldwork, which includes data transcribing, translating, coding and final writing up issues.

### **Before Entering the Field**

I did the fieldwork for my research one year after I started the PhD. In the first

year, I changed my research focus from the well-educated women's feminist movement to women's gender experience. Originally, I wanted to explore young well-educated women's attitudes to Western feminist ideas and feminist activists in China. Focusing on the feminist movement in Beijing was for revealing women's attitudes to Western feminism. However, after I read more studies on gender in the reform era of China, I found that some young women in China still held conventional ideas or ideologies on gender relations. My focus on women's participation in the feminist movement might narrow my research and exclude young well-educated women who had a negative attitude or even those who had never heard about the feminist movement. Accordingly, I shifted the research focus to young, well-educated women's gender experiences. Furthermore, based on my own experience and the reading I did on migrant workers in Beijing, well-educated migrant women's experience might be different from that of local women in Beijing. I finally focused on researching how migration impacts the gender experience of young, well-educated women in Beijing.

The new research question not only covers my original research interests, it also allows discussion of the broader social, cultural and economic context of young women's attitudes to gender relations and gender inequalities in reform era China. I also considered interviewing men, such as participants' husbands, colleagues and male family members. However, I decided to only interview women, due to practical considerations. Research on the masculinity of middle-class men working in Beijing already existed, therefore I could discuss the main arguments of it in my thesis. Moreover, I could explore the gender relations from the women's description of their subjective feelings. Finally, I decided to research how migration impacts well-educated women's gender ideas through investigating what their migrant motivation is, if their hopes and expectation matches with their migration experiences, what constrains and opportunities they met in Beijing, and what factors affected their career, sexual and marriage relationships. After the research objective was settled, I began to prepare for the



fieldwork three months before I started. In those three months, I obtained approval from the Ethics Committee, made an interview guide, looked for potential participants by posting a recruitment article online, contacted potential participants and made my first round recruitment.

### Interview Guide

I designed an interview guide which included the themes and main questions I wanted to discuss with the participants before the start of the fieldwork. All questions were designed to be open-ended and allow flexibility to change while maintaining the overall structure during the interviews. Asking open-ended questions in an interview can help to maximise discovery and description and make full use of the differences between participants (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992). The guide was designed on the basis of my own experience of living and working in Beijing, and the background reading I did on Chinese women's changing position in the reform era, China's internal migration and the new rising middle class. I made a list of the themes, which covered the three main aspects of my participants' migrant experience: career and work experience, love and marriage life, and daily consumption and weekend leisure activities (see Table 1). Under each theme, there were some main questions. I also planned to use photographs to promote interview responses, so I planned to ask participants to choose one photograph they had taken of 'the most meaningful place for them in Beijing'. In the interview, I planned to ask them what this photograph was about and why they had chosen it.

I also thought about the internal logic of the questions. A reasonable connection between the questions asked should make it easier for the interviewer to follow without having a question list on hand, and also make it easier for interviewees to make sense of the interviews (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). I planned to start the

interview by asking participants to tell me about their occupation and daily work, because they spent most of their time at work each day, so it would be a good start for them to have something to say about themselves. The main questions on each theme followed a chronological order. In that way I could recall the memory of their past work experience and the first job they had in Beijing. I would also ask them about future career plans. Love and marriage was the next theme to explore. This is a more private conversation topic and normally would only be shared with friends. Once we were familiar with each other, it was time to start discussing more sensitive topics. The main questions of this theme would also be asked in sequence, according to their sensitivity level. The less sensitive questions, such as their marital status, could be asked before the more sensitive questions, such as contraceptive methods. According to the background reading I had done, people might be emotional when talking about their ‘private love stories’. In order to make the interview more relaxed, it would conclude with consumption and weekend leisure activities as the last theme of the interview.

**Table 1: Interview guide**

| Themes                     | Topic of Main Questions   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Career and Work Experience | Their occupation and daily work<br>Past work experiences and the first job they had in Beijing<br>Their work relationships<br>Gender difference at their workplace and industry<br>Future career development plans  |
| Love and Marriage Life     | Their boyfriend<br>Their love stories<br>Their experience of meeting someone introduced by their friends or parents with the intention of marriage<br>The relationship between sex and relationship<br>The relationship between being in relationship with a man and marrying him |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Daily Consumption and Weekend Leisure Activities  | <p>Their experience of renting or buying a house in Beijing</p> <p>Their weekend leisure activities</p> <p>The person they usually socialise with at the weekend</p> <p>The money and time spent on leisure activities</p>  |
| Migration Motivation (questions in this theme may have been covered previously, if not, this is a separate theme) | <p>Their decision to migrate to Beijing</p> <p>Other possible choices apart from Beijing</p> <p>Talking about the life of their childhood friends who stay in their hometown</p> <p>Their future plan in Beijing</p>  |
| Ending  | <p>Anything else they want to tell about their life in Beijing</p> <p>Something to ask me about this research project</p> <p>Their expectation of this research project</p> <p>What do they want to know from it</p> <p>Their decision of participating in it</p> |

### The First Round Recruitment

The main recruitment method used in this research is Internet recruitment. The Internet has become a useful option for research recruitment. In 2017, 731 million people had access to the Internet in China, which accounts for 53.2% of the population (iFeng, 2017). The main reason people cannot access the Internet is because of a low educational background and lack of computer skills. However, this research is about the well-educated population in urban areas, so the population who cannot access the Internet are not the main target group of my fieldwork. I began to look for potential participants for my research two months before the start of the summer fieldwork. Because I was still in York when I started to recruit, the Internet was the best way for me to contact women who were living and working in Beijing. I started the recruitment process by posting an open letter introducing myself and my project online. My online social network helped me to spread this article. Twenty-one out of twenty-nine

participants were recruited in this way.

The reason I introduced myself was that a qualitative interview is a form of interaction between interviewer and interviewee, which requires participation from both sides in the production of data. The position of the researcher in the process of interviewing is highly influential on the relation between interviewer and interviewees, as well as the reaction of the interviewees (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992). The influence starts from when I began to release information on recruiting interviewees online. I reflected on how I presented myself as a researcher in the recruitment article and how the participants would react to it.

Hi, I am Sally, a PhD student in Sociology at a university in the UK. I am recruiting participants for my social investigation project 'The Lifestyle of Professional Migrant Women in Beijing'.

The investigation plan is based on my two years' experience of living and working in Beijing as a new migrant. I worked as an editor in a publication company and lived in an apartment in Anzhen (a district in Beijing). It only took me half an hour by bus to go to Gulou (a district in Beijing, in the centre of the city). In those two years, I met many girls who had come to work in Beijing, just like me, and we became very good friends. We had lots of interesting and creative thoughts on what kind of life we wanted to live.

Just like meeting a new friend, we can talk about our jobs, families, friends, the clothes and skin care products we like or some events we recently went to. If you are interested in my story, I can share my experience of studying and working in the UK with you, no matter whether it is about my Masters or PhD application, or my non-fiction writing skills.

There were three short paragraphs which introduced 'who I am' to people reading the article. In the first paragraph, I portrayed myself as a researcher who was equipped with professional skills and knowledge of related fields. By

introducing myself in this way, I increased my credibility. In the second paragraph, I provided some information about my experience in Beijing. This follows the feminist research tradition that strove for intimacy and included self-disclosure and believing the interviewees (Oakley, 1981). Here I mentioned the names of several districts of Beijing, which are very familiar to potential participants, Anzhen and Gulou. These locations are very likely to raise a common identity among Beijing residents. By doing this, I was telling my potential participants that 'I already know a lot about your experiences, I understand how you feel and we could become friends if we meet'. I downplayed my professional status and portrayed myself as one of the migrant women, which helped to build trust between interviewer and interviewees (Bart, 1987). Evans (1979) describes this position of the interviewer as 'knowledgeable stranger' who falls between 'interviewer as friend', which enables interviewees to be comfortable to talk (Segura, 1989), and 'interviewer as stranger', which enables interviewees to share some sensitive experiences and feelings (Zimmerman, 1977). In the third paragraph, I introduced 'how the interview will be conducted'. I defined myself as a 'learner' rather than a 'researcher'.

Through presenting myself as a professional researcher, knowledgeable stranger, and humble learner, I made a balance between staying professional and being friendly and created a trusting relationship with potential participants. For academic purposes, participants would be more willing to contact me and share their experience with me if they knew I was someone they could trust (Wajcman, 1983). For ethical purpose, it will avoid interviewees being over-exploited (Webb, 1984), because I intend to regard the interview as an exchange of information and I would love to share my own experience and give my advice if needed, for example, how to apply for a PhD at a university in the UK. This also helped me to have greater understanding of their problems and needs, which was also part of the research. Next, I continued to talk about who was expected to participate in the project.

So, if you are a girl who is from somewhere outside Beijing, no matter where your hometown is, no matter how long you have been living in Beijing, and it does not matter if you have a boyfriend or not, please contact me directly before the end of August if you are interested in the project. All interviews will be done face-to-face in Beijing. My Wechat Number is: wsl2193072 (Sally).

I was not very sure how many people would contact with me after reading this, so I set no clear criteria in the recruitment article, all migrant women in Beijing were welcome to apply. I did mention the diversity of home place, duration of living in Beijing and marital status was preferred. Usually when someone contacted me on Wechat, I would ask them about their occupation and how long they had been living in Beijing. I recorded the information of the applicants' name, contact information, occupation and duration of living in Beijing and did not do any selection. I did not know how those characteristics might diversify the migrant experiences of my participants. Finally, more than 30 people replied.

I posted my open letter on two Internet sites, Wechat and Douban. Internet recruitment has become a useful method for academic research. Even though some researchers report a low response rate using Internet recruitment, more recent studies report using the Internet received a higher response rate compared to using traditional recruitment methods (Hamilton and Bowers, 2006). Every Internet site has its own focus, so it has become the community of people with particular interests or characteristics (Sharf, 1997). The Internet offers researchers a means of recruiting participants with these particular characteristics (Mann and Stewart, 2000). However, that means the researcher must know the Internet sites which their target group often uses, in order to place an announcement about the research (Hine, 2004; Illingworth, 2001). Because I used to live and work in Beijing and my work included online marketing, I was familiar with the Internet use habits of Beijing young people. Moreover, most of

the popular websites in China publish reports on their users online every year. It was not difficult to select appropriate Internet sites for this study.

The main online platform I used is Wechat. Wechat is one of the largest instant messaging apps by monthly active users in China. I provided my Wechat contact information in the recruitment article. So no matter where the potential applicants saw my recruitment article, they could add me on Wechat if they were interested in the project. Apart from this instant messaging function, another function of Wechat which helped me to recruit is Moments. Moments supports users posting articles and sharing with Wechat friends. User privacy is extremely important for Moments, only friends from the registered user's contact list can view it. This function strengthens the relationship of its users, they identify each other as 'friends', even though they may never meet each other face-to-face. I posted my article in my Moments. Some of my friends forwarded my article in their Moments. Eventually, 538 users viewed this article and 16 of them became my interviewees. Only 6 of them were in my contact list, the rest were friends of my friends. There are very weak ties between my applicants and me. My applicants added me on Wechat and asked me, 'Do you know this person, she is my colleague. I saw your article from her Moment.' Or 'My friend sent me this, do you also know my friend?' But I didn't know most of these voluntary mediators. Due to this weak friendship tie, they were more willing to trust me and apply to participate in my project. However, this friendship tie also narrows down the applicants to migrant women who share similar characteristics with me, such as a similar age, educational background, occupation and interests, which are the reasons why we became friends initially.

The second online platform I used is Douban. Douban is a Chinese social networking service website which provides registered and unregistered users with information on films, music, local entertainment events, and other lifestyle and cultural products. The typical users of Douban have several characteristics.

They are from the mega cities of China, Beijing and Shanghai, aged between 20 and 29, and have a bachelor degree or above (Zhihu, 2016). The typical users of Douban fit with the recruitment target group of my project. I posted my recruitment article in several online networking groups based in Beijing. About 10 people contacted with me because they saw my open letter on Douban. Five participants finally participated in the project. However, Douban attracts its users by providing information on urban lifestyle and cultural products, so I was less likely to access migrant women who are not interested in this kind of information, by using this platform.

I evaluated how this recruitment method worked from the feedback given by my participants in the interviews. I asked my participants ‘why did you decide to participate in this interview?’ Most participants told me they were interested in the research question or they could help me to know more about group I was interested in. However, some participated for other reasons. Mifei said, ‘I am not really interested in your results or how your research will make changes to my life. I am just interested in discussing some serious issues with strangers. That is all. And, I wanted to know the person who is organising the project, and I wondered why she did this.’ Some of the participants were interested in my educational background and wanted to know how I applied for a PhD at a foreign university, some were interested in my research methods and wanted to learn how to collect data through doing qualitative interviews, some just came to have a chat and make friends with me. These participants were not motivated by their interest in the research topic. They were more interested in the project itself and my attitude of willingness to share my own experience and make friends with them. They are different from participants who are driven by their interest in the research question.

Ethical Issues



I obtained approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of York before I went to the field. I presented all the information my participants needed to know about the research in the information sheet. My participants should also know how I would deal with data from the consent form. I showed the information sheet and consent form to my participants before they took part in the interviews. There is tension between ‘the aim of research to make generalisations for the good of others, and the rights of participants to maintain privacy’ (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, 2001, p.93). In this sense, the researcher should consider ethical issues when making the research plan in order to anticipate any potential harm. Capron (1989) says that there are three ethical principles which any researcher should follow, autonomy, beneficence and justice.

One of the important issues about the ethics of this research is anonymity. In the recruitment sheet I posted online, I told my potential participants that in the research process, their real name would not be used nor any other personal information, such as their work address or home address. Even though they told me in the interview, I would disguise their personal information in the final thesis in order to protect their privacy. The only personal information that would be collected in my research was their contact information, such as their email address and telephone number. Their contact information was placed fully separately from my fieldnotes and interview data. The protection of participants’ identities follows the ethical principle of beneficence, which means the researcher should do good for others and prevent harm. The use of pseudonyms is not useful when the group being researched is small, but it works in this project because Beijing is a metropolis, my participants were working in different companies and most of them did not know each other before the interview. It is unlikely that they can identify who they are. Furthermore, because most of my participants were strangers to me, the safety of their personal information is also the issue they cared most about the project. They asked me if

their personal information would be collected the first time they contacted me. Only after I reconfirmed to them the protection of their identities in the project, were they willing to accept my interview offer. Declaring the research was anonymous helped to build a trust relationship between the researcher and participants.

The second issue I reflected on most during the fieldwork was any emotional distress that might affect the participants or researcher. I read other researchers' reflections on their qualitative fieldwork, in which they discuss the emotional work they did to deal with women participants' emotions generated in the interview (Denzin, 1984; Steinberg and Figart, 1999). Some participants might cry or feel depressed when discussing private or sensitive experiences which they usually hide in their daily life. My research partly concerns couple relationships, so it might include questions like how to deal with the pressure from parents to marry or their attitudes towards premarital intercourse. I was ready to stop the interview and tape immediately if my participants felt very uncomfortable about the topic and did not wish to continue. In this way I would not cause any emotional distress or physical harm to the participants. However, I did not think about my own emotional distress in the interview. I only talked about how I would ensure my safety in the field, but I did not expect that as a researcher, I would be emotionally stressed, even finding it difficult to fall asleep at night because of that day's interview. The researcher should consider their own emotional vulnerability in the field as an ethical issue before the start of the fieldwork too.

I showed the information sheet and consent form to my participants when we met face-to-face before the interview started. Some of them asked me to explain more about their right to withdraw from the study up to six months after the completion of the interview. I told them I would not use their story if they decided to withdraw from the project, even after the interview. This follows the

principle of autonomy, which means the participants have the right to the information in the study and to withdraw from the study. My interviewees were all well-educated young women with professional jobs in Beijing. Maybe because they very often dealt with business contracts at work, most participants read them through carefully before they signed. After they had fully understood the meaning of each term, all participants signed the information sheet and consent form in Chinese.

### **In the Field**

I went back to China in June, 2016. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face in Beijing. Once the participants decided when they wanted to do the interview, I let them choose where they wanted to meet. Even though some participants asked if they needed to prepare for the questions in the interview, I told them it was not necessary and what they needed to do in the interview was to be relaxed and chat with me like meeting a new friend.

One day before each interview, I did some preparation. I checked the map and located the place I was meeting my participant. Three interviews were conducted at my participants' homes, three were conducted at their workplace and the rest were in cafés or restaurants they chose. Because they were very familiar with the place, it was easier for them to feel relaxed. This also provided us with a topic to start the conversation. In the cafés and restaurants, I asked them why they chose the place. However, the noise of these public spaces distracted me and I was worried about the quality of my recordings. For interviews which were conducted in the home or workplace, I made some observations when they were giving me a tour of the place and interacted with their roommates or colleagues. However, my interviewees were sometimes distracted by the presence of others

and looked around and lowered their voice when talking about some sensitive topics. Letting the interviewees choose the place is a good strategy to know more about the context of the story told by the interviews. However, it is necessary to make sure the environment does not distract the interviewer or interviewee.

I also read my participants' Wechat Moment when preparing for each interview. It helped me to know more about them and I made a list of some personalised interview topics. I also charged my phone and recorder, both of which can record. Two interviews were actually recorded by my phone because my recorder was out of power on that day. It is always necessary to bring two pieces of recording equipment for an interview in case any one of them does not work well. I checked with my participants about the time and place three hours before the start of the interview to make sure everything was ok.

### Sampling While Interviewing and the Second Round Recruitment

I started to select my participants when I was making my decision on who would be my first interviewee. Usually I selected around five women and asked them if they were free to do an interview in the following week. They could decide which day and where to do the interview. The process of selecting and sampling interviewees was a dynamic and ongoing practice. I used a 'theoretical sampling' method (Mason, 2002) and decided who to interview next based on the data I already had. In order to achieve theoretical saturation, I still recruited after I started to interview. Below I explain the principle of my sampling process and how this influenced the final result.

Glaser (1978) acknowledges that in the initial stages of a study, researchers 'go to the groups which they believe will maximise the possibilities of obtaining data and leads for more data on their question' (Glaser, 1978, p. 45). I interviewed my

first participant Feifei on 3<sup>rd</sup> July. In the first two weeks after I interviewed her, I did another 9 interviews, up to the 18<sup>th</sup> July. After that, I went to participate in a one-week academic conference in Beijing and stopped the interviews temporarily. The reasons why I selected these applicants to interview in the initial fieldwork are that I shared similar experiences or interests with them or we had already chatted and knew each other. This made it easier for me to prepare for the interview. Through doing an initial analysis of the data collected from the first ten interviews, I had some sense of what the life of my target group was like and found some characteristics which might diversify their migrant experience. Only in the next stage of data collection, did I start to use ‘theoretical sampling’ and select participants based on experience-related characteristics.

In qualitative research, sampling procedures are not rigidly prescribed as in quantitative studies (Morse, 1991). The sample size in qualitative research is usually small. The logic behind qualitative research is not trying to represent the full range of experience. Qualitative research is good at ‘constituting arguments about how things work in particular context’ (Mason, 2002, p. 136). In my research, I found ‘the duration of working and living in Beijing’ was an important characteristic which diversified the migration experience of my participants. I tried to select applicants who had been living in Beijing for less than one year, one year to four years, five to ten years, and more than ten years. The participants of each type could not represent all migrant women who have the same characteristic. What I was trying to explore was to see how this characteristic was connected with and diversified the migration experience of my participants. In this sense, the selection and sampling criteria were based on the characteristics which diversified the migration experiences of my participants.

I did my second round recruitment while I was doing fieldwork in Beijing. There were two reasons why I continued to recruit. Firstly, I identified several characteristics which might diversify the migrant experience of my participants. I

had to look for more participants with some specific characteristics, so I had enough participants in each category. Here I am trying to recruit participants who can enrich the categories of 'educational background and occupation', 'duration of living in Beijing', 'type of unit', and 'social class background'. Secondly, participants with these characteristics were rare in the people who had contacted me. The first round recruitment was highly constrained by the recruitment platforms I used. Another reason why this happened was that migrant women with these characteristics were minorities. Women who have degrees in Engineering were hard to reach, because it was a male-dominated course. It was difficult to recruit women who worked for the government, public institutions or state-owned enterprises, because it is difficult to find a job in these sectors. I posted another recruitment article online:

In order to cover a more diversified group, I am currently looking for participants:  
who have degrees in Science or Engineering,  
who have degrees on Economics, Law or Management,  
who have been living in Beijing for more than 5 years,  
who work for government, public institutions or state-owned enterprises,  
who graduated from the universities in Beijing,  
who are from villages.

I identified 'educational background and occupation' as a characteristic which diversified my participants because of the data I had collected. The data showed that one gender was dominant in an occupation or industry because of the cultural capital they had, and this form of cultural capital was highly gendered and socially constructed. In Xiaohui and Mifei's interview, they explained women were dominant in marketing related occupations because women were good at socialising with clients and customers. So I wondered what the experiences of women who worked in male-dominated industries were like. Therefore, this category was separated into three types: female-dominated

occupations, male-dominated occupations and occupations with no gender domination. Occupation is highly related to educational background and professional skills, so I recruited more participants with diverse educational backgrounds in Arts and Humanities, Science and Engineering, and Social Science.

‘The duration of living in Beijing’ diversified the migrant women, because the longer they had stayed, the more work experience they accumulated and the more work responsibilities they had taken on. They also had to face more pressure from families, such as taking care of children and supporting their elderly parents. Therefore, maintaining the balance between work and family life was more challenging for older migrant women. As a new graduate, Lili was still trying to learn the skills needed for her job. While for Yoyo, who had been living in Beijing for 7 years since she graduated, the challenge was trying to be a good manager in a company and also a good mother to a three-year old child. Based on my interviews, there are four different types in this category: less than one year, one year to four years, five to ten years, and more than ten years.

The identification of ‘type of unit’ as a characteristic which diversified the migrant women was also based on the literature on China’s reform and open up policies and the data collected in the first ten interviews. China experienced a process of marketisation and privatisation after carrying out the reform and open up policies of the 1980s. In the interviews, jobs in government, public institutions or state-owned enterprises were described as ‘stable, boring, highly repetitive and allowing the enjoyment of good benefits’. In contrast, jobs in private enterprises were described as: ‘highly competitive, not stable, challenging and have limited benefits’. Discussion of the contrast between public institutions and state-owned enterprises and private enterprises was common in the interviews. Another reason why the type of organisation is important is because only graduates with a job in government, a public institution or a state-owned

enterprise could obtain a Beijing *hukou*. This category is separated into two main types: private enterprises and institutions, and state-owned enterprises and institutions.

The identification of ‘social class and family background’ was because of China’s social stratification and social mobility, and the data I collected in the first ten interviews. Because of China’s *hukou* policy, rural residents cannot enjoy the same social welfare as urban residents. In my interviews, if young women from urban areas wanted to buy an apartment in Beijing, their parents would support them and pay the down payment using their savings. The young women’s own savings were far from enough to make the payment. In this sense, the family background of the young women decided whether they could afford an apartment in Beijing to a large extent. Because of this, I separated this category into two main types: participants from an urban area and participants from a rural area. Overall, I identified seven characteristics which diversified the migrant experience of young women: duration of living in Beijing; educational background and occupation; type of unit; social class and family background; marital status (single, in a relationship, married or engaged or cohabiting without children, married with children); place of origin (Northern or Southern part of China); and, University location (in or outside Beijing).

When I was in Beijing, I also met potential participants offline. I seized every opportunity I had to spread my recruitment information. I went to some career experience sharing events with the purpose of meeting potential participants. I also introduced my research project to new friends I met doing activities and at events I was interested in, such as a documentary film night and academic conferences and workshops. Four participants were recruited through participating in offline events and activities. I used diverse recruitment strategies to enrich my participation candidates. In order to increase the breadth of each category, in this round of recruitment, I also used snowball sampling and



acquaintance introduction to reach new participants. Juanzi and Beila had rural background and they were introduced by friends. Qiu had a degree in Engineering and she was introduced by Liuyuan. Dou had degrees in Economics and she was introduced by Kailin. At this stage of the fieldwork, I selected applicants based on those criteria. I did not interview all the migrant women who contacted me, because I already had too many participants with the same characteristics. The general background information for participants can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2: Participant description**

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Year of Birth</b> | <b>Work experience</b> | <b>Education</b> | <b>Occupation</b>             | <b>Marital status</b>     |
|-------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Dou         | 1984                 | 8 years                | MA               | Finance Professional          | Single                    |
| Qiu         | 1990                 | 2 years                | MA               | Civil Engineer                | Single                    |
| Kailin      | 1987                 | 5 years                | MA               | Bank Data Analyst             | Married, with no children |
| Chunhua     | 1988                 | 4 years                | MA               | Human Resource Manager        | Married, with a child     |
| Yuxin       | 1992                 | 1 year                 | MA               | Project Consulter             | In a relationship         |
| Bao         | 1992                 | 1 year                 | MA               | Human Resource Manager        | Single                    |
| Hongdou     | 1989                 | 3 years                | MA               | Finance Manager               | Married, with a child     |
| Sisi        | 1979                 | 16 years               | BA               | Doctor                        | Married, with a child     |
| Baixue      | 1981                 | 14 years               | BA               | Engineer                      | Married                   |
| Jing        | 1990                 | 3 years                | MA               | Project Consulter             | Married, Pregnant         |
| Luqi        | 1989                 | 4 years                | BA               | Internet Operation Specialist | Engaged                   |
| Beila       | 1992                 | 0.5 year               | MA               | Project Consulter             | In a relationship         |

|           |      |          |               |                               |                       |
|-----------|------|----------|---------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Liuyuan   | 1989 | 3 years  | MA            | Researcher                    | In a relationship     |
| Mingming  | 1991 | 2 years  | MA            | Journalist                    | Single                |
| Juanzi    | 1987 | 0.5 year | MA            | Executive secretary           | Single                |
| Chenxiang | 1991 | 0.5 year | BA            | Event planner                 | Single                |
| Yuzi      | 1988 | -        | PhD candidate | PhD student of Film Study     | Engaged               |
| Yoyo      | 1985 | 7 years  | BA            | Internet Operation Specialist | Married, with a child |
| Aima      | 1993 | 0.5 year | BA            | Internet Operation Specialist | Single                |
| Qixi      | 1993 | 1 year   | BA            | Internet Operation Specialist | Single                |
| Su        | 1993 | 0.5 year | BA            | Headhunter                    | Cohabiting            |
| chengzi   | 1986 | 5 years  | MA            | Project Consulter             | Single                |
| Mifei     | 1988 | 5 years  | BA            | Sales in Insurance Company    | Single                |
| Lili      | 1992 | 1 year   | BA            | Internet Operation Specialist | In a relationship     |
| Anne      | 1991 | 2 years  | MA            | Director                      | In a relationship     |
| Xiaohui   | 1985 | 5 year   | MA            | Project consulter             | Cohabiting            |
| Feifei    | 1987 | 5 year   | MA            | Product Manager               | Single                |
| Liuyue    | 1988 | 4 years  | MA            | Project consulter             | In a relationship     |
| Hong      | 1987 | 4 years  | MA            | Editor                        | In a relationship     |

My sampling process was dynamic and ongoing. The number of participants was hard to decide before the start of the interviews. Researchers should sample until they reach ‘theory-saturation point’, and this point is reached when the data begins to stop telling you any new points about the social process (Coyne, 1997). In this sense, it depends on the researchers’ experience and intelligence to decide

if the saturation point has been reached. However, based on my own experience of doing this project, even though I tried to include as many participants in each category as possible, the information collected was restricted by the time and funding available. It was difficult for me to demonstrate that saturation point had been reached and no other patterns could be found among migrant women. This may be a limitation. What I could do was to try to use different recruitment strategies and include as diversified a sample as possible.

### Interviewing as an 'Insider' or 'Outsider'

My two-year's work experience in Beijing made me feel I was an 'insider' of the group I was studying, which also enhanced my confidence in doing the interviews. Feifei was the first participant I interviewed. She was my former colleague and we worked together for two months before she left. She then worked for an online education company. We kept in touch and she contacted me after she read my online recruitment letter. Sharing the experience of working together diminished the distance between us. When Feifei told me the reason she left the company was because her work did not need professional skills: 'Even someone who had never been to university could do it well.' I knew how she felt about the job because that was also my reason for leaving.

My 'shared experience' position offered an advantage and made it easier for me to understand the implied content of the interviews (Padgett, 2008; Kacen and Chaitin, 2006). I was also more sensitive if the interviewees expressed opinions which were new to me. I could understand the anxiety of participants who were still single in their late twenties. However, when Juanzi told me she was not worrying about that currently. I was curious about what made us different. She was 29 years old and worked in a university as an administrator. 'Because I want to do a PhD, as you know, in China, I cannot earn any money while I'm doing it.

I do not want to spend my boyfriend's money.' I began to realise even though we shared many similar migrant experiences, there were some life experiences which made our ideas on intimate relations different from each other. In this case, I felt I was an 'outsider' when talking about experiences and situations which were new to me.

At the beginning of the interview, Feifei spent the first 40 minutes introducing me to the development of the online education industry in China, which I knew nothing about before I conducted this interview. Juanzi told me stories about her childhood in a small village and her relationship with her brother and sister. As an only child who was brought up in an urban area, there were so many norms and emotions I had never experienced before. Interviewing people about an unfamiliar experience was challenging and deprived me of the benefits that came with familiarity (Fawcett and Hearn, 2004; Fontes, 1998). It was challenging to ask more in-depth follow-up questions. So I let my interviewees control the agenda at this point and only said 'I see', 'yes, so what happened then', or nodded and smiled when listening to their narratives.

However, studying an unfamiliar experience also has advantages. 'A researcher unfamiliar with the specific experience under study may approach it from a fresh and different viewpoint posing new questions that may lead to innovation direction.' (Berger, 2015, p. 227). I asked for an explanation about some of the norms and concepts which were taken-for-granted and never thought about before by my interviewees. When Juanzi and I were discussing the meaning of education for children in her village, she said, 'Education can make you a better person, there are lots of jobs (*hunhun*) in my villages. You know.' I was not very sure what 'jobs' meant in that context. So I probed and asked her to tell me more about 'jobs', which helped me to get a richer and more detailed description of a group of village youths who were not well-educated and had grown up to be manual workers in cities.

Even though I was equipped with insights as an ‘insider’ of the social group I was studying, sometimes I felt I was an ‘outsider’ when I was interviewing participants with experiences which were new to me. In this sense, because of the diversity of the group I was studying, my identity as an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ was experience-based and kept vacillating, even when I was interviewing a particular interviewee, like Feifei. This identity position was not stable during the fieldwork. I continually learning new knowledge from the interview, and also made an effort to educate myself through checking related information online or chatting with friends on some of the topics. With the accumulation of knowledge and changes in my own life experience, I was moving from the position of ‘outsider’ to the position of an ‘insider’ (Horsburgh, 2003), which enabled me to ask more in-depth questions when I was interviewing about experiences and topics which were unfamiliar to me before I did the fieldwork. When I was interviewing participants from villages, I knew they usually had brothers or sisters and their relationship with them was an important topic. I can feel that this fieldwork has become part of my life experience and changed my way of understanding certain issues.

#### Self-disclosure in the Interviews

My position as an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ influenced my way of asking questions and understanding the participants in the interviews, but the response of the interviewees was more directly influenced by how I presented myself in the interview. Self-disclosure during an interview is good feminist practice (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992). When collecting personal information from participants, such as their year of birth, hometown or university, I was glad to tell them my personal information if participants asked. Exchanging privacy helps to build close connections and creates rapport in the interview (Melamed, 1983). When

participants place the researcher as one of them, they are more willing to share their experience with the researcher (Letherby, 2003).

I found my self-disclosure was necessary especially when I was interviewing some participants who were a little shy and only provided short and superficial answers to the questions. Lili was one of those participants. The first half hour of the interview was frustrating for me because she kept answering my questions briefly. When she showed me her photograph and told me the reason why she came to Beijing was because of the indie music here. I found we shared similar interests in heavy metal music, which is only enjoyed by a very small group of people and has become part of youth subculture in China. Then I told her I was also a big fan of the bands she liked. We recalled our memory of listening to similar bands in high school. She laughed and said, 'If you ask a heavy metal fan what bands she listened to in high school, usually their answer will be Linkin Park, or Marilyn Manson. We are the same. It is amazing, isn't it?' As the interview went on, Lili was more willing to talk and share more detailed stories. I could see that my self-disclosure had put her at ease. After that I talked less about myself and concentrated more on asking questions.

I also disclosed my opinions when I found the participants held very different attitudes on a particular issue with me. Hongdou was a young mother of a three-year-old boy. In the interview, she expressed her willingness to be a housewife while doing some part-time work in Beijing because 'if both husband and wife are very busy at work, the home is not warm'. Having so much feminist knowledge in my mind, I showed my concern about being a housewife, 'because you spend more time on taking care of the child and doing housework, it is less possible for you to accumulate work experience and networks which are needed for the job market. Do you mind that being a housewife actually increases your risk?' She replied, 'I can understand why you ask this. I can do some part-time work at home. As long as I still have that connection with society and also my

professional skills, I am not worried about that. If my husband leaves me some day, I can still live by myself. I do not mind taking some risks at this stage. We are family, so we should support each other.’ Instead of only exploring why she wanted to be a housewife, I shared my opinions and concerns which enabled us to discuss her opinion on being a housewife.

However, many researchers argue that inappropriate self-disclosure in the interview makes interviewees feel uncomfortable. ‘If the researcher volunteers information about herself unasked, this may be seen as an unwelcome contribution and not part of the research contract. This may be particularly relevant when the topic is one often considered taboo’ (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993, p.76). In this case, interviewees may only give the interviewer what they want to hear, and hide their real thoughts (Bombyk, Jenkins and Wedenoja, 1985). In my interview, I only spoke of my own experience when it was asked for by the participants or when I felt it was necessary as a method to create rapport with participants who were shy. When I was telling a story, I tried to provide specific facts without showing my attitude. When I was disclosing my opinions on a particular issue, I would encourage my participant to share with me what she thought from her perspective. I tried to make my participants aware that I was paying attention to their answers and truly tried to understand, instead of imposing my thought on them. I could feel if my self-disclosure was managed properly, as my participant would smile and raise her voice, and provide more in-depth and rich information about themselves in return.

### Asking Difficult Questions

When interviewees started to provide detailed information on their experiences and share their feelings with me, I knew it was time to ask some more difficult questions. Handling difficult questions needed me to cross boundaries and my

interviewees to step out of their comfort zone (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). In my interviews, I identified three categories of ‘difficult’ questions: questions on sensitive or private issues, questions on exploring ‘taken-for-granted’ values and concepts, and asking for explanation and clarification on contradictory opinions in the interview.

When an interview went on well but the participant suddenly seemed hesitant or only provided superficial and short questions to a particular question, I felt the atmosphere of the conversation changed. For instance, Mingming mentioned a lot about the ‘idiots’ (*shabi*) she was working with in the interview. When I asked her to tell me something about those ‘idiots’, who were they and what they did. She was hesitant to answer my question and looked around to avoid my gaze. In ordinary conversations, this is when someone should change the subject or tell a joke to lighten the atmosphere. However, in the interview, I chose to wait for a few seconds. This period of time was provided for my interviewee to think about whether she could answer my question in some way, and the silence also gave her some pressure. However, this could not be too long. I would control it for around 5 seconds. The participants would be more unlikely to answer when the silence lasted longer and it was also unethical to make them to feel too anxious. Mingming still did not say anything after a few seconds. So I said, ‘If you think you really do not want to talk about it, it’s ok. You do not have to answer my question.’ However, after I said this, Mingming told me a very detailed story of a conflict she had had with one of the ‘idiots’ at work. Leaving a few seconds for silence, followed by an expression of concession provided the interviewees with more space to find a way to discuss sensitive or private issues.

When exploring taken-for-granted values and concepts, it also took some time for the participants to reflect in depth on how the phrases and concepts were used and the meanings of them in their everyday life. One strategy for doing this was asking the interviewees to provide examples. Another strategy was asking the



interviewees to compare and build relationships between similar or related phrases and concepts. For instance, when talking about the career development of women with Juanzi, she mentioned she felt uncomfortable when a team leader who said she was an 'ambitious woman'. 'It is a negative judgment for women.' said Juanzi. We then discussed how the words 'ambitious' and 'ambition' were used in her daily life. I asked her to give me some examples when 'ambitious' was used to describe the women she knew at work, and then we talked about whether 'ambitious' had the same meaning when used to describe men, and what the differences between women with and without 'ambition' were. We found that the word 'ambitious' was used to describe women who wanted to have good career development. 'Ambitious women' were in contrast to women who were 'family-oriented'. When it was used to describe men, it had a positive meaning. Even though Juanzi wanted to have a good career, she did not want to be judged as 'ambitious' because that made her feel too special. Making comparison and giving examples helped to understand the meaning of a phrase or concept and how it was used in everyday life.

The third type of question was difficult to ask because it took effort for me to identify the contradictory opinions in the interview, and it also put pressure on the participants to think about what they had said and why the contradictory opinions existed in their narratives. Feifei expressed wanting to have a successful career and earn enough money to live a good life in Beijing. However, when talking about her future partner choice, she said she wanted to marry someone who was successful in his career so he could be the provider of the family. I was confused about her contradictory identity as a career woman who could be financially independent and as a family-oriented woman who was dependent on her husband. I asked her about my confusion. She then explained, 'I will only need to depend on my husband financially when I am pregnant and after giving birth to a child. I cannot earn any money in that one or half a year. It is already unfair for my husband because he has to support me economically. I will earn

money myself and contribute to our family most of the time.’ Contradictory opinions did not mean interviewees were lying. In my interview, it was usually because I did not fully understand the context of those opinions. Asking difficult questions which were usually not discussed in normal conversation was challenging, both for me and my participants. However, asking difficult questions was essential for a successful interview which aimed to generate contextualised, detailed and in-depth data.

### Emotion Work in the Interview

Unlike surveys, observations or other research methods which do not need the researcher to interact with the participants, in interviews, researchers are highly involved in interaction with the participants. I needed to deal with the emotions generated in this interaction. ‘Emotionality lies at the intersection of the person and society, for all persons are joined to their societies through the self-feeling and emotions they feel and experience on a daily basis’ (Denzin, 1984, p. 70). Emotional work is also a strategy for managing a good interview. It requires the researcher to ‘produce an emotional state in another person while at the same time managing one’s own emotions’ (Steberg and Figart, 1999, p.16).

When my participant showed me her engagement ring, I was supposed to be happy for her. And when my participant told me how hard she tried to get pregnant and cried, I was supposed to feel sad about it. Even though I also felt a little jealous of the engagement ring and I did not share any similar experience with the women who could not get pregnant, I still tried my best to feel their emotion and be empathetic about their stories and make them feel I could really understand what they were saying and how they felt about it. The aim of doing this emotional work was not to help my participants to get rid of those emotions. Emotions are not an anathema to academic research. On the contrary, researchers

can 'infer other people's viewpoints from how they display feeling' (Hochschild, 1983, p.22). I reacted to them by displaying my emotions and feelings in order to make them feel relaxed and truly understood. 'Becoming openly emotional was an important aspect of the researcher, signaling that the researcher had connected in a very personal and emotional way with the story that the participant was telling' (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009, p.65). When a connection was built, participants were more willing to disclose deep feeling to me in the interview.

However, there are some situations in which my emotions were evoked because the participant's story reminded me of my own personal experience. When a participant mentioned she often quarreled with her husband because she felt he did not pay enough attention to her when they had to live apart for several years because of work, I thought of my own experience and suddenly became very emotional. However, my participant was smiling when she told me the story because 'it has already passed'. So I held on to my emotion and kept on smiling and nodding while I was listening to her stories. I did not want to show my emotion to her because she did not know my background experience and she could not be expected to deal with my emotion. So I had to mask my emotions in order to keep the interview going well. However, after I finished the interview and went home, I remembered I did not feel very good and the emotion continued to influence me for a period of time. I had to deal with it by myself. Maslach (1982) suggests that the researcher might experience emotional exhaustion when she needs to encounter people frequently. I felt emotional exhaustion especially after I finished more than two interviews a day and arrived home late at night. Managing my own emotions during and after the interviews was also part of the research.

The emotions generated in the interviews need to be managed properly. The principle I followed was that I should create an atmosphere for the participants to feel comfortable, safe and understood, so they were willing to share more of their

experiences and feelings with me. In order to accomplish this, I was empathetic about their stories and masked my emotion if it was not expected by the participants. Doing an interview needed me to be involved in the private world and feelings of the interviewees and sometimes, I had to keep my distance from the stories told by the participants in order to avoid emotional exhaustion. As a person who does not like to hide my feelings in my daily life, I felt doing emotional work in the interviews was challenging for me.

### Using Participatory Approaches in the Interviews

Asking difficult questions needed me to take more control of the interview agenda, while participatory approaches were applied to encourage the participants to be more engaged and decide what they wanted from the interview. This was not only research 'on' the participants, it was also a research 'for' the participants. The 'researcher that is more fully participatory will aim to use the research process itself to empower those who are being researched' (Johnson et al., 2004, p.215). This enables the research to better represent participants' experiences. I applied three strategies to make my interviews more participatory: listening to extended narratives from the participants, using photographs to promote interview responses and providing opportunities for participants to ask me questions in return.

The first strategy I used was careful listening to participants' extended narratives. Luqi and I met in a rice noodle restaurant and I had a chat with her about the restaurant. She told me the reason why she recommended this place was because this restaurant used to be next to her university. Then I asked about her university life. After that, she started to recall memories of how she applied to the university, her relationship with her roommates and how she got her first job in Beijing. She continues telling her stories for about one hour and I did not stop her or ask other

interview questions. This also happened in some of the other interviews. Participants began to provide rich and detailed information by themselves, building connections between events, and presenting them in a clear chronological order. They were developing stories and narratives in the interviews. When the participants told me a well-prepared story, I knew it was a story which had been told several times before. I could tell the plot of the narrative and the participants' intention and desire in it. Even though not all the information included in the story was related to my research topic, and there were many items on which I really wanted to probe and ask further questions, I did not interrupt my participants. What I did was smile and nod, and say 'yes', 'I see', 'so what happened then', or just repeated what they just said to let them know I was listening and paying attention to what they had said. Not all the interviewees could provide extended narratives like Luqi, some interviewees only provided short, general answers which needed me to ask follow-up questions. My participants had different ways of answering questions. Maybe that was because of their personalities. Interviews with participants who could provide extended narratives usually lasted for more than four hours. Even though I did not interrupt them, I still tried to identify new issues and some points and concepts which I wanted to develop more after they finished their narratives. Based on this, the rest of the interview was more interviewee-centred and interviewee-guided.

The second strategy was using photographs to elicit interviewee responses. The strategy of using photographs out to be very effective in encouraging women to discuss their migration experiences. The photos were not used as data sources in themselves. All of my participants used smart phones. Most of the photographs were chosen from the photograph albums on their phones. Some of the participants went to take a photograph especially for the interview. In the process of selecting places, taking photographs and choosing images, the interviewees participated in the research project and displayed their notion of 'self'. There is a

history of using photography as a method to research the construction of self (Noland, 2006). 'Every image embodies a way of seeing, even a photograph. For photographs are not, as often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights... The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject' (Berger, 1972, p. 9-10). When my participants were choosing photographs of the place which was most meaningful for them, they saw the city from their own perspective and attached special stories to the image. The themes of the photographs were quite diverse and could be separated into five different categories. The first category of photographs was the participants' home in Beijing, for example, the view from a window, their pets, a street near their home or residential area. The second category concerns their work, such as the building of their unit, or a place where they used to work. The third category is entertainment places, for example a park, a café, or a pub. The fourth category is their university, such as their classroom, the office where they used to work or their dormitory. The final category covers public spaces in Beijing, one of the participants taking a photograph of a poster in a Beijing subway. When we were discussing the photographs, I could see they had prepared a story with amazing details and rich emotions. The photographs in the interviews were like islands in the sea which could help me to locate and identify the most significant information on the research voyage.

The third strategy I used was providing opportunities for participants to ask me questions in return. In the recruitment article, I told potential participants that I saw this interview as an exchange of information and a chance to meet new friends. So, at the end of each interview, I provided an opportunity for the participant to ask me questions in return. From their questions, I was able to understand why they were interested in the interview and what they wanted from it. This was when I started to tell them my stories and provide the information they needed as much as I could. Some of the participants came to the interview

because they were interested in me, and asked me about how I did the interviews, why I did this research project or how I applied for a PhD degree. Most participants came to the interview because they were interested in my research topic.

I did a thematic analysis on their questions and I found they emphasised several different aspects of my research topic: some participants were interested in how 'age' influenced the migrant experiences of women, they wanted to know the experiences of the migrant women who were younger or older than them. Some participants were interested in how 'type of unit' influenced the migrant experiences of women. Some participants were confused about their 'class identity' and wanted to know how to define 'middle class' and if they belonged to that category, and some participants were confused about their 'roles of women' and wondered how other well-educated migrant women dealt with the conflict between work and family life. I also brought those confusions and questions into my research, which influenced the way I analysed the data and presented the results. I feel that it is not just research on its own, it is also research which explores our confusions.

### Leaving the Field

I kept in touch with all the participants after I finished the fieldwork. We were still friends on Wechat. They posted the details of their daily life online and I sometimes made comments on their posts. They replied to my comments and made comments on my posts in return. By having online interaction, we maintained the connection even when I was in the UK. They posted photographs of significant events, which made me aware of the changes that were happening in their lives, such as photographs of their wedding, their new born baby or their new office. Even though the information they presented was highly selective and

constrained by their own online networks, and I did not know more detailed stories about those significant events, online social networks were still a very useful tool to follow what happened to my participants after the fieldwork finished, which helped me to make preparations to do follow-up interviews afterwards.

In the summer of 2017, I went back to Beijing and stayed for two months. I contacted my participants using Wechat and asked them how they were and if they were willing to participate in a short follow-up interview. Several of them were not in Beijing and away on holiday during the summer. Bao and Chenxiang had left Beijing and returned to their hometown. Eventually, I conducted ten face-to-face follow-up interviews. However, all of the participants who were not in Beijing agreed to have a conversation by phone or chat with me online for a while and tell me about what happened after the interview. I did not record the interviews by phone because for me, the fieldwork had finished in the summer of 2016. The research was about their identity construction at a particular age and particular life stage. In this sense, this is not a longitudinal piece of research, instead, it is a snapshot of a point in time. I did not intend to see if they had realised the plans they had made for the future or how their life would change in one year. Therefore, I regarded the follow-up interviews as a chat between friends, so the conversation was not recorded. Even though I made some notes about the follow-up interviews, only very limited information was presented in the final thesis.

I invited my participants for dinner or a cup of coffee in a public space in Beijing. During the informal interviews, I experienced a 'tension between friendships and the goal of research' (Acker et al., 1996, p. 69). Qixi was the first participant who did my follow-up interview. I felt both of us were not comfortable while we were having the conversation. I was not sure if I should play the role of a researcher or a role as a friend. If I acted as a researcher, I ought to follow the principle of



proper self-exposure and collect as much detailed information as I could in the interview. However, as a friend, I ought to create rapport and develop our friendship by avoiding asking 'difficult questions' and discussing more about my life. Qixi was also confused about her identity as an interviewee or a friend to me. I could see she was hesitant when asking me private questions, such as about my work in the UK and my family and friends. Qixi worked in Beijing as an internet operation specialist in a privately-owned internet company. I worked as a researcher in a foreign university. We did not share that much experience in common in our daily life. In this sense, I found it was difficult for me to maintain our relationship by developing a friendship with my participants.

In later interviews, I told my participants in advance that the conversation would be an informal and short follow-up interview for the fieldwork I did in 2015. I invited them to bring any questions they wanted to ask about the project and I asked them about the changes that had happened in the last year, as well as their attitudes towards these changes, what made them make the changes and whether they had any new plans for the future in Beijing. They asked me about the initial findings of my research and what other migrant women thought about the issues they cared about, such as attitudes towards the conflict between developing a career and the responsibility of taking care of families, and other women's plans for having children or not in their early 30s. After the short interview, I let my participants guide the conversation. Hongdou changed her job and currently worked as a salesperson in an insurance company. She knew I did a lot of interviews, so she asked me to recommend some potential customers. In order to protect my participants, I could not give her any private information, so I recommended my other friends to her. When my participants asked me to do them a favour, I felt I should help them as much as I could because I really appreciated the time they spent on my interviews. It was also a good chance for me to participate in their daily life and understand their troubles, needs and expectations.

## **After the Fieldwork**

After leaving the field, I started to transcribe the interviews in Chinese and carefully listened to my tape over and over. The final writing up process was challenging for me because English is my second language and I needed to translate my quotes into English first before I used them in my thesis. I especially discussed how to translate Chinese terms which had no English words to replace them. I printed my transcripts out and coded them manually in order to avoid losing the context. Finally, I used thematic analysis to analyse my data and identified three main themes and several related concepts for each theme. In the thesis, I built a connection with the literature and extended my results to other settings.

## **Data Transcription**

Upon returning from Beijing in 2016, I started to transcribe the interviews manually. All the interviews were transcribed after the summer fieldwork. In order to protect the privacy of my participants, I transcribed the data myself. All the interviews lasted for more than two hours. Several of them were over four hours, transcribing was an exhausting task. The participants and I spoke Mandarin Chinese in the interviews. I transcribed the data in Chinese. Only in the final writing up stage, did I translate selected quotes into English.

It was easy to ignore the small details while transcribing, such as short pauses, the stress on particular words in a sentence and the emotions, such as laughing and hesitation. However, those details are important information and ignoring

them sometimes result in different interpretation of the data (Poland, 2003). When I was interviewing Yuxin, she said ‘the life of Chinese women is tough’. If I had only written down the words she said, I would have thought she was complaining to me and showing me how hard she was struggling with her life when I analysed my transcripts. However, she laughed after she said the sentence. Yuxin was discussing the dual pressure on women coming from work and family. ‘Women need to take care of more things compared to men’. However, she was not angry. Instead, she accepted the situation and put up with it. In Chinese culture, people force a ‘bitter smile’ when they feel bad in public. A bitter smile was used to ‘suppress the display of bad feelings by portraying good feelings’ in order to ‘prevent the listeners from experiencing any bad feelings’ (Sun, 2010, p. 113-114). If I ignored her smile, I would not understand Yuxin’s intention of suppressing her bad feelings well. In this sense, it is necessary to pay attention to the details when analysing the data. Simply writing down the interviews word for word is not enough.

Instead of transcribing all the details of the interview data, I transcribed less. I only wrote down the main information in every sentence. Every three to five minutes, I stopped and wrote down the time. In my transcription, it was shown like this:

01: 30:30

I am interested in your research topic because I think being a woman is really not easy. Women need to take care of families, but there are also so many successful businesswomen and female politicians. It is really an interesting phenomenon.

Women need to take care of more things compared with men. The life of Chinese women is tough.

01:33:00

I am not an ambitious person at work. I do not want my work to influence my family life.

From the transcript, I could see that Yuxin changed topic at 1 hour and 33 minutes. She shared her understanding of women's public and private responsibility from 01:30 to 01:33 and then she started to talk about her own attitudes to work and family. When I analysed this paragraph, I went back to listen to the original tape recording and paid attention to the details of the interview. I listened to the recording several times. This way of doing transcripts helped me save a lot of time, and avoid ignoring important details at the same time. It only took me two to three hours to transcribe a one-hour interview. When I needed to quote a participant, I would listen to the tape and write down every word of each sentence and then translated into English.

Transcribing was also my initial stage of doing data analysis. By transcribing in this particular way, I broke down an interview into different topics and data units, which helped me to do further analysis. Transcribing was a stage where I listened to the recording carefully and recalled the memory of doing the interview after the fieldwork was finished. So I had some new thoughts about my data. I took notes on the ideas I thought about while doing transcriptions, such as potential codes and themes, which were the basis for my analysis.

### Translation

After transcribing and choosing the quotes which could support my points in my thesis, I started to translate the quotes from Chinese into English. Translation is challenging for me. One reason was that, my three years' study in Britain still did not enable me to understand English culture very comprehensively. When I was trying to match English words with Chinese words, it was difficult to choose the most proper one, especially when the English word was only used in a particular historical, social and cultural context. I asked my supervisor, professors and

English-speaking friends for some help. For example, when I interviewed Juanzi about the environment where she grew up. She told me ‘there are lots of *hunhun* in our village. They bully girls, play on the street, skip classes, and do not want to spend time on study.’ The term *hunhun* is used to describe the youth, especially young men, without a good educational background or a stable job who often make trouble in the community. Initially, I emphasized the negative meaning of the term and translated it into ‘ruffian’. My supervisor advised me to change this for another English word because ‘ruffian’ was out of date and not frequently used in modern English. After discussion, we decided to use ‘yob’ to describe this group of young village people, which kept the original meaning of the word, such as the characteristics of age, social class and gender of the group.

When I tried to translate a Chinese term which had no colloquial English word to replace it, I used Chinese Pinyin directly in order to avoid distorting what my respondents said. In this case, the meaning of a particular term was reflected by the context of how it was used. Hobart suggested that it is the way people use the word instead of the word they use that is important (cited in Wikan, 1992). Even in Chinese, the meaning of a particular word keeps shifting and changing according to the context in which the word is used. In this sense, when I use Pinyin directly in the text, I explained why the concept is important and unique in Chinese culture and how it was used in the context of my case. A specific instance occurred when an interviewee mentioned the reason why she tried to find a job in Beijing instead of going back to her hometown was because her parents’ *guanxi* was not strong enough to make it certain that she would get a decent job in her hometown. ‘Even if I have the same or even better qualifications than other candidates, when they have stronger *guanxi*, I won’t get the job.’ *Guanxi* is a term which is deeply rooted in the Confucian tradition of defining individuals in social relations. It is used to describe connections or ties developed between relatives or close friends in China. In this context, Jing was complaining about her disadvantage when looking for a decent job in her

hometown. She compared the disadvantage of her parents' *guanxi* and her advantages in qualifications and expressed her dissatisfaction towards the job market in her hometown, which motivated her to migrate to Beijing, a city where could provide her a more equal competition environment. With the direct quotation and the following comparison between different concepts, I explained how the concept was used, and also retained its cultural characteristics.

### Coding and Writing Up

I did not use Nvivo or any other qualitative data analysis computer program to do data analysis. Initially, I tried to use Nvivo and uploaded my transcripts and created codes. When I was analysing the quotes of a particular code, I found they were fragmented and it is easily to lose the context of the quote (Gibson and Brown, 2009). So I had to re-read the text several times, which turned out to be a waste of my time. I then used Microsoft Word, printed out the transcripts and coded manually. I used marker pens of different colours to highlight the quotes. Memos and notes were made in the margins. I used thematic analysis to analyse the data. The data analysis process was separated into two main levels. At the first level, I coded line-by-line and found three main themes. At the second level of data analysis, I selected related concepts and sub-themes and built their relationships with the core themes, which made preparations for writing the final report.

At the first level, I used Microsoft Word and Mindjet to help me in analysing my data. Mindjet is a computer program which displays information in mind maps using colours, images and spatial relationships. When I was doing line-by-line coding, I did not know what information was significant or useless to my later analyses, so I coded very quickly and tried to have a very brief understanding of what topics my participants had covered. This way of coding helped me to avoid

any forcing (Oktay, 2012). After I finished coding the first five participants' transcripts, I began to identify the concepts which were significant in their stories. For instance, when analysing the intimate relationships of young well-educated migrant women, I identified three concepts which were significant in their stories, physical and sexual attractiveness, sense of responsibility, and mutual understanding and support. Then I clarified what these concepts meant and sorted all the different meanings and related data into the same file. Through comparisons, I continued to identify the systematic similarities and differences between these meanings, define the dimension and properties of the concepts, and develop the relationships between these concepts. The migrant women who regarded sense of responsibility as important in a relationship usually downplayed the value of appearance attraction. While the women in a relationship based on physical attractiveness usually denied the important of a sense of responsibility for sustaining the intimate relationship. All three concepts could be grouped together to explain the young women's 'premarital partner choice principles', which was regarded as a theme. After I finished analysing the transcripts, I identified three core themes: young migrant women's career development paths, premarital partner choice principles, and marriage and childcare strategies. The identification of three core themes is related to how I designed the interview. However, it is still different from the original interview themes, because after I analysed the transcripts, I found 'daily consumption and weekend leisure activities' was related to 'their love stories', so I included them in the core theme of 'premarital partner choice principles'. Participants' 'migration motivation' was related to their 'career development', so it was discussed in the 'career development' theme.

At the second level of data analysis, I began to focus on the analysis around the core themes. I sorted all the word documents into three files, each corresponding to a core theme. Then I printed the documents out and used marker pens to select quotes which supported each concept and theme. I collected data until reaching

the saturation of the themes, which meant no new information emerged during coding. At this stage, I did not use all the data I coded, instead, I only chose the items which were most relevant to the core themes. Glaser and Strauss (1967) insist on saturation of the core theme at a minimum.

Even though I used thematic analysis method in analysing my data, it does not mean I did not use any theoretical framework or literature when I was discussing the meaning of concepts. Before I started my fieldwork, I read literature on the research topic I was interested in. I brought the ideas I gained through reading to the data analysis process. The recognition of concepts was highly influenced by my knowledge background. However, by using thematic analysis, I tried to avoid forcing the existing concepts or theories onto my research and I looked at my data in a different way. It helped me to explore new meaning of the concepts and develop the existing theories. The first draft of the report was more about presenting the research results I had using thematic analysis. By reviewing the draft again and again, I added more literature to the report, and then built connections with Connell's theory on gender relation. I found Connell's theory on gender relation best suit with my data, and it is an open theoretical framework which helps me to discuss different dimensions of gender relations. I found similarities and differences between my result and the results in other literature, and also explored what made the differences in the thesis. In the following chapters, I present a picture of the participants' migrant life in Beijing in three parts: women's career development paths, premarital personal life, and marriage and child bearing strategies.



## CHAPTER THREE BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL: Young Migrant

### Women's Gendered Experience at Work

Aima graduated from a tier one university outside Beijing in 2014. Then she started to work in a provincial capital city near her hometown. Most of her relatives worked in the army. Recommended by her parents, she also found a job in an office in the army. However, she left the job after a year and went to Beijing. When I interviewed her, she had just started to work for a private start-up music company.

Working for the army is just like working for the government. Parents like those jobs and all want their children to work in those kinds of organisations. Actually, the welfare of working in the army is even better than in the government, like having an 'iron bowl'. However, those jobs are for the youth who are more obedient to their parents, which I am not. My parents said they did not need me to earn a lot of money. They just want me to have a stable job, get married, and settle down...I feel it is so boring, all fixed up, and without any challenges. I am still young, and I want to go out and get more different life experiences. I do not want to live the same life when I am in my 40s...I was in a band in the university. My mother said I could not support myself only by playing music. I know it is difficult. Even though the job in the army is secure, my skills are not very useful for that. I prefer a job which can make use of my skills and I can accomplish something with my own efforts. I really need some uncertainties in my life. So I left.

In the interview, Aima spent a long time explaining why she left the Army and came to Beijing. In her story, we can see how she decided what kind of job she really wanted, and what roles different factors played in this decision-making process, such as 'welfare' 'salary' and 'skill'. We can also see how this related to her parents' expectations, her age, and significant events in her future life, such

as marriage and settling down, and how these factors motivated Aima to go to Beijing for a career she wanted. Like Aima, the decision to start a new life in Beijing was meaningful for all the young, well-educated women. One thing they needed to consider first was what job they would do and what career they would like to have in Beijing.

Job searching only has a short history in China (Wang and Moffatt, 2008). Before 1997, all university graduates were allocated a job in the state sector by the local government. The young women's parents' generation was brought up in the era of the planned economy, like Aima's parents. They were more used to the organisational culture of institutions and companies in the state sector. The recruitment of new employees and promotion was largely decided by the candidates' *guanxi* with the leaders. However, young people who go to work for organisations in non-state sectors have different expectations and face new challenges. Compared with the last generation, Rofel argues that young people in China today are 'desiring subjects', Maoist feminism was criticised to be put to the service of state interests and suppress women's real, feminine singularity (Rofel, 2007). The reforms open up new spaces to construct identities which are no longer constrained by the class struggle discourses of the Mao era.

I tell stories about these young women's career development and their experiences of becoming professionals in Beijing. China is more and more dominated by the power of corporations and the market in the reform era. The gender structure in the workplace and in the market is interwoven with women's identity as migrants and their high educational backgrounds. I discuss their decision to migrate to Beijing, and then how they found their first job and started their career. I also look at how they developed their career and positioned themselves as professional workers in the industries they were interested in. Based on their stories and discussions, I explore the young women's strategies for dealing with the constraints of the organisational culture in the state sector,

the traditional gender expectations of their family and colleagues, the state's *hukou* policy, the objectification of women in the marketised economy, and explain how they became 'professionals' in this context and how that identity is gendered.

### **Setting Out: Diversified Migration Desires**

In the first chapter, I explained the macro-level political-economic reasons for the regional differences and class differences in China. My analysis of well-educated migrant women's migration motivation is made at the meso and micro levels. I first explore the organisational culture of different types of institutions and enterprises and how this affected the young migrant career women's motivations. Then I take into account gender relations in the household and family when understanding the migration process. The social capital women's parents' have also diversified the migration desires of young, well-educated women with different class backgrounds.

When asked 'why did you migrate', young women responded by telling their stories of different expectations and experiences of hunting for their first job in their hometown, the cities near their hometown and in Beijing. One of the important reasons why Aima's parents wanted her to work in the army was for the social welfare and stability of the job. By working in the army, Aima could settle down as soon as possible after she graduated. Aima's description of her experience in the army showed that the organisation she worked in was dominated by 'clan culture' (Cameron and Quinn, 1999; Ralston, et al., 2006). The employees treated their organisation as family, the organisation regarded taking care of their employees through housing and other social benefits as an important strategy to create a sense of belonging for their employees. It increases

employees' long-term loyalty to the organisation. 'Affiliation' played a key role in China through work units (Jackson and Bak, 1998). Aima's parents and grandparents all worked in the army, which was still organised as a centrally planned, collective and closed system. Aima's parents also distanced themselves from the musicians who did not work in the state sector. Her mother told Aima to keep away from the free musicians she worked with in Beijing because they had 'tattoos and long hair'. 'For my mother, only the art soldiers are decent people. The musicians I worked with look like bad persons.' Their loyalty towards their organisation made them have a strong identification with people working in the organisation and show prejudice towards musicians who were not in the government system. However, Aima identified more with the musicians' youth subculture in Beijing. Her loss of interest in the stability a job in the state-sector could provide and her rejection of loyalty and affiliation to the army motivated her to leave and look for something different in Beijing.

Su worked for a foreign head-hunting company in Beijing. The company had branches in all the mega cities in China. Su's daily work included meeting candidates face-to-face, doing interviews and building connections. As a company which provides human resource services, it must be located in the mega cities in which a large number of experienced professionals can be found. As a headhunter, what she needed was a platform which could help her build connections with candidates and recruit qualified employees as fast as possible. She had graduated from a university outside Beijing half a year earlier and had a bachelor's degree in Human Resource Management. She also expressed her feelings on the differences between working in a state-owned enterprise in a small city and working in a foreign company in Beijing.

I really hate my life doing repetitive work and depending on a fixed salary. This job gave me motivation, every time I recruited someone successfully, I felt very happy, and a sense of self-achievement, especially when I got

paid because of my achievement. To be independent financially is important for women.

Institutions and enterprises in the state sector have very standardised regulations and procedures and numerous managerial levels. Promotions are more based on obedience to the regulations, procedures and policies, within a strong hierarchal culture. Neither Su nor Aima were satisfied with the salary and promotion system of state-owned enterprises and public institutions in their hometown. For them, '*lunzi paibei*' (being promoted based on length of service) was a serious problem in organisations in the state sector. The low differentiation of pay reflects a need to minimise competition and create harmony in the workplace. It is part of a strongly collective culture. (Jackson and Bak, 1998). Comparatively, a newcomer's individual performance was less important than their obedience to their superiors and the organisation's standard procedures. In this sense, both Su and Aima criticised the hierarchal culture in the state sector and looked forward to finding a job which regarded individual performance as a crucial criterion when deciding promotion and increase in salary.

Ralston et al. (2006) researched on the organisational culture of various Chinese ownership types. They found that foreign controlled enterprises in China are more dominated by market culture. The major objective of market culture is to maximise productivity and profits in order to achieve market dominance. The objective is achieved through measureable goals and carefully defined procedures. In this sense, employees working in foreign-controlled enterprises are expected to be aggressive and goal-oriented. Su was initially motivated by the high salary provided by her company. In the interview, she told me she was quite satisfied with the job because the salary was directly decided by how much work she had done. 'Besides the basic pay, I can earn 18% of the annual salary of the people I successfully recruit as a reward. Every time I am promoted, the percentage will increase.' She had her own responsibilities at work. She has no

conflict of interest with her colleagues or managers. More freedom and autonomy was provided for employees to achieve their performance goals. For Su, the economic reward the work in Beijing offered her was the most important reason which motivated her to go to Beijing.

Aima was different from Su. For her, the economic reason was not the main reason to migrate to Beijing. After she left the army, Aima came to Beijing and worked in a private start-up music company which had recently obtained financing when I interviewed her. She was responsible for holding performances, releasing albums and promoting the bands and musicians in her company. 'There is largest number of independent music companies and freelance musicians in Beijing. When I was a student at university, I often came to Beijing for concerts and live music performances during holidays.' The business resources in Beijing provided Aima and her company a good platform to start new projects. Beijing was attractive to Aima because of the flourishing music industry there.

Compared with state-owned and foreign-controlled enterprises, privately-owned enterprises are more dominated by adhocracy (entrepreneurial) culture (Ralston et al., 2006). In order to adapt to new opportunities in a rapidly changing environment, privately-owned enterprises foster a creative workplace for their employees. Their objective is to produce innovative products and services. So, their employees have more freedom and individual initiative, and need to be equipped with new knowledge and skills. For Aima, the sense of accomplishment at work was not directly achieved by promotion or increase in salary. She could understand her parents' concern about her economic condition because of working in a private start-up company in Beijing. 'I did not intend to make a lot of money by working in the music industry...but if we do not provide these new freelance musicians opportunities to perform and accumulate experiences, they will not have any chance or hope of being famous and successful' said Aima. By promoting new freelance musicians and providing them more performance

opportunities, Aima and her colleagues were trying to explore the music market and foster promising new musicians. For Aima, a sense of accomplishment at work was achieved by making this innovation and accumulating more professional knowledge and skills in the industry she was interested in. Aima told me all the work she had done was to prepare for starting her own business and opening a music bar near her hometown on her own, which showed strong entrepreneurship.

Aima's parents often heard stories about neighbours and acquaintances who failed in a small business. The uncertainty of the competition and market was too dangerous and the risk was too high. For my participants' parents, the best jobs their daughters could have in their hometown were in the state sector, such as public schools, state-owned companies or government. Their stories of unsuccessful small businesses were used to persuade Aima to give up her career. However, these stories did not really fit with Aima's experiences in Beijing. Aima's mother judged her start-up company as a 'briefcase company'. It is used to describe a fake company which does not have a real office or employees and is only used to scam. However, for Aima, the music company she worked in was just like other small start-up companies in Beijing.

You know, there are lots of small companies which were started by the 80's and 90's generation, it is normal for young people to do something together like this, my mother cannot understand, I really do not know how to explain to her, she has too much prejudice about this.

For young women who do not fit with the clan and hierarchical culture of state-owned enterprises and looked forward to working in an organisation with a promotion and salary system which values individual performances or in an organisation with innovation and entrepreneurial culture, migrating to mega cities where they can find more foreign- and privately-owned enterprises

compared with their hometown was a good choice. The market and entrepreneurial culture of the enterprises encourages competition and the performance of individual agency at work. Marketisation and individualisation go hand-in-hand. This gives young well-educated graduates strong motivation to migrate to the regions which are more market-oriented and gain some more diverse life experiences which are different from the 'fixed and boring' life attached to work in the state sector.

The motivation for well-educated women's migration was also influenced by gender relations and responsibilities in the household and family. As discussed in the first chapter, in Chinese traditional culture, women are associated with the roles of wife (*fu*) and daughter (*niü*) in the family (Rosenlee, 2006). Even during the Mao era, women's domestic burden persisted and their primary role was still in the family (Manning, 2006). In the post-reform period, women were even encouraged to 'return to the home' (Patricia, Hou and Wang, 1995). The different expectations of sons and daughters derive from the traditional kinship system of the Chinese. The traditional Chinese kinship system is patrilineal, sons are viewed as providing a family with continuity, such as taking responsibility for supporting the elderly (his parents) and also his own family and children financially (Jun, 2004; Miller, 2004). The groom's family is also expected to provide bride-wealth on marriage and daughters will leave their natal family and take on a new identity of 'daughter-in-law'. Daughters are expected to live with the husband's natal family and take responsibility for helping her husband and his family after she marries (Gaetano, 2015; Yang, 1991). However, only daughters enjoy an advantage in several aspects because of the enforcement of the one-child policy. Because men have the responsibility of purchasing a house, parents can invest more money in their only daughter's education (Fong, 2004).

Qixi was from Shandong Province. She came to Beijing and worked in the internet industry. She was quite satisfied with her work and salary. When talking



about her decision to come to Beijing after graduation, she also had different ideas from her parents.

Parents all want their daughters to live a stable life and stay close to them, without expecting them to earn a lot of money. Working in public schools, local government, or state-owned enterprises can promise me a stable income. My mother said if I was a boy, she would not care about where I wanted to go. But I am their daughter, they really want me to go back home and live close to them.

Qixi was expected by her mother to play her role as a daughter, to stay close to them, have a stable job, and she did not expect her to take risks to make a large amount of money. Daughters are not expected to make a large amount of money to contribute to their family and compete for higher social status. In this sense, for Qixi's parents, it was a good choice for Qixi to work in the state-owned sector and earn a fixed salary in her home city. Even though she was the single child at home, her parents still compared her with an 'absent son', a son who took responsibility for contributing to the family economy. As the only daughter in the family, she could still not be treated like a boy on migration. For Qixi's parents, migrating to mega cities was a strategy to make more money compared with staying in the hometown. More freedom was given to the 'absent son' on choosing the city he wanted to work in. The situation is the same with the youth who are not well-educated. Daughters do not have the economic pressure, so the parents do not need them to make a lot of money. But they are still expected to provide emotional and physical support for family members (Evans, 2008; Fong, 2004; Zhang, 2009; Zhang, 2004).

Su's parents also did not support her coming to Beijing, because 'it was a good choice for girls to find a job in local government and live close to parents.' Since she had a boyfriend in Beijing, her parents disagreed even more with her future career plan in Beijing because her boyfriend's hometown is far away from Su's.

‘My parents hoped I would marry someone from my hometown. I told my parents they did not need to worry about me. If anything bad happened in my marriage, I could be responsible for the choices I made myself.’ In rural areas, because the groom or the groom’s family is responsible for providing a new residence after a marriage, the residence is expected to be in the groom’s village (Gaetano, 2015; Yang, 1991). Daughters are expected to ‘marry out’. Su’s parents also worried that she would marry someone from far away. In this sense, migrating to mega cities increases the possibility of Su marrying someone who is not from her hometown. Marriage to a faraway place is not considered to be a good choice for parents because they worry that their daughters will not be treated well when the natal family is not around. In addition, the daughters will not be able to provide them with emotional and physical support.

Most of my participants initially faced opposition from their parents, especially their mothers. My participants’ effort to overcome this opposition expressed their individual agency. Qixi rejected her parents’ opposition because she knew she could not find any work which was related to the Internet industry she was interested in. The salary of the work she could do was much lower than her salary in Beijing. She was more interested in working within a more professional and efficient team, which the work in her hometown could not provide. ‘I really cannot accept life in my hometown. I do not know what I can do in my hometown.’ So she insisted on leaving. However, she also took into consideration her parents’ opinions after they had several big arguments about where to work. ‘Beijing is not very far away from Shandong. It only takes three hours by train. I did not go to Guangdong or another mega city, I just do not want them to worry about me.’ Aima and Su also finally reached an agreement with their mothers by telling them that they were in Beijing only temporarily. Su plans to start a small business in a city near her hometown after she was tired of fighting for a higher salary in big companies. Aima told me that the live bar she wanted to open would not be in Beijing. She would also choose to go to a city near her hometown,

because she knew some friends and acquaintances who might help her with her business. The different roles and responsibilities ascribed to men and women by the kinship system shape migration patterns.

Other than gender, another factor which influenced the decision to migrate to Beijing is the class background of the young women's family. Aima's parents and grandparents all worked in the state sector, recommended by her family, she could easily find a job in the army. Baixue, whose parents and grandparents all worked for a state-owned energy enterprise, and Chunhua, whose parents and grandparents all worked for a state-owned transport company, were in a similar position to Aima. This does not conform to Granovetter's (1973, 1974) weak-tie hypothesis. Granovetter argued weak ties (infrequent interactive or low intimate relationships) are more diversified and wide-ranging. Therefore, it was more likely to help the job hunter to access the information and resources which are beyond their own social circles. In the Western context, there are some empirical cases supporting this hypothesis. However, there is also empirical research which provides mixed findings on the weak-tie hypothesis elsewhere. In Japan, job seekers tend to learn job information through strong ties based on family and community networks (Watanabe, 1987).

Bian used the data from a 1988 representative sample of 1,008 adult residents in Tianjin and analysed the state job assignment system in China. The research indicated that 'when influence rather than information flows through personal networks, jobs can be channelled through strong ties more easily than through weak ties' (Bian, 1997, p 381). In the state sector, jobs are secretly assigned by officials as a favour to those who have direct or indirect ties with them. This needs the two sides to have strong ties of trust and obligation. In the state job assignment system, the labour quota was allocated by the central administration to the lower levels of work units. The higher education system was highly centralised in the planned economy of China. It was the state which decided the

number of admissions to universities. Before 1997, university graduates were guaranteed a job. Within this system, personal social networks were used to gain influence with job-assigning authorities, which makes the situation different from the weak-tie hypothesis. Bian's research was based on data from Tianjin in the 1980s. It was a period of time when there was no advertising or formal hiring procedures. Compared with the job search situation in Beijing, acquiring a position in the state sector in small cities was more dependent on the strong ties the parents had.

Jing graduated from a university in Beijing. When talking about how she made the decision to start a career in Beijing, she said she also considered the choice of going back to her hometown with her boyfriend when she graduated.

My parents are all peasants in the village, I asked their opinions. They said they had some connections and could help me to find a job in a local public school; however, it is difficult for ordinary people like us. Even if I have the same or even better qualifications than other candidates, when they have stronger *guanxi*, they get the job. This is a big problem for us. Looking for a good job in small cities depends too much on *guanxi*. It is too difficult for ordinary families like mine.

*Guanxi* (relations or relationships) is a set of interpersonal connections that dictate social interactions and facilitates exchanges of favours between people (Hwang, 1987). For any two individuals who develop *guanxi*, they must share familiarity or intimacy, trust and reciprocal obligation (Yang, 1994). In this sense, *guanxi* is a set of strong relations. Bian found that *guanxi* networks help to promote job opportunities for *guanxi* users (Bian, 1997). Compared with Aima, whose families all worked in the state sector, Jing did not have the influential *guanxi* accumulated by the previous two generations of her family. Even though they were all well-educated young people with professional skills and knowledge, it was still less possible for Jing to find a job in the state sector in a small city.

However, the job she acquired in Beijing was also a position in the government. The stability and social welfare provided by jobs in the state sector was still very attractive for Jing. She acquired the position by participating in the institution's open recruitment.

Chenxiang's parents were also peasants in the village. When she graduated, she applied for positions in local state-owned enterprises and government, but failed. Her parents also did not have useful *guanxi* in the state sectors. With the help of a friend she met online, she went to Beijing and found a job in a privately-owned enterprise. 'If I succeed in applying for a job in the government or state-owned company in my hometown, I would like to take the job. It is a stable job with dignity.' Chenxiang's attitude towards working in the state sector was much more positive compared with Aima and Su. However, because of her family background, she did not have the chance to work in the state sector in her hometown. So she went to Beijing. One year after I interviewed Chenxiang, I asked about her recent situation, she told me she had left Beijing and found a job in a state-owned enterprise in the provincial capital city near her hometown. She found the job relying on her family's *guanxi*. Finally, her parents found someone who had an indirect *guanxi* with them and wanted to help their daughter to find a job.

Not all well-educated young women from small cities or villages came to Beijing because they were bored with the stable life which was attached to jobs in the state sector like Aima and Su. Because of the lack of useful *guanxi* of her parents, Jing and Chenxiang left when the choice of working in the state sector in their hometown did not exist at that time. Aima and Su's parents already worked in the state sector. It was much easier for them to reach out to friends who shared mutual trust and obligation and would be able to find a job for their daughters. However, for Jing's and Chenxiang's parents, reaching someone who worked in the state sector was more difficult. Their parents' class location influenced their

ability to help their daughters to enter into the state sector. Even though Jing found a job in a private company by herself in Beijing, she still thought working in the state sector was a much better choice. Once she had a chance to get a job in the state sector in her hometown, she preferred to go back.

Looking for the right job, which could best motivate them, was the starting point of my participants' migration story. This is closely connected with the independent womanhood discourse among the young professional women in Beijing. The working environment in Beijing respected personal innovation, creativity and performance. Their parents' idea of 'having a stable life and marrying early' was 'too boring' for them. In the labour market, these well-educated women were pushed away from the state sector of their hometown which was regarded as more suitable for girls by their parents' generation. They expected to acquire more economic capital with a higher salary, cultural capital, such as the opportunities of using and developing their professional skills, and social capital, such as social relations other than *guanxi* in Beijing. Well-educated young women were motivated to break through a patrilineal-patrilocal family system and live a more independent and uncertain life in the mega city. Even though I only told stories about five young women with different social backgrounds, the constraints they met and their different strategies for dealing with these constraints represents the diversities of all my participants. Recognising the diverse motivation of these young women also helps to understand their different attitudes towards future work in Beijing and future migration patterns, which I explore next.

### **Becoming Professional Women: Job-hunting and Job-hopping in Beijing**

After well-educated young women came to Beijing, they still experienced

job-hunting and job-hopping. When they were away from their hometown, they had to rely on themselves to look for job opportunities. They chose between different organisations and institutions and took into consideration economic, political and cultural factors, such as salary, welfare, Beijing *hukou* policy and the managerial culture of the organisation. Gender was linked with those factors in many respects. Through discussing their job-hunting and job-hopping choices, we can understand their aspiration for the jobs they wanted and how it was related to their gender.

The information individuals used to find their first job can be roughly divided into two types. The first type is the 'structured job information market', where positions can be found through online or offline wanted adverts, employment agencies and job fairs; the second type is the 'hidden job information market', which relies on interpersonal networking. Job seekers are introduced to potential employers by their parents, relatives or friends (Allen and Keaveny, 1980). As indicated, young women had to rely on their parents' personal networks to access the information and chances to find a job in the state sector in their hometown. After my participants left their hometown and went to Beijing, where there was no *guanxi* to help them find a job.

After Su graduated, she thought it was fine for her to work in any mega city in China. The foreign head-hunting company she was currently working for had branch offices in Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen and Guangzhou. She sent her CVs to all of the branch offices. Luckily, she acquired the opportunity to interview in all of these mega cities. Compared with other cities, Beijing was more attractive to Su because of its history and cultural heritage, so she decided to go to Beijing. Every graduation season, the big companies in mega cities recruit new graduates from the universities of the country, which provides the young people graduating from universities outside of Beijing great opportunities to start their career in a mega city. When Su and her classmates were using formal job search methods

and collecting job information through the ‘structured job information market’, the reputation of their university, average score and performance in the interview process were important factors which decided if they would be successful.

The results of various studies on the two types of information resources shows that in the West, networking or the use of informal job information sources was the most common and efficient method to find a new job (Mau and Kopischke, 2001). It might allow job seekers to talk to the decision makers directly. Aima came to Beijing before she got her first job here. She knew the information about the job she wanted to apply for using informal information sources.

I did not try to find any other kind of job. I went to some music events, collected information about this industry and also did some networking things when I first came. I met this person in DDC. I was drinking at the bar and he sat next to me and we began to talk and he told me something about this start-up company and asked me if I wanted to come, then I went to an interview and got the job.

DDC is a popular live music venue in Beijing. It has weekly activities to attract music fans, musicians and other related people who work in the music industry. Aima often went to DDC for its music performances and social activities. ‘Before I went to Beijing, I did not have any friends or relatives here. The reason why I have so many pals now may be because we all shared similar interests and topics on music.’ The man who introduced her to her first job in Beijing was now one of her friends. When Aima was in the army, she felt isolated. ‘I wanted to invite someone to go to a live house. They even did not know what a live house was. I felt too depressed to be with them.’ Her friendship with other music fans in Beijing was based on their similar attitudes to and knowledge of indie music. In this sense, for Aima and her friends, the job information was circulated among people who shared the same identity as music fans. The job Aima acquired in the army also relied on interpersonal networking. Compared with the social capital



Aima acquired through the strong ties of her parents in her hometown, she acquired social capital through weak ties accumulated by herself in Beijing.

Like Su and Aima, Lili and Qixi also came to Beijing for the work opportunities in the industry they wanted to be involved in. Both of them wanted to find a job in the Internet industry. However, the difficulty was, even though they graduated from tier one universities, their degrees had nothing to do with the work they wanted to do. Lili told me about her experiences in Beijing.

The life is really difficult. I do not know what I really want. In the first year, I spent most of my time on hanging out with my friends. Every weekend, I went to art exhibitions, concerts and movies. I did not do anything useful. When I went to interviews, I felt I did not have any skills. I felt so confused when thinking about my future.

Qixi also shared her job hunting experiences in Beijing.

Because I did not have any related skills or work experience, when I first came to Beijing, it was really difficult to apply for an internship successfully. One or two out of five companies I applied for were willing to give me an interview. After 8 months' work, things were different. All the companies I applied for were willing to interview me. And I have several offers to choose from.

Qixi did not have a degree which was related to the industry she was interested in, but small start-up private companies still provided her with a job opportunity. She learnt through work. One year after I interviewed Lili, I did a follow-up interview with her. She still worked in the Internet industry. She finally found a position and got promoted in a mature Internet company she was interested in. In universities, knowledge and skills are taught in a way which is away from specific contexts (Beach and Vyas, 1998). After well-educated women graduated, they still had a strong motivation to learn through work. They not only developed

knowledge and skills through interacting with more experienced colleagues, they also learnt how the knowledge and skills are actually used in different contexts. Their capacity to work effectively in different organisational settings is developed (Engestrom et al, 1995). Acquiring cultural capital through working in small start-up companies was a good strategy for Qixi and Lili to start their careers in the industry they were interested in when they had no professional skills or knowledge. After they accumulated enough work experience in small start-up companies, both of them applied for positions in more mature, and bigger companies.

Another important factor which diversified the graduates' first employment pattern is the *hukou* policy in Beijing. Su, Aima, Lili and Qixi were all graduates from tier one universities outside Beijing. In their stories, all of them told me about how they considered giving up the work in the state sector. After they came to Beijing, they chose to work in foreign-controlled companies or privately-owned companies. However, this is different from the graduates of universities in Beijing. Jing learnt data analysis in the Management School of a university in Beijing. When asked the reason why she chose to work for the government, she said the reason was simple, 'I can have Beijing *hukou* if I take this job.' She also received an offer from a big private Internet company. However, she gave it up and chose to be a civil servant. 'My classmates have three different choices in their first jobs, public institutions, government or Internet companies. For the first two choices, the reason why they are attractive for us is because they can give us Beijing *hukou*. However, the salary of these two kinds of jobs is really low. And the jobs in Internet companies are attractive to us because of the high salary.'

The *hukou* system is highly relevant in the lives of the new migrants in Beijing. It differentiates local people with non-locals. Only the graduates who successfully find a job in state sectors have the opportunity to acquire a collective *hukou*

which is attached to their units. With the collective *hukou*, they are qualified to buy a house in Beijing. Then they can register as individual Beijing *hukou* holders. The individual Beijing *hukou* is attached to the private house the holders own. The new migrant with a Beijing *hukou* can be officially identified as a resident of Beijing and enjoy the related social welfare such as health care and education. Beijing *hukou* holders can enjoy a free periodic physical examination in the community hospital when they are retired. More importantly, the *hukou* passes on from one generation to the next. Their children can also have Beijing *hukou*. Children are qualified to apply for the local public schools. The key universities in Beijing, such as Peking University and Tsinghua University will give a higher admission quota to Beijing high school graduates.

It is not hard to understand why the young graduates from universities in Beijing regard whether the job provides a Beijing *hukou* as an important criterion for a ‘good job’. However, salary is another important criterion.

Most of my classmates are from average families. It is impossible for our parents to support us to buy a house in Beijing. So entering an industry with a high salary is important for us. However, the problem is, without a *hukou*, they have to wait five years to have the qualification to buy a house in Beijing.

So when choosing the first job after graduation, like those who graduated from the universities in Beijing, work opportunity in the state sector is also very attractive. They face the conflict of choosing work opportunities in the state sector or in the non-state sector. They also faced the dilemma of choosing between having a Beijing *hukou*, while not having a job with a salary which is high enough to afford a private apartment, or having a job with a high salary, while not having the qualification to buy a private apartment in Beijing. However, for graduates who had already given up the chance of finding a job in the state sector in their hometown and who were pursuing self-achievement in a mega city,

*hukou* is not taken into consideration when hunting for a job in Beijing.

After the new graduates found their first job in Beijing, they started to use this platform to explore the industry and the company in which they were working. They also had to locate themselves in the industry and explore their new identity in the workplace through interacting with their co-workers and managers. As an Operation Manager in an Internet company, Qixi's daily work included writing reports on the data on users' behaviour and cooperating with the technology developer to improve user experience. An operation manager is responsible for building connections between users and product developers, promoting the products and expanding the market share. When Qixi talked about the reasons why she left her last job, she expressed her dissatisfaction with her co-workers and managers.

When my manager wanted to make some changes to our products, he did not really care about the user data I collected. I could not convince him with my report, and he did not explain to me why he wanted to make those changes...And when I found some bugs and asked the technology developers to fix them, they did not make an effort. So I had to wait. I had lots of conflicting ideas with my managers and the co-workers...They only considered themselves and their performance in front of our boss at work, and did not care about your contribution. During that period of time, I felt like I really hate going to work every day. So I left.

As we can see from Qixi's description, the manager took an 'authoritarian leadership' approach (Holmes, Schnurr and Marra, 2007). Joint discussion and team cooperation was not encouraged at work. Every employee reported their work to the manager and then he had the power to make decisions by himself. The employees showed their loyalty to the manager intentionally by working until very late at night. Qixi felt her work and advice was not respected. However, the leadership and teamwork of the second private company she worked for was completely different.

In my current job, even though my colleagues have different thoughts from me, we discuss problems together. We can reach an agreement through open communication. I can also learn something valuable from them. The technology developers are more willing to fix the bugs I find. I really enjoy working with my team members. I feel it is really important to work with excellent workers.

The leadership style of the company where Qixi is working is relatively relaxed and tolerant. All employees are encouraged to participate in the discussion and problem-solving process. They contribute and communicate more freely. Through creating an egalitarian and democratic atmosphere, Qixi's leader empowered the members of his team. Qixi not only felt a sense of achievement by impacting the decision-making process, she also learnt from more experienced colleagues. A company which enabled her to accumulate more cultural capital through working was more attractive to her. Compared with the last company with an authoritarian culture, Qixi felt more motivated in her current company with a 'team-oriented' and 'empowerment-focused' culture (Holmes, Schnurr and Marra, 2007). They were empowered to make decisions, and they were also empowered with the professional knowledge of how to solve problems effectively, which is an important capability at work. The workers in this company were more concerned about doing things (zuo shi) while the workers in her last company were more concerned about engaging good relationship (with leaders) (zuo ren). Even in privately-owned companies, there are still leaders who manage the company in an authoritarian style, which follows the state company tradition. There are also private companies which create a democratic atmosphere and empower their employees, which is more of a liberal type.

Mifei graduated from a university outside of Beijing with a bachelors degree in International Trade. She had been working as an insurance salesperson for four

years in Beijing. Mifei also changed her job once in these four years and just started working for a new company one year previously. At the beginning of the interview, she expressed her feeling of working in the new company. 'I really enjoy working here. I can feel the company is full of love. Even though I have pressure to improve my KPI, I really want to make the effort to achieve my goals.' I was really curious about what she meant by 'love', why she had such a strong emotional attachment to the new company and what made Mifei feel there was no 'love' in her last company.

Let me give you an example, my manager (in the last company) did not decide who would be promoted by checking our sales performance. If I sent some small gift to my manager during festivals, and someone else sent him a new iPhone, then the position would not be mine.

In Mifei's last company, sending expensive gifts was a method for employees to engage in personal relationships with their managers. They made use of their personal relationships or connections to be promoted. Their sales performance became less important. Mifei felt dissatisfied with this. The employees' gender also played a role when establishing personal relationships with their managers. Mifei told me an example of her own experience at work.

There was a time when I went to attend a conference with my manager. He sent me messages and asked me if I wanted to come to his room in the hotel at 2:00 in the morning and discuss something about work. I refused his invitation. This kind of thing happened more than three times. He did not force you to do anything. He just gave you a chance. Then you can make your choice. I do not think this is really necessary for me. I can achieve what I want with my own work ability. But I know some of my colleagues are different. Maybe married women do not care (about sex) that much.

For the female employees, having sex with their manager was also a method to engage personal relationships. In this context, sexual harassment in the

workplace was ascribed to the authoritarian system of the organisation. In Mifei's old company, men dominated the high status jobs and they had gendered advantage access to more resources. When female employees and male employees were competing for the same position, gender discrimination became more serious and obvious. Mifei told me she remembered what a male colleague said to her, 'as a woman, do you think it is really necessary to be so tough and compete with men?' In an organisation which adopts a relationship-oriented, rather than a task-oriented management style, masculine domination becomes legitimised in the workplace and women tend to hold subsidiary positions and have limited access to company profits (Liu, 2017). Men performed their masculinity at work by engaging in cruel political struggles and women were excluded from the struggle because of their gender.

The unequal power and labour division and accumulation are supported by sexist discourses. As the dominant group, men justify their superiority by creating hostile attitudes and negative stereotypes about women (Glick and Fiske, 1996, 2001). In the workplace, hostile sexist beliefs promote that men should hold dominant positions and exclude women from power competition (Cikara et al., 2008). In Mifei's old company, her male colleagues held the belief that women were incompetent and sexually manipulative, so women should not be aggressive at work. The workers in a hostile sexist organisation have more tolerant attitudes to the sexual harassment in the workplace (Begany and Milburn, 2002; Russell and Trigg, 2004) Workplace sexual harassment not only decrease women's job satisfaction and finally causes workplace withdraw behaviour, it also affects women physical and mental health and well-being (Willness et al., 2007). Mifei felt depressed in her last company because she was discriminated against and isolated from the competition for higher status because of her gender. She eventually left because of the frustration.

Mifei's last company was based more on the personal relationships built over

food, drink, gifts and sexual entertainment rather than on skills demonstrated at work. This phenomenon not only existed in Mifei's old company. Uretsky (2016) looks at how local businessmen built relationships of trust with government officials through *yingchou* (entertaining clients). They demonstrated their loyalty through engaging in sexual entertainment together with local officials even though the activity was illegal in China. *Yingchou* was also used to build trust relationships among the officials. A society or organisation in which people rise up by engaging in loyal relationships with their leader is a *virtuocracy* (Uretsky, 2016). Engaging in sexual relationships with the leaders was a method for the female employees who wanted to rise up to build trust and loyalty relationships with the leaders. Women were either isolated from political competition because they were regarded as incompetent or engaged in personal relationships with the leaders by having sex with them. Female employees' personal, intellectual capabilities were disregarded, while their worth was equated with their appearance and sexual function.

However, in Mifei's new company, all salesperson's sales performance and salary was open to others. The managers decided who would be promoted according to the sales performance of their subordinates. Even though Mifei needed to compete with others if she wanted to be promoted, she did not need to engage in personal relations with her manager or struggle with her colleagues. The work relation in the new company was more friendly and 'full of love'. In contrast, a society or organisation in which people can rise up by their talents, skills, capability and self-achievement is a *meritocracy* (Young, 2017). Mifei's new company was an organisation with meritocratic characters. In the new company, gender became less important compared with capability and achievement in deciding the increase in salary and promotion of an employee. Sexist discourse was less evidenced compared with the meritocratic principle of the market economy. However, women were still disadvantaged because of their family burden and reproduction responsibilities, the fact of gender inequality was



hidden by the 'equal competition principle' of the market.

Apart from looking for a company with a more democratic, meritocratic and equal organisational culture, the young professionals in my interviews also continued hunting for jobs with higher salaries. Acquiring more economic capital was always one of the reasons which motivated them to change jobs from their hometown to Beijing. In the labour market, a person's labour becomes a quantifiable thing which can be priced. Knowledge becomes an economic asset. Its value in the economy is linked to the outcome it can produce. The traditional concept of professionalism conveys the idea of an autonomous power given to the subject to make decisions in the workplace based on the possession of professional knowledge and skills. However, in neoliberalism, the patterning of power was inserted by market power and established through 'a purchase contract based upon measurable outputs' (Olssen and Peters, 2005, p.325). The professionals lost their autonomy. Higher salaries became the uniform standard to judge their performance and value at work.

Jing had been working in a government office for three years and had a Beijing *hukou*. However, she was not satisfied with her job.

Actually my workload is heavy. I need to be on business trips frequently and work extra hours. However, the salary is comparatively low. The project is funded by the government. However, my salary is not related to how much money we get from government funding, because I can only get a very small amount of money from the funding.

Compared with her classmates who worked for big Internet companies in Beijing, Jing's salary was comparatively low. The big internet companies Jing mentioned are all non-state companies which follow the working of the market. Her projects were all directly funded by the government.

My work is to give policy makers advice based on the data I collect. However, they do not really consider my advice. I want to get a job in an Internet company and really do something which can achieve something with the skills I learnt at university.

Like the young professionals who graduated from the universities outside of Beijing, Jing also wanted to change her job from the state-owned sector to the non-state-owned sector after she acquired a *hukou*. Even though Jing worked in the state sector, she also followed the principle of the labour market and judged the value of the work she had done by the money she earned. So she felt her knowledge and skills were devalued and should be rewarded with a higher salary. A higher salary motivated Jing to leave the government department.

Mingming had been working as a journalist for one year after she graduated from a tier one university in Beijing. When talking about her future career plans, she told me in the next two or three years she would keep working as an entertainment journalist. However, after accumulating more work experience and contacts in the entertainment industry, she would like to find a job as a TV or film producer.

As a new graduate, the salary when working as a journalist is satisfactory. However, the problem is, the money will not increase with the time you work in this industry. Most of my colleagues are young and they will leave after working here for two or three years. I will also look for work opportunities as a producer or releaser in the TV or film industry, which pays much higher.

Mingming and her colleagues changed career from one industry with a comparatively lower salary to a more successful industry with a higher salary. Like Jing, this is also based on similar professional skills and knowledge needed to work in these two organisations or industries.

Even when they were in Beijing, the dismantling of the *danwei* system allowed professionals to freely choose their jobs. Professional women were more willing to work in an organisation with an egalitarian and democratic atmosphere, a fair promotion system and a task-oriented management style. In such an environment, they continued to accumulate more human capital by learning new skills through cooperating with more experienced colleagues, and they increased the value of their skills by pursuing jobs with higher salaries. They were highly responsible for the professional skills and knowledge they had, which was an important aspect of their self-development and self-exploration.

### **Gendered Skills in a Market Economy**

As we can see from the young women's stories, 'skill' is the foundation for new graduates to start a career in Beijing. The accumulation of skills at work enables young professionals to hunt for another job. As an important concept which can decide the migration and career development patterns of young professionals, it is necessary to discuss how they understand the meaning of skill in the context of their stories; how 'skill' distinguishes them from other groups of migrants in Beijing; how it works when choosing a job; and, how it is gendered.

Juanzi had a Masters degree in education and worked as an administrator in a university in Beijing. She grew up in a village and both her parents are peasants. Juanzi shared her opinion on the influence of higher education on young people with me when talking about her experiences of growing up in her village.

There are lots of jobs in our village. They bully girls, play on the street, skip classes, and do not want to spend time and effort on study. Most of my classmates dropped out after they finished middle school. I went to high school and prepared for my college entrance examination and they

went to cities and worked as manual workers...Girls found someone and got married in their early 20s after working for several years. As for boys, perhaps they have to spend their life working as manual workers. I am the first one in my village to be admitted by my university...My marks in high school were always very high. If I failed an exam, the villagers would look down on me. I am now preparing to apply for a PhD in education. I really enjoy doing academic research. I need a job which needs me to think critically and creatively.

Juanzi distinguished herself from the jobs in the village by having an academic degree. For her, a good job was 'a job which needs her to use her head, not only her hands.' It was based on the knowledge accumulation through academic learning and training. Juanzi's parents are peasants. After the 1990s, there is a trend that peasants from villages came to cities for jobs in factories, restaurants, hotels and homes as manual workers. The work is tiring and even harmful to the workers' health. They do not have a high educational background or professional skills when they first come. But they also have their occupational mobility pattern. They aspire to move out of manual labour to a semi-skilled occupation such as 'hair stylist, beautician, baker, travel agent or tailor' (Gaetano, 2015, p.79). For those who attend classes after work and get a college degree, they seek out office work. However, even if the semi-skilled work or office work pays no more than their original manual work, they still choose this mobility. The reason is that manual work is 'stigmatised' and considered to be 'low-level' (Gaetano, 2015). In the workplace, they are not even respected by their clients. In Juanzi's case, even though she already had a Masters degree and worked in an office, she was still not satisfied with her career and tried to pursue a PhD and a teaching and research position in a university. The pursuit of knowledge through education provides strong motivation for her to realise upward social mobility. She separated her work from manual work because it required her to have a Masters degree and skills in education and student management.

The pursuit of knowledge not only enables young professional to move from one class to another, but also motivates them to make choices between different work opportunities in different cities and companies. Aima left her job in a government office and went to Beijing because this was the place where she could find a job which could use and develop her knowledge of music. Qixi also went to Beijing in order to be involved in the industry she was interested in. Her reason for leaving her last job was that ineffective teamwork cooperation did not satisfy her desire for learning through working. Feifei had the experience of working in Shanghai for half a year. However, one of the reasons why she preferred Beijing to Shanghai was she could participate in more free industry conferences and workshops in Beijing. The young professionals not only learn more professional knowledge through receiving higher academic education, like Juanzi, they also have strong desires to learn at work, like Aima and Qixi, and learning by themselves in their spare time, like Feifei. The use of professional skills at work is an important aspect of these young professional's self identity. The pursuit of the exploration of professional knowledge and the development of professional skills provides them with strong motivation and agency at work. The values of knowledge and skills are not the same. In a market economy, the value of knowledge is decided by the market. Conflicts happen when the knowledge and skills they have cannot be sold at a good price or bring money or wealth for them. I will tell the stories of Aima and Xiaohui, both of whom met the conflicts and explored their own ways of dealing with the dilemma.

As a promoter in a music company, Aima told me about the work and life experience of the musicians she cooperated with in Beijing.

The performance we held yesterday actually lost 3,000 *yuan*. Each musician only earned 100 *yuan*, which was enough to take a taxi home in Beijing. For these young musicians, life in Beijing is really difficult. They cannot support themselves if they only rely on the money they earn from performing music. Most of them also have other jobs...The local

musicians in Beijing, can live like this as long as they want. However, for musicians from outside, if they cannot accomplish something, most of them can only stay in Beijing for two or three years.

Then I continued to ask her why were they willing to live like this and how her company survived.

If we (the music companies) do not hold performances, these musicians do not have any opportunities to perform; nobody will know their talents. In the beginning, it is ok for the musicians and companies to lose some money. They really have a faith in music. You must give the musicians some time to accumulate more stage experience. Then their performance will become better and attract more audiences.

The main business of the start-up music company Aima was working for was promoting the young musicians they signed. In the first few years after they started their career in Beijing, they usually lost money because of the high living costs. However, their passion and faith in the music industry provided them with the motivation to try new opportunities and accumulate more experience in such an environment. They also had to keep attracting larger audiences before the economic pressure of living in Beijing became too heavy for them to continue their career. Only when their music brings them enough of an audience would their skills and talent in playing music and their public status as professional musicians be admitted in the labour market.

Xiaohui once worked in a company as a marketing consultant. However, she left that job. Every month, she only spent one week on doing business projects and earning money. The rest of the time she had a plan for writing novels. She learnt creative writing at university and obtained related Bachelors and Masters degrees. We discussed why she made this choice in her career.

It is difficult to make money and support yourself just from writing novels.

So I have to have some skills to make money. In my four years' experience of working in the consultant company, I was always trying to bear up with my work. For me, my working skill on consultant is only a tool to make money. That is all I want from it. However, if I do not write novel, I am not myself...My aim is to publish my novels and find my audiences. I am not trying to write some popular books. So I guess the number of the readers who can really understand and enjoy my works will be very small. This is what I am worrying about now. I am not very sure if my novels can find their 'market' and if this 'market' really exists.

For Xiaohui, because of her educational background and interests, she regarded being a professional writer as an important aspect of her self-identity. For her, writing novels was her work, while doing business projects was only a way to earn some money. However, she also realised the audience for her work was limited and the money she could earn was not enough. The lack of 'market' still challenges her status as a professional writer.

Even though the value of a professional skill is decided by the market, some professionals still chose not to give up their skills and knowledge only in the pursuit of higher profit. This is different from the peasants and migrant workers who are more willing to move out of manual labour and find jobs in other industries (Gaetano, 2015). This is also different from capitalist entrepreneurs who were primarily driven by economic motives (Chen, 2013). Zhou (2004) looks at the rise of the middle class in China. She argues that they pursue success through an ethic of hard work rather than family *guanxi*. Compared with 'family status' (*mendi*), 'nepotism' (*qundai*), 'shady transactions' (*touji quqiao*) or other illegal methods, middle-class men and women emphasise 'individual hard work', 'good education' and 'accumulated cultural capital. Li (2003) suggests that many Chinese people do not think the concept of class is appropriate for Chinese society. The consciousness of the Chinese middle class is still in formation. The new generation of professionals shares the value of pursuing self-development and self-achievement at work and strong attachments with the professional skills

they have, which is an important characteristic of the middle class in China. In the market economy, which is dominated by hard-driven and profit-centred hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Pearse, 2015), professional women like Aima and Xiaohui distanced themselves and resisted the hegemonic masculinity by sticking to their professions, which constitutes an important characteristic of middle-class identity of well-educated women in Beijing.

However, gender also works through gender segregation in the workplace and in the labour market. One key mechanism in legitimising the gender segregation was through naturalisation of gender. As a women writer, Xiaohui talked about how her gender influenced her work. She gave me a good example by explaining the existence of women's literature as an independent literary genre.

A male writer once told me a story about his experience of doing research for his new writing project. He needed to write a story on the lives of people living on a boat. So, he asked a boatman if he could stay on the boat with him for several days. The boatman agreed. But he told the male writer that only men could stay. They do not accept women on the boat, which means that as a female writer, I do not have the chance to write something about staying on a boat. That is the difference. Women cannot write some life experiences because of social and cultural constraints. Women's literature can be an independent literary genre because of the female perspectives in it. It is a critical perspective. All the histories are about men's stories. Women always keep silent. The existence of women's literature can shake the dominant role of men's values and ideas in the history. So when I am writing, I am aware of my gender identity.

A writer's work is based on their daily life experiences. Women's and men's life experiences are differentiated because of their gendered expectations. As a writer, the professional skills of Xiaohui are different from male writers. 'Male writers are expected to write something on wars or detective stories, because men are thought to be more aggressive and logical. Female writers are expected to write love stories, because they are thought to be more emotional.' In the context of



China, publishers and readers all share these expectations. However, in the UK and USA, there are many successful female detective story writers. In China, man is constructed as being naturally logical and better at writing detective stories than woman. A biological determinist understanding of gender naturalised men's logical superiority over women.

Research shows that men are given higher expectation for masculine jobs and women are more preferred for feminine jobs (Davison and Burke, 2000; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Heilman, 1983). In my research, I identified different ways women's gender is related to their work. Xiaohui worked as a consultant on fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) in a foreign company before she left her job. In the company, the majority of employees were female. 'Men are much fewer than women, and women are also more capable and more likely to be promoted.' The main task of Xiaohui's last job was interviewing consumers and writing reports on their needs on FMCG products. Because the majority of daily goods consumers are women, they are responsible for purchasing FMCG products for the family. In this sense, as 'insiders', female interviewers have better understanding of the behaviours and ideas of their interviewees compared with men. Female interviewers are thought to be better at doing interviews. 'Women are better at communicating. We tell some jokes and make each other feel more relaxed, just like chatting. It is not easy for men to create rapport and chat like that. So women have more advantage.' The essentializing discourse within which women are seen as better at listening, asking and understanding compared with men is related to women's expected sexual division of labour as caregivers and their responsibility for doing emotional work in the family. They are expected to care more about other people's opinions and feelings than men. As an extension of their family roles, women enjoyed more of an advantage in doing interviews and understanding consumers' opinions about FMCG products.

In Xiaohui's case, because of the labour division and women's responsibility for

purchasing daily goods for the family, their behaviour pattern, values and opinions have a significant impact on the market. Women's role as major daily goods consumers opens up more work opportunities. Their opinions are expressed because of the development of the market economy in China. Women's skills used in the domestic sphere extend to the public sector. They are thought to be good at doing work in the FMCG industry. Xiaohui told me the men in her company were 'too shy or too direct when talking to a women consumer during the interview. Most of the male workers left because they were less likely to be promoted.' Men's inferior performance compared with women was naturalised in the FMCG consulting industry. However, men deal with the naturalised gender discrimination in the organisation by looking for other work opportunities, which reinforces the segregation.

A similar situation happened in the life insurance industry and entertainment and fashion industry in my interviews. As an insurance sales woman, Mifei told me saleswomen can better understand the importance of welfare for children's safety, women's health and family financial management, because it was the woman who took care of family health and managed the money in the family. She also felt she had the advantage in communicating with potential customers. In Anne's media company, more female journalists worked in the departments of entertainment and fashion, because women were thought to be more interested in entertainment programmes and fashion products and more male journalists worked in the politics department. As main consumers and producers, the participation of women in the market economy makes their voices heard and skills acknowledged. In this way, women were empowered in the reform era.

However, women are thought to be less good at doing jobs which are in conflict with traditional femininity and women's division of labour in the family. Qiu had a Masters degree in Civil Engineering. She had been working in a state-owned construction company for two years. The young engineers would be sent out to

overseas sites for construction projects. However, usually, only male engineers would be sent out. The experience accumulated by doing overseas projects benefited the young engineers' professional skills. The men had more advantages because of that. Qiu explained why more male engineers were sent out.

Almost all the overseas sites are in third world countries and public security cannot be guaranteed. In some countries in Africa, even riots happen. So it is dangerous...The living conditions are very poor. So, if we need to buy basic daily goods, we have to go together and drive a long way to get to the nearest supermarket...My work at the site includes climbing up high buildings. Even though we have methods to protect our safety, it is still very tiring and scary. The manager does not want female engineers to do that.

The working conditions of the site were described as dangerous, hard and tiring. In such environment, the managers did not let her do dangerous and tiring work. Qiu's male colleagues also wanted to 'take care of her'. 'This is when my male colleagues show their masculinity. They do not let me do any dirty work. They often send me some daily goods as small gifts, such as mosquito repellent.' As a female engineer, Qiu was regarded as delicate and timorous by her managers and colleagues. Even though she was glad to be protected, she also lost some opportunities to accumulate more work experience and improve her professional skills. In this sense, in a dangerous, hard and tiring work environment, female professionals symbolise a feminine image of being delicate and timorous, which is constructed discursively through their interaction with their male colleagues and managers. This is in contrast with the symbolic image of 'iron girl' and gender equality discourse of the Mao era. Women were mobilised to participate in heavy industry and they were proud to do manual work which was the same as male workers. However, in Qiu's case, women are regarded as naturally and biologically weak.

Regarding female colleagues as weak and needing protection is also a form of sexism. Unlike hostile sexism, benevolent sexism refers to ‘a subjectively favourable, chivalrous ideology that offers protection and affection to women who embrace conventional roles’ (Glick and Fiske, 2001, p.109). Compared with hostile sexism which has direct negative consequences for women’s access to higher status, benevolent sexism’s negative consequences are indirect. It prevents women from accessing more challenging assignments, valuable positions and receiving critical development feedback (King et al., 2012; Vescio et al., 2005), which causes women to perform worse compared with men. Hostile and benevolent sexism goes hand-in-hand (Glick and Fiske, 1996, 2001). In Qiu’s company, women engineers had fewer opportunities compared with men to practice their professional skills on construction sites. Even when Qiu finally had an opportunity to go overseas, most of her time was spent on doing paperwork in the office, professional work at the site was left to the male engineers. The sexual division of labour in the company was obvious. Women had fewer opportunities to access overseas practice and promotion.

However, Qiu still displayed agency in the workplace. Qiu took a chance to go to the overseas site because of her good English language skills. At the site, she was also responsible for maintaining public relations with the company’s clients. Every time Qiu’s managers needed to have a casual dinner with the company’s clients, they asked Qiu and another female engineer to come with them. They were the only two female workers at the site. During the dinner, both men and women needed to drink wine. But women were not required to drink as much as men. ‘The dinner was for maintaining good relationships, not for business, so we drank wine in order to be friendly and show our respect.’ Their male managers invited them to the dinner for ‘stimulating atmosphere’. Qiu had the chance to have dinner with the managers because of her gender. It was grounded in an objectification of women (Langton, 2009), but Qiu did not feel uncomfortable about the dinner.

Women have different attitudes on this kind of things. For me, they are only a good opportunity for me to leave a good impression on my managers. Compared with the male engineers who do not have a chance to have dinner with their managers, I feel this is an advantage my gender brings me.

Qiu used it as a strategy to develop a good relationship with her superior and make her voice heard in the male-dominated environment. She cooperated with the dominant masculinity in her company and benefitted from the cooperation. For her, the most important thing was not doing labour-intensive work at the site, it was more crucial to learn something from the experiences and improve her work ability, which included learning how to socialise with clients and managers.

In addition to this, women are also excluded from industries which require its employees to work overtime and travel a lot. Kailin had been working in a state-owned bank for 7 years. She was planning to change a job when I interviewed her. She was in her 30s and planning to have her first child. When talking about her career plan, we discussed the gender segregation in the finance industry. Kailin felt working in a state-owned bank was not challenging enough for her and the salary was not satisfactory. A friend of hers recommended a position in an online finance company. However, considering her plan of wanting a baby, she rejected the offer.

My friend said the company required her to work overtime very often on weekdays. Sometimes, employees needed to work at weekends. They do not really have time to take care of their families. My friend said if I was planning to get pregnant and needed to have more time to take care of a family, then this work was not suitable for me...Most of the employees in that online finance company are male. For them, it is ok if they get paid higher for working overtime. But for women, if they need to get back home very late at night everyday, they are not really willing to do the job. So more and more women leave, and the men stay.

Working overtime left people less time to be with their families. This is in conflict with women's role as family caregivers. Even though the work is highly paid, women are less likely to take it. Apart from this, working overtime very often also caused health problems for pregnant women.

The workload of the head office of our bank is much heavier and employees very often need to work overtime. Last year, of the 200 employees, 6 pregnant women suffered a miscarriage. The managers also felt pressure because of that. So they prefer men to women when recruiting new employees.

Young women's domestic role of giving birth to children and taking care of families excludes them from jobs which required employees to work overtime. In contrast, newly married men have a heavier responsibility of supporting their families financially. So they are more willing to take highly paid jobs regardless of the heavy workload. Kailin still wanted to find a job in a more challenging environment. Her plan was to quit after she gave birth to her first child and ask her parents to help to take care of the baby, so she could concentrate on her work. 'I am a woman with ambition.' said Kailin. In a highly hard-driven and profit-centred working environment, Kailin chose to adopt a masculinised working pattern (Connell and Pearse, 2015), working long hours, improving work efficiency and focusing on profits in order to prove skills and work abilities. In a masculinised work environment, Kailin also cooperated with the hegemonic masculinity in the workplace and acquired a sense of self-achievement. However, Kailin and Qiu cooperated with workplace hegemonic masculinity in different ways, Kailin adopted a masculinised working pattern, while Qiu benefited from accommodating to men's interests and desires.

## Summary

In this chapter, I focused on the career development of migrant women in Beijing. Migrating to Beijing and working in non-state sectors was not regarded as a good choice for women by the parental generation. For the new generation of well-educated young women, it was more important for them to ‘make an effort on their own’, instead of relying on the distribution of the state. They aspired to a ‘good job’ which could develop their professional skills and help them to achieve middle-class status. By migrating to Beijing, they broke through a patrilineal-patrilocal family and labour market institution. They acquired higher economic capital by having a job with a higher salary compared to their hometown. They also accumulated social capital of their own by participating in networking activities instead of relying on their parents’ *guanxi*. Well-educated women empowered themselves in the labour market in Beijing.

It was clear that gender inequality still existed in companies and institutions in Beijing. The workplace was more dominated by hard-driven and profit-centred hegemonic masculinity, which followed the meritocratic principle of the market. Even though sometimes gender inequality was hidden, it still worked through the naturalisation of gender. Women were expected to be naturally good at a job because the skills and capacity required in the work were suited to a woman’s family role as main caregiver. The professional women found their own positions by resisting or cooperating with the hegemonic masculinity at work. They resisted the workplace hegemonic masculinity by sticking to their professions and rejecting giving up their profession by taking a job with a higher salary. There were also women who cooperated with the hegemonic masculinity by adopting a masculinised work pattern or accommodating to men’s interests and desires in order to pursue higher position in the company.

Rofel (2007) witnesses a historically specific self-conscious enthusiasm for the search for a novel cosmopolitan subjectivity. Working is one of the measures for pursuing personal freedom. The regulation and management of subjects actually happens through freedom (Hoffman, 2008). These young, well-educated women were highly responsible for their self-development and became 'professional subjects' by expanding networks, learning new skills through cooperating with more experienced colleagues, working hard, accumulating more professional knowledge and skills and looking for jobs with a higher salary. They were important resources which were needed for the state to develop the new economy. The state's neoliberal strategy of governing through freedom transformed professionals to become 'desiring subjects'. In the next chapter, I will look at the personal life of the professional young women and see how professional career development is related to their intimate relationships.



## CHAPTER FOUR NEGOTIATING THE MEANING OF SEX, INTIMACY

### AND MARRIAGE: Young Migrant Women's Premarital Personal Life in

#### Beijing

My first time having sex was with my ex-boyfriend in university. I did not need him to protect me or be responsible for me and I did not really like him that much. My thought was, both of us were adults, we could make the decision on this kind of things ourselves. We could have sex as long as both of us enjoyed it. I never thought about marrying him. University life was boring. I only needed a man to be with me. My parents knew about that and they gave me advice on contraception...I met my current boyfriend online. He works as a manager in a small company. I really enjoyed dating him because he is a very social person. He took me to meet his friends working in different industries. I felt it was funny to hear them talking about their stories. We only meet once a week. The rest of the time, we have different lives and social circles. A good relationship should make me feel comfortable and relaxed. If you have to deal with lots of conflict or feel lots of pressure in a relationship, you should give it up...When I am with a man, I would not consider if he was a partner I should marry. I am more interested in if we have fun with each other. I do not want to consider marriage. It is not about the man I meet. It's about myself. I hope I can explore more about what my life could be like, such as my career and what type of man I enjoy being with. This is what I am thinking at this stage. Maybe things will change when I'm 30 years old. Most girls want to get married and have a child as early as possible after they graduate. But girls like me also exist.

Liyuan told me about her experience and opinions on premarital sex, her expectations of a good intimate relationship and her thoughts on marriage. She used 'having fun' and 'self-exploration' instead of 'falling in love' or 'considering marriage' to explain her premarital sexual and romantic relationships. She did not consider whether her boyfriend was a partner she

would like to marry, nor did she reject the possibility of marrying him. During the interview, Liuyuan frequently told me that girls like her were in the minority. However, she did not feel anxious or depressed to be in the exception. Liuyuan is not the only woman who was reflective on the prevailing ideas on marriage.

Even though marriage is still a central social institution in Chinese society, sexual and romantic relationships are detaching from marriage. Young people usually date more than one partner before marriage (Li, 1998). Compared with the 1980s when marriage was usually accepted as the end point of a romantic relationship, breaking up has become more widely accepted since the 1990s (Farrer, 2014). Access to abortion and contraception methods gives young people more freedom to enter or exit a sexual or romantic relationship (Qian, Tang and Garner, 2004). In this sense, there is a period of life when young people are involved in informal romantic relationships and casual sexual relationships. They may have different expectations of a relationship. The delinking of sexual relationships from marriage increases the uncertainty in young people's intimate relationships. In this sense, before talking about the young women's post-marital life, it is necessary to discuss their stories about their sexual and romantic relationships before entering into marriage. This chapter focuses on discussing how young middle-class women interpret sex, romantic relationships and marriage in relation to the wider social and cultural conditions of their migrant life in Beijing.

### **Managing Sexual Desires in a Market Economy**

In the history of modern and contemporary China, the meaning of sexual feelings has transformed over time in public discourses. In late imperial China, sexuality was defined under the couple's duty of carrying on the family line. Marriages

were arranged by parents (Sommer, 2000). Young people should not be involved in any premarital interaction. In the May 4<sup>th</sup> era, the 'free love' discourse was popular among well-educated urban young people. Sexual feelings represented an individualistic spirit of rebellion against a feudal patriarchal system (Farrer, 2002). Young people were encouraged to make their own decisions on choosing their lovers and marriage partners based on their feelings. In socialist China, sexuality and procreation were strictly controlled by the central state and incorporated into the planned economy (Dikotter, 1995; Edward, 2000; Evans, 1997). Sexual feelings in this era were negatively contrasted with the sense of social duty in socialist China. Premarital sex was not accepted and the government promoted premarital sexual abstinence among young people. Encouraged by the Chinese Marriage Law of 1950, young people had the freedom to choose marriage partners themselves through dating (Xu and Whyte, 1990).

In the post-Cultural Revolution era, intellectuals began to criticise the revolution and the class conflict discourse. Maoism was portrayed as having repressed human nature. People were encouraged to explore other identities as human beings apart from their class identity, for example, their gender identities. Sexual desires were described as part of human nature and came back into public discourses (Rofel, 2007). Borrowing from foreign ideas (Altman, 2004), young people in urban China created a new sexual culture oriented to the free market (Farrer, 2002). The change in women's role in the capitalist labour market and the less predictable future of a potential partner allowed young women to be more willing to engage in short-term relationships and have more freedom to withhold commitment. Premarital sex was more frequently seen as an acceptable practice (Farrer et al., 2012; Jeffrey, 2015; Li, 1998; Parish et al., 2007; Zheng et al., 2011). Apart from the permission of the law and the development of the market economy, the changes in sex culture were also brought about by an extended single life and the delay of marriage (Pan, 2006). However, in

mainstream public discourses, it is only permitted for those who are seriously involved in an intimate relationship which must be solid and stable, devoted to a common future and with the intention to marry (Farrer et al., 2012). Instead of emphasising individual desire or pleasure, sex is understood as natural and based on a biological urge (Zarafonetis, 2017). These public discourses influenced my participants' ideas about sex and premarital intimate relationships.

Lili's love story started with an encounter in a café near her work place. She still looked very excited when she shared the experience of meeting her girlfriend two months previously. I asked her why she noticed the girl and why she felt the girl was attractive at that moment. She described her feeling to me.

She definitely was a lesbian. It was obvious. I felt she had a special disposition, a specific taste... It seemed that she was really nice and we had a lot to share and talk about. Then I worked up the courage to say 'hi' and give her my Wechat number.

For Lili, the girl's 'special disposition' gave her strong motivation and courage to have further interaction with her. She later defined the feeling as 'attraction', which was her criterion to judge if she 'likes' and is willing to develop the 'feelings' (*ganqing*) for someone. I asked her if she was attracted because of the girl's identity as a lesbian. She explained that the feeling itself was more important than the person's sexual orientation. 'Our gender identity should not limit who we have feelings for. Even for heterosexual people, the principle should be same.' Lili is still exploring her sexual orientation. She said it was still possible for her to have feelings for a man. It is all up to the 'special disposition' of the person.

Lili is not the only one who regards 'the attraction of disposition' as the foundation of developing an intimate relationship. When Mifei described her

experience with a man she was interested in, she also described ‘the moment’ she was attracted to him.

That was a time when he was drunk and I sent him back home. I took care of him at his place, and he lay on his bed, looking at me in silence. It was dark in his bedroom, but there was some light so I could see his face. The look in his eyes was so chaste. At that moment, I realised that I really liked him. Since then, we chatted very often on Wechat. His elegant and gentle disposition was attractive to me.

For Mifei, the moment of attraction is also related to a detailed description of the disposition of another person’s appearance. ‘When I said the man is attractive, I mean, it is a feeling that I want to kiss him.’ The physical intimacy, which includes sexual desire and desire for other forms of interaction, is motivated by the feeling of being attracted. For Lili and Mifei, the feeling of ‘liking’ brings them physical pleasure, it is aesthetic and the intimate relationships developed following the ‘moment of attraction’ is based on this motivation. Both of them used ‘pure’ and ‘human nature’ to describe this aesthetic motivation.

However, the aesthetic and sexual desire motivated by the body of the person they like is not only physical, it is also cultural. Mifei used ‘special disposition’ instead of ‘appearance’ to describe the reason why they were attracted. She used ‘elegant and gentle’ to describe the man’s disposition, which is related to the man’s taste in possessions and his personality. In the later interview, she mentioned his Hermes belt and skin care products when telling her stories about the man. His luxuries left a deep impression on her and became the symbols which represented him. Chenzi worked as a management consultant in a foreign company. When talking about her private life, she also regards the appearance of men as an important criterion when choosing a boyfriend. She complained about the terrible taste some men have in clothes. The style and brand of clothes can distinguish one man from others. Bao developed the idea of judging men’s taste

in clothes. She worked as a human resource manager in a foreign company in Beijing Central Business District. She told me the women working in the Beijing Central Business District would not date men working in the Zhongguancun district, a district in which was located large numbers of privately-owned Chinese companies, especially high technology industries. The dress code for Beijing Central Business District foreign companies is more formal, while employees in private companies can wear casual clothes to work. Even though their salaries are similar, employees working for foreign companies spend more money on purchasing luxuries and care more about their looks and taste in consumer goods. Because of the district and the character of the companies they work for, the young professionals are separated into different social groups according to their different cultural tastes.

Professional women were attracted by men with particular tastes and cultivation. Hird (2009) argues that white-collar men in Beijing reshaped existing notions of Chinese masculinity. They started pursuing consumerist goals and paying more attention to their appearance and bodily hygiene. More money was spent on attractive clothing and brands. They also cared more about personal habits and having a sophisticated demeanour, such as eating and drinking healthily and being gentle to women. Embracing a 'hedonist' lifestyle of big city eating, drinking, bars, cafés and beauty salons was also part of their self-construction project. The metrosexual is a product of consumer capitalism. Professional middle-class men separate themselves from less cultivated or poorly educated men. The ideal partner that these middle-class women found physically attractive was still the white-collar men who paid attention to personal appearance, personal habits and had a sophisticated demeanour.

In this sense, middle class women's sexual desires and aesthetic tastes are highly classed. Johnson and Lawler (2005) argue that our love relationships are structured by social class. Our decisions about accepting a love partner are made

on the basis of surface signifiers such as clothing, hairstyle, ways of eating and drinking and ways of taking up physical space' (Johnson and Lawler, 2005, p 2). Knowing what to wear, where to go, and how to eat and drink not only reflects the cultural capital we own, but is also an indicator of our economic and social capital. Our body actually expresses the true 'nature' of the 'person' (Bourdieu, 2001). We all feel more comfortable with someone who shares 'habitus compatibility' with us, such as similar tastes and a similar temperament. Lili and her girlfriend met in a café bar they both liked. Their similar tastes in urban space provided them with a chance to meet. Mifei and Chenzi cared more about men's tastes in clothing. Even though the desire aroused was physical, they were all looking for a love partner who shared their urban middle-class outlook. Therefore, we can also apply the theory in a non-Western context. Lili, Mifei and Chenzi's sexual desire and aesthetic taste in men was structured by their social position. They were sexually attracted to professional men who shared similar tastes.

Lili, Mifei, Chenzi and Bao emphasised the significance of physical attraction in an intimate relationship. It is aesthetic and motivates sexual desire, as well as the desire to be more intimate and develop communication and feelings with each other. By contrast, through emphasising the aesthetic meaning of an intimate relationship, they criticised the idea of engaging in intimate relationships based on pragmatic and material reasons. In Lili's story, there was a time when she had a quarrel with her girlfriend because they had different opinions about their intimate relationship.

She said she started to like me after we were together. I did not really understand why. Because I think we should have liked each other before we decided to start a relationship. So, at that time, I doubted that her motivation was pure. Maybe she thought I could satisfy her demands, or our conditions matched well. I was a little upset that time.

From Lili's explanation, we can see that she regards 'mutual attraction' as a motivation which is in contrast to 'demands and conditions'. Mifei told me her experience of dating a man she liked. Both Mifei and the man were in relationships with someone else, while Mifei was not satisfied with her relationship. They dated several times and she was 'crazy for him'. However, when the man asked Mifei to have sex with him, she rejected him. 'Maybe I felt it would be my loss if I had sex with him. He had a girlfriend at that time. Even though I really liked him, the feeling was not pure enough. Maybe that was the weakness of human nature.' Mifei emphasized the purity of sexual desire and the aesthetic pleasure in an intimate relationship. However, when considering the external form of it, such as the public status of being 'girlfriend' and 'boyfriend', she experienced conflicting feelings. On the one hand, she was attracted to this man, so that she really wanted to have sex with him. On the other hand, she felt she should not take this action because he had not broken up with his girlfriend, so she worried that they could not develop a formal couple relationship. She felt she cared more about the status of being his girlfriend than simply having sex with him. She criticised her motivation for the man as being not 'pure' enough.

Lili and Mifei felt ambivalent and frustrated when involved in a relationship influenced by pragmatic and material factors, such as demands, conditions and the public status of a relationship. This is in contrast with the situation of having sex with someone for pragmatic and material reasons. Luqi told me a story about a friend from the same village as her.

She met her husband online. When they first met, the man had a wife and a child and my friend knew all about it. They still dated and had sex. Then my friend got pregnant, and the man divorced his wife and got married to her.

After telling me about the story, Luqi made some comments on it.



If you saw the photograph of her husband, you know that they really do not match. He is 10 years older than her. However, the man has a house, a car and Beijing *hukou* and he offered my friend a job in his company...Girls like my friend are very common in Beijing. Even though they have some skills and graduated from colleges or universities, they just do not want to make an effort on their own through working. The reason why they come to Beijing is very simple. They want to find someone who already has everything and married him...The ways they get to know these rich men are very limited, so they have to use the Internet. When meeting a guy with good conditions, they would try to maintain a stable and long-term relationship with them, such as through getting pregnant.

Luqi told me about the story of girls who intended to marry up in Beijing. They gave up sexual and aesthetic pleasure in exchange for pragmatic and material benefits in their relationships. Pretty migrant women are not passively consumed by the men who have more economic and social power. They use their attraction as a strategy to 'marry up'. In the Chinese tradition, husbands are expected to have a better educational background and higher social and economic status than their wives (Fincher, 2016; Ji et al., 1985; To, 2015; Yang, 1994). A women's well being depends on her marriage and husbands' social status. Women are expected to move and join their husband's families after marriage (Wang and Hu, 1996). In villages, rural women in disadvantaged positions not only interpret marriage as a life event, 'but as an alternative to their limited social and economic mobility' (Fan and Huang, 1998, p.246). For the migrant women, marriage is a means of achieving mobility. These migrant women not only respond to marriage passively, they are active agents. Through marrying men who are locationally privileged, disadvantaged women pursue migration by marrying into more developed regions, in exchange for economic opportunities. The same as the village women, the gold-digging girls in Luqi's story also regarded marriage as a strategy for seeking to migrate. Through migrating to men who

already had Beijing *hukou*, private apartments and cars, the women could benefit from the marriage and enjoy the same social welfare as local people in Beijing. However, unlike the village girls who did not have the skills to find work in the industrial sectors in urban areas and add labour resources to their husband's family, the women who intended to marry up in Beijing were well-educated and had professional jobs in companies. Luqi's friend did not give up her career after she married, she also benefitted from the marriage by having a better job in her husband's company. Her marriage also helped her to promote her social status in the public sphere.

The meaning of sexual attraction in intimate relationships is ambiguous for the youth in Beijing, which made the decision of engaging in sexual relationships full of risks. Mifei experienced several romantic encounters. After dating with several men she was interested in for several times, the men lost contact with her and disappeared from her life. Even though she enjoyed the process of flirting and having intimate encounters with them, she still suffered from the end of the relationship emotionally.

There were several times when they did not want to continue the relationship with me, and there were times when I did not want to develop a more serious relationship. But no matter what the reasons, I felt the woman suffered more.

Luqi also told stories about other pretty girls who did not end up marrying rich men. Even though they tried to be involved in a sexual relationship with men who had a higher social status, not all rich men wanted to develop a serious relationship leading to marriage.

If things really do not work out, then you really need to think about why. There are a lot of people who are just playing. They do not force you to do anything you do not want to. Then everyone can just be responsible for

themselves. That is it.

The meaning of a sexual relationship is defined and negotiated by people who are involved in the relationships. The risk of becoming pregnant without ‘marrying up’, and the risk of suffering from disappointment and frustration because of the failure to start a serious intimate relationship based on mutual attraction hurts those young migrant women physically and emotionally.

In order to cope with the risks, young women in Beijing have to use several strategies. Mifei used *yuanfen* to explain the uncertainty of a relationship. *Yuanfen* is a term commonly used in Chinese romantic talk. It means that what happens between two people is fated or destined. It is predetermined, cannot be explained or achieved through effort (Farrer, 2002). Mifei left the development of relationships to *yuanfen*, which made room for choices being made freely by the other party in the relationship.

The important thing is that you need to enjoy the process. As for the result of the relationship, it depends on *yuanfen*. You can’t make an effort to achieve anything on purpose. You need be relaxed. Then things will happen as they should.

For the young people who engage in relationships for pragmatic and material reasons, the process itself is more result-oriented. Luqi told me a story about her neighbour who was from Inner Mongolia. There was a time when he met a girl using Wechat. He brought her back and they had sex. Luqi only saw the girl once. Then she asked her neighbour why he did not continue dating the girl.

He said the girl was from Anhui Province, and he was from Mongolia Province, so he thought the relationship would not work out...People (migrants) really do not want to spend too much time on this (intimate relationships). If they meet someone who matches well, then it is ok to try to date for a longer period of time. If in this process, someone finds there

are some points which do not match well. Then, you do not contact me, and I will not continue to contact you. People stop talking to each other. Then that is it. We are all adults. We know what we should be responsible for and what we should not be responsible for.

As a mega city in which there are young migrants from different provinces, Beijing provides more opportunities for them to meet potential partners. People use the Internet or public spaces to meet strangers, flirt, getting to know each other, and engage in short or long-term relationships. However, they also need to negotiate with the other person who is involved in the relationship on the meaning of it. Maintaining contact with each other is the only way to prove the continuity of the relationship. When someone finds she or he cannot get what she or he wants from a relationship, it will end with them losing contact with each other and disappearing from each other's lives. When more choices are provided, less effort is made in trying to understand and get to know each other or solve conflicts in the relationships. It is easy to give up a disappointing relationship and try to start a new one as soon as possible. Flirting, sex, and short-term relationships are free from mutual responsibilities, commitments and external forms.

The idea that sexuality is seen as part of human nature is popular among the migrant women in Beijing. It comes from the intellectual's critique of Mao's class conflict discourse in the 1980s (Rofel, 2007). However, some young people have forgotten about the Cultural Revolution's history and use this to criticise people who want to be in a relationship for pragmatic or material reasons. They not only regard sex as something which is based on biological needs, but also see it as something to enjoy and pursue. In Farrer's discussion of the changing sexual culture in Shanghai, he states that 'romantic feeling has come to represent the authentic human value opposed to the worship of money, but also endangered by it.' (Farrer, 2002, p. 195) For women who want to marry up, sexual attraction is

used in exchange for pragmatic benefits in the relationship. In Lili's and Mifei's opinion, they were immoral and their relationships were not pure. However, Luqi had a more neutral attitude towards gold digging girls in Beijing. For Luqi, they are successful if their strategy works in the relationships and marriages they want. Moral standards on sexuality were diversified.

### **Looking for a Man with a Sense of Responsibility**

Men's 'responsibility' is a concept which is important in couple relationships in China. It is tied to women's 'chastity', especially when the woman is still a virgin (Farrer et al., 2012). Being the first (and only) person to have sex with a woman is regarded as a valuable gift for her beloved partner. The concept was also frequently mentioned in interviews when the young women were considering marriage. Men's responsibility is not only tied to women's premarital sexual experience, it also decides if the informal romantic relationship can develop into stable couple relationship or even marriage. Yuzi was in her late 20s and about to marry her fiancé when I interviewed her. She was a full time student doing a PhD in a university in Beijing. She recalled her memories of dating her fiancé and shared her opinion on how she thought of marriage.

I was already 26 years old when I met him. We had to deal with the troubles we met when living in Beijing, like making plans to buy a house together. In this process, I found I really liked his character. He has a very strong sense of responsibility and he tries really hard to solve problems and fight for a better life for us.

Apart from the sense of responsibility and the character of her fiancé, Yuzi also considers their other conditions.

His income is enough for us to live a decent life in Beijing. He likes my

high educational background. He thinks it is important to have someone who is very well-educated in a family. Then the children can be promising. His job needs him to travel a lot, and it is a good thing if I can be stable, even without earning that much of money. We really match well.

Both Yuze and her fiancé were looking for a qualified life partner. They made important decisions and considered their benefits as a whole. In the dating process, they rehearsed their gendered roles in a future marriage and performed duties, such as buying a house in Beijing, making plans for the contribution of wealth to the family, the division of domestic labour, and considering the education of their future children. The two parties of the couple are connected by a sense of responsibility for each other. When Yuze said her fiancé has a strong sense of responsibility, it is not only his responsibility for Yuze herself, it is more about responsibility for the family, which also includes their future children. In this form of relationship, the sense of mutual responsibility later transforms into an emotional attachment to each other, which sustains their intimate relationship. When asked about Yuze's past emotional experiences, she shared her opinions on the differences between dating someone and looking for a marriage partner.

I never thought of marriage when I was in my previous two relationships. Their (family) conditions are both very similar to mine. My fiancé's family background is worse. There is a saying, poor children early masters. So he is much more mature than I am...I think if you like someone, it is more about physical attraction. You can fall in love in a very short period of time. However, for my fiancé, his appearance is not that attractive to me. Instead, we get along well and feel comfortable being together. He is really a good choice to marry.

Like the 'gold-digging girls', the girls who want to find a marriage partner also engage in relationships for pragmatic reasons and downplay the value of physical attraction. The difference is that 'gold-digging girls' only emphasise the men's suitable material situation and look forward to marrying up, while women who

want to find a marriage partner emphasise the men's sense of responsibility and their capacity to support a family. It is marriage-oriented and procreation-oriented. Accordingly, sexuality is not for pleasure for these women, it is more about procreation. However, when sexuality is separated from pleasure, and the value of pleasure is downplayed in marriage-oriented intimate relationship, pleasure-oriented sex outside of the relationship can be tolerated to some extent.

Yuxin was 24 years old and had been working as a business consultant for two years when I interviewed her. She met her boyfriend through matchmaking. After dating for half a year, she thought they really matched well. However, they had a conflict because her boyfriend lied about his past emotional experience. 'He lied about the number of ex-girlfriends. So I felt I did not really trust him.' However, she still wanted to be with him because 'he took care of everything very well and had a sense of responsibility'. I was confused about why she still felt the man had a strong sense of responsibility while they had trust issues. Then she shared her opinions on men's sexual relationships outside of intimate couple relationships or marriage.

Almost all of my male friends have cheated on their girlfriends or wife. Sometimes it was a one-time thing; sometimes it developed into a short-term relationship. It is not a shock for me now. There were also married men who wanted to play with me. They were attractive and rich. I believe there are some young women who want to play with them too. They will not force you. It is totally your choice...One of my friends said she can tolerate this as long as her husband was good to her, willing to spend money on her, and take care of her well. Even though up to now, I do not trust my boyfriend, I can still accept him.

In Yuxin's story, her boyfriend's sense of responsibility for her and the family can be separated from mutual confession, trust and loyalty. The couple leaves each other's secrets alone as long as they can perform their gendered roles well in the

relationship. The research shows that in China, men's extramarital sexual relationships are more approved of compared with women's infidelity (Parish, Laumann and Mojola, 2007). The 2011 interpretation of Marriage Law ignored extramarital sexuality. Extramarital sexual relationship is regarded as illicit, and the Law only deals with the issues on marriage relationship. Infidelity was only regarded as an emotional not legal issue, and the party-state 'increasingly delinks marriage and sexuality' (Davis, 2014, p.53). With the lack of mutual trust, the couple develops a sense of partnership in their relationship. In Yuxin's description, she used 'suitable' and 'right person' to describe her boyfriend, instead of any words which expresses emotional attachment, such as 'love'. However, faced with the uncertainty and risks brought by the lack of mutual confessions and trust, Yuxin does not simply accept the situation passively. She also has a strategy to sustain the couple relationship. For her, 'it is also the women's problem if their men cheat on them and find somebody else'.

You cannot keep your man if you cannot take good care of your family. If I treat him well, cook well and keep the house clean and neat, and we have our children, then home is the warmest place for the man. He cannot live without you. Even though he has an affair outside of our relationship, he will still come back to you someday.

Yuxin planned to 'keep her man' by playing her role as a qualified conventional girlfriend or wife in the couple relationship, by performing her 'duty' of doing the housework and the emotional work for her family well. This is also explained by mutual responsibility and a sense of partnership in this form of intimate relationship. If a man can also perform his 'duty' of being the main family provider, then the couple relationship can still be sustained even without mutual confessions and close emotional attachments. The extreme pragmatic couple relationship suggests clear sexual division roles, which reinforces the patriarchal system. However, the research on extramarital relationships in China shows that Chinese men can resort to extramarital relationships in order to have more



autonomy, a sense of recognition and achievement or simply some romantic feelings (Ho, 2012). In this sense, being a responsible husband does not preclude extramarital relationships. Yuxin's tolerance towards her boyfriend's dishonesty and her male friends' extramarital affairs explains how women play a role in constructing Chinese hegemonic masculinity.

Man's sense of responsibility does not only mean he 'is good to' his family, it also means he should have the capability to provide his family enough wealth through having stable income and pursuing high social status. A man's earning capacity and entrepreneurial spirit is central to the construction of contemporary Chinese masculinity (Hird, 2016; Zheng, 2012). This form of hegemonic masculinity is the product of a marketised economy (Ho, Jackson and Lam, 2018). Anne was in a relationship with a man who met difficulties in his career. In the interview, she complained about her boyfriend's career issues.

He really needs to make some effort to figure out his life direction. He has a degree in English Studies and wants to be a professional writer. However, this is really difficult and risky. I tried to convince him to separate his interests from the work he can do and get a more job with stable income, such as in sales or media. But, he is a persistent person.

Then she explained how her boyfriend's career development was related to their future relationship, which includes marriage.

We are both outsiders. It will be very difficult if I only rely on my parents' support to buy our own apartment in Beijing. My boyfriend's family condition is much worse than mine. So, he has to rely on himself. I try to convince him that making money is important for us at this stage. Otherwise, we will not have enough money to buy an apartment in Beijing. We cannot get married. He really has skills which can make a lot of money, which can give us a better life and we could get married as soon as possible. But, he wants to make money by writing novels. This makes me feel very disappointed. My parents also put pressure on him over his career.

My father said if he did not get a stable job, then he did not want to see him again.

Anne's boyfriend was making a choice between the work he was interested in and work which could make more money. Even though he was in love with Anne and was good to her, Anne was still not satisfied with his career choice. The pressure of buying a house and improving their living conditions pushed Anne's boyfriend to give up his interests and choose a job with a higher salary. Because of the high housing prices and living costs, economic pressure on migrant men to support a family and buy an apartment in Beijing has become much heavier. Thus, the gendered role men are expected to play in intimate relationships pushes them to pursue a higher income and social status in their public social lives.

Jing had just got married and was pregnant when I interviewed her. She had been in a relationship with her husband for eight years before they married. They were both from a rural area and Jing came to Beijing to go to university. After she graduated, she found a job in the government and received a Beijing *hukou*. Her boyfriend went to work as a sales man in a private start-up technology company.

He works six days a week. Sometimes he needs to travel to three or four cities in a week and only stay at home for half a day with me. Sometimes, I felt it was boring to live without him. But, I have to understand him. He has to work hard for us. His income is more than three times than mine.

In order to pay for their apartment and living expenses, Jing's husband works for a private company, which needs him to work overtime and frequently go on business trips. Therefore, Jing and her husband have to live separately most of the time. Jing has to do most of the housework and feels the lack of emotional support from her husband. However, she chose to understand him.

Matches like ours are very common for migrants in Beijing. Men want to

find a girlfriend who has a Beijing *hukou* and girls who have Beijing *hukou* want to marry a man who has a high income, so they can buy an apartment and start a family together in Beijing.

In this sense, the conventional gendered roles women played in intimate relationship pushed them to work in the state-owned sector to have the chance to apply a Beijing *hukou*. And the work is stable and not very busy, so they have time to take care of their family. In contrast, men are pushed into more marketised sectors to fight for a higher income and social status by working hard. The marketisation process in China is gendered.

Having a sense of responsibility does not mean a man is willing to say ‘I love you’ or ‘I want to spend the rest of my life with you’ to a woman. It has more significant meanings than verbal commitment, such as considering each other’s benefits as a whole, taking a gendered role in the relationship, and making plans for the future together. A man needs to have the capability to earn enough money and be the main family provider. He is also expected to support and care about his girlfriend’s well-being by sharing housework or taking care of her. In return, women are willing to step into marriage and take their role as a wife and a mother, fulfilling domestic duties and supporting their husband’s career. The women’s understanding towards ‘sense of responsibility’ or ‘responsible mind’ was also shared by the white-collar young men in Beijing (Hird, 2009). These middle-class men were still expected to be the main breadwinner in the family. Compared with women, they have more pressure to be successful in their career. Their social status and self-respect depends on their career success. Therefore, they learnt a ‘cool masculinity’ suited for office life. They still have the responsibility for taking care of the family and maintaining harmony in their marital relationships, which needs them to develop a caring, sensitive and respectful masculinity. This form of intimate relationship follows the pattern of the ‘dutiful spouse’ model. This model is grounded in the ordinary life of ‘family

practicalities and explicit duties, stresses the diligent and responsible fulfilment of family duties by both spouses, and when necessary, an accepted sexual division of labour' (Jankowiak and Li, 2016, p.152). Even though this 'dutiful spouse' model was more widely accepted among the last generation of Chinese people who were born between the 1960s and 1970s, it was still expected by some of my interviewees when considering marriage.

### **Remaining Independent in an Intimate Relationship**

However, some young migrant women have a different attitude towards a man's sense of responsibility to a woman. Liuyuan is in her late 20s and Xiaohui is in her early 30s. They represent two types of women among the participants who did not have traditional views of intimate relationships. For them, remaining independent in their intimate relationships and having their own career and life plan were more important compared with marrying a man who had the potential to take responsibility for being the main family supporter. To (2013) studied the partner selection strategies of 50 single professional women in Shanghai and identified two types of women who broke through traditional gender perceptions in relationships, 'satisficer' and 'innovator'. 'Satisficers' refers to women who 'found lower economic men as partners whom they believed would be less controlling due to their not being in traditional breadwinner roles' (To, 2013, p.17). 'Innovators' refers to women who 'did not look toward to traditional marriage and chose alternative relationship forms over marriage for their exemption from traditional household roles' (To, 2013, p.17). I compared my participants to the single professional women in To's and further explored how their strategies were related to the context of Beijing.

Liuyuan expressed her opinion on the intimate relationship she wanted.

I do not really need a man to take care of me. I can solve most of the problems I met in daily life. If I cannot solve it, I will pay for someone who has professional skills to help me with it. It will put too much pressure on me if you really spend effort taking care of me, because I do not want to take care of anyone else. Men and women should be equal in this...The man I want to be with should be independent. He should live a good life even without a woman to take care of him, cleaning his place or cooking dinner for himself. If a man said he was willing to give me commitment and be responsible for me, because we had a sexual relationship, it would be really unnecessary for me.

Liuyuan was 27 years old when I interviewed her. She had been working in a public biological research institution in Beijing for 3 years. When talking about her personal life, she really did not agree with the discourse of ‘mutual responsibility’ or ‘marry a reliable man who is good to her’, instead, she wanted to get away from those ideas in her own intimate relationships. She had been with her boyfriend for a year. They met through a dating website. She described what her relationship was like with her boyfriend.

I just want to be happy when we are together. That is it. We have dinner together, chat with each other and enjoy having sex. We only meet once a week. The rest of the time, we have different lives and social circles...When we first met, we used to meet very often, but the feeling was not good. I remember there was a time when we fought for the issue on who should throw away a bag of rubbish at his place. Then after that, both of us agreed we should not meet every day...Love is only a flavour in my life. It does not have any significant meaning, so I do not spend too much effort on it or worry about any details, such as why he’s replying to my texts so late today.

In contrast to a relationship which is based on trying to see if they match each other for marriage, Liuyuan’s relationship is not only free from mutual responsibility and commitment, but also free from conflict and disagreements. It

was not something which she needed to spend effort to sustain. When talking about marriage, Liuyuan said neither her nor her boyfriend wanted to consider marriage at this stage. Liuyuan's partner selection strategy was more like the 'innovator' in To's study. For innovators, marriage may not be the ultimate goal and they reject men who have strong patriarchal attitudes or who interfere with their work-lifestyle choices (To, 2013). Liuyuan's partner selection strategy was decided and constrained by her migrant experience in Beijing.

I am 27 years old. In the city where I was born, young people of my age were already married and had their first child, but I'm in Beijing now, I can have different choices, I am in no hurry to get married. My boyfriend wants to concentrate on his work at this stage. So, we can reach an agreement on this issue, which is nice. This is also one of the reasons why we are still together.

In Liuyuan's hometown, being unmarried at 27 years old is something which cannot be accepted by parents, boyfriends or even friends. Through reaching an agreement on marriage and dating mode with her boyfriend, Liuyuan could make a different choice about her personal life and leave more space for the changes and uncertainties she expected.

The reason why I do not want to get married is not because of him, it is because of me. Even if I dated someone else, it would be the same. If I get married to someone, I cannot date anyone else. So, I am not ready for that. I want to be open to more choices.

Then she gave me a metaphor on her attitudes on marriage.

I do not want to marry a Muslim and give up eating pork because of him. If I really want to stop eating pork someday, then it's ok if I marry a Muslim. I am still in the process of figuring out if there is a more satisfactory lifestyle for me to live. I hope I can live an independent and satisfactory life by myself first, then I can decide if I want to share it with

anyone else.

Liuyuan was not satisfied with her current life in Beijing. She was not making plans to buy a house or start a family there. Instead, she thought of applying for work opportunities in America and other cities in China, such as Hangzhou. She was still interested in making friends and spending time with other men. Instead of looking for a life partner who could participate in the rest of her life and make all the important decisions with her, Liuyuan wanted to have more control of her life in her own way.

Small cities, like Liuyuan's hometown, have limited work choices and potential mate choices. Mega cities like Beijing are more tolerant and give young women like Liuyuan more choices and uncertainties. For women who wanted a relationship based on different forms of pragmatic reasons, the external form of an intimate relationship and marriage is worth making an effort to sustain. A standard middle-class family should have a husband with a stable income and high social status, a wife, and a child (or children), a private apartment, a private car and Beijing *hukou*. They were looking for potential life partners of this standard. However, for Liuyuan, a house in Beijing, a man with a stable income and high social status and marriage was not something she was looking for. She was exploring some more diverse lifestyles.

The housing price is too high in Beijing now. I am not sure how long I will stay in this city. I am not considering buying an apartment in the surrounding suburbs and spending two hours going to work. The apartments near the place I am working are really unaffordable for me.

Liuyuan's lifestyle was also a strategy for dealing with the high house prices and living costs. This form of intimate relationship is enabled by the social and cultural conditions in mega cities like Beijing. However, the 'freedom' of Bohemian intimacy relationships is not without material and economic

constraints. Liuyuan's free choices are constrained by the work opportunities available to her in other cities. The development of her career and the demand of the labour market decided her geographic mobility pattern. In this sense, for 'innovators' like Liuyuan, the reason she rejected marriage was also for pragmatic concerns, such as high housing prices and living costs for migrants in Beijing, and the potential better work opportunities and living conditions in other cities, which explains why autonomy and personal satisfaction was possible in mega cities like Beijing.

The second story is about Xiaohui. Xiaohui used to work as a brand marketing consultant for five years before she left and went to Beijing. Now, she works as a part-time business consultant, and spends most of her time on traveling and writing novels. When I interviewed Xiaohui, she was 32 years old and cohabiting with her boyfriend in Beijing. They met at university and stayed together afterwards. Her boyfriend was working in a private finance company and planning to start his own business. He needed to invest money in his own business so he did not plan to buy a private apartment in Beijing. I asked Xiaohui about her opinions on her intimate relationship.

We have been together for ten years. Maybe we will get married in one or two years. I am considering whether we want to have any children. If we had a child, then we would need to take care of her (or him) and live a stable life because children need to go to school, and we'd need to make more money for the upbringing of the child...However, my boyfriend still wants to start his own company and I want to have more time of my own in order to concentrate on writing novels. Both of us think we may leave Beijing and migrate to another city in the next few years. The opportunity, time and economic costs of bringing a child up in Beijing are very high. So, I am considering not having any.

As we can see from Xiaohui's explanation, Xiaohui and her boyfriend reached a consensus on the children issue. Her boyfriend is more willing to invest his



money in his own business compared with buying a house (for his future family) in Beijing. Xiaohui wants to spend more time on writing instead of taking care of a family.

My boyfriend and I are both very independent. I have the freedom to make choices on the lifestyle I want. There was half a year when my boyfriend did not have an income and I supported him financially. Now, we live together, he pays the rent, while I pay the living expenses. We discuss problems with each other as well as our future plans. Both of us respect each other's choices. He does not want me to make any sacrifices, and I do not need him to make any sacrifices for me. It is harmonious. I bought a small house in Shanghai. He wants to start his own business, but the risk is high. Maybe he will go bankrupt. But at least, we have a place to live in Shanghai. So he thinks it is ok.

Xiaohui and her boyfriend are both very independent, but they also support and respect each other in the relationship, and make plans and take risks for the future together. Xiaohui's partner selection strategy was more like the 'satisficer' in To's study. Satisficers still do not reject marriage. However, they do not mind if their partner has a lower economic status. Like innovators, they also reject men who have strong patriarchal attitudes and interfere with their work-lifestyle choices. Therefore, they accept men who have a lower economic status, but who may have more egalitarian values (To, 2013). For couples who are together for marriage, the gendered division of labour in the relationship is obvious. However, Xiaohui and her boyfriend play a more equal role both in the private sphere and the public sphere. Her boyfriend does not have to have a stable income or an apartment in Beijing. Xiaohui does not need to have a child or spend most of her time taking care of a family. Both of them can have more freedom to choose their career and lifestyle. Xiaohui chose to be a writer not out of material motivation; it is more about her self-exploration. When women are in an equal intimate relationship, more diversified choices can be made on their roles in the public and private spheres.

On the other hand, when the man in the relationship is free from having to earn a stable and high income, Xiaohui has to have the capability and skills to make money to support herself and even her boyfriend when he is in trouble financially. In this sense, compared with the middle-class family which is founded on mutual responsibility and gendered division of labour, this form of middle-class couple is founded on gender equality and the economic independence of men and women. The former intimate relationship is more procreation-oriented, and in the latter form of intimate relationship, the couple has a more critical view towards having children. In the former middle-class family, because women have to concentrate more on taking care of a family, they rely on their boyfriends and husbands financially. While for women in the latter form of middle-class family, women have a stronger sense of self-achievement at work. The reason why Xiaohui gave up having children was also due to pragmatic concerns. She knew the economic cost of raising a child in Beijing was high. Instead of marrying someone who could be the main family supporter or choosing a job with a higher salary, she gave up having children.

Both Liuyuan and Xiaohui shared their life plans for the next few years with me. The similarity is, they did not adjust their career with their marriage and family life plans. For ‘innovators’, like Liuyuan, and ‘satisficers’, like Xiaohui, autonomy was important in an intimate relationship. The ‘independent womanhood discourse’ supported them in having autonomy and they especially disagreed with the ‘family responsibility discourse’ which supported gendered division of labour in an intimate relationship. However, both of their strategies were constrained by the social, economic and cultural context of Beijing. Because of the job market in Beijing, they had a platform to make more choices in developing their career, and because of the high living costs in Beijing, they had an excuse to postpone their marriage and chose another lifestyle, like staying single or cohabitation. Migrant professional women’s intimate relationship

changes due to ideological, as well as pragmatic reasons.

### **Knowing and Understanding**

Other than sexual attraction which brings aesthetic and physical pleasure, and the sense of responsibility which brings material guarantees to the relationship, there is another factor which works to develop the intimate relationship. When asked why they were satisfied with their current partner, some women told me it was because they ‘getting along pretty well with each other’, which means they have common interests, ideas, living habits, and have the ability to understand each other, know each other, are willing to support each other in what they do. This form of relationship follows the pattern of the ‘emotionally involved’ model which is based on ‘shared empathy and mutual respect, and other reciprocal processes, such as consideration, cooperation and compromise’ (Jankowiak and Li, 2016, p.154). Research shows that young Chinese couples today put a high value on ‘joint activities, shared feelings, empathy, and mutual trust’ (Jankowiak and Li, 2016, p.157) compared with the last generation. In the post-Mao era, there is a trend for the emotional quality of marriage to be more and more important for couples (Xu, 1999; Pimentel, 2006). Love and mutual companionship is also regarded as indispensable for an ideal marriage in public discourses (Yan, 2003).

Lili found she shared many common interests with her girlfriend after they had been dating for a while. Lili came to Beijing to find a job because of her strong interest in music performances. Her girlfriend also had an interest in music performances in the live houses in Beijing, and she had a taste for the theatre, which Lili also enjoyed watching with her. Therefore, they really enjoyed their time together. I asked her if common interests were as important as for her

previous relationships.

When I was with my previous girlfriends, I used to think our tastes for these entertainment activities were not necessarily the same. We can simply avoid talking about this if we have different interests. However, if they did not respect my interests, or said something bad about them, then I couldn't accept that. When I am with this girlfriend, I started to realise it felt so good that we shared common interests and ideas on things. I really enjoy dating her.

Lili said she did not have the ambition to be very successful in her career. She showed more interest in the music and she had stronger emotional attachments to her identity as a music fan.

I had the opportunity to work for a company which needed me to work six days a week. I rejected it. I thought if I only have one day off per week, how I can have enough time to spend with my girlfriend. So, this is what I want from my work. I cannot be too busy or too tired or it will influence my relationship with her. It is fun to be with her, we have common interests. I like all her thoughts on things. Even if we do not do anything special, I simply enjoy talking with her.

Lili is still in relationship with her girlfriend at the time of writing. Compared with the previous relationships Lili had, their common interests and ideas helped her to develop a more pleasant and intimate relationship with her girlfriend. In the reform era, even though homosexuality is no longer regarded as a mental illness and well-educated urban young people have accepted that to some extent, same-sex marriage is still illegal in mainland China. Young adult lesbians still have the duties and pressure of marriage in order to meet the expectation of their parents because staying single in the late 20s is still regarded as being stigmatised (Engebretsen, 2009). In recent years, lesbians have used the strategy of marrying a gay man in a contract marriage in order to solve the problem. Lili and her girlfriend will still face obstacles when considering future plans in the

next few years.

Like Lili and her girlfriend, Anne was attracted to her boyfriend because they shared a lot of interests on photography in common. Anne and her boyfriend used to be neighbours who lived in the same apartment block. Because of that, they knew each other and then became friends. When they first met, they found they shared many common topics. Both of them liked reading, writing and taking photographs. Then they started to date and participated in activities and events together and met many new common friends. They became boyfriend and girlfriend 'naturally'. Anne worked as a director for an online media company, and she wanted to have her own movie and video studio in the future. Her boyfriend supported her ideas and also helped her with her dream. They run a private website on photography together after work. 'When I am lazy, my boyfriend will push me to make plans for what I want to do. So up to now, everything is going well.' She was responsible for taking photographs and her boyfriend was better at editing and writing stories about the photographs. Their work started to attract more and more audiences.

However, when considering their future and whether this relationship will develop into marriage, Anne had her concerns. Her boyfriend was struggling to become a professional writer, while Anne was trying to convince him to find a stable job and earn money to support their life in Beijing first. In the interview, she expressed her worry about her boyfriend's career development and regarded this as the biggest problem in their relationship.

I really get along well with him. Then it is ok to live together. If we get married, then my parents or his parents will ask us to have children as soon as possible, but we cannot afford a house in Beijing now.

Anne came to Beijing for its resources and work opportunities in the media

industry. Beijing is a good place for her to have a promising career. However, in order to have a family and support their children in Beijing, they have to earn enough money to support their life and buy an apartment in Beijing, so their children can access to local public education. Instead of running into marriage, she and her boyfriend chose to cohabit. Anne still enjoyed her time with him and supporting each other in their daily life. Anne had taken her boyfriend to meet her parents. ‘My father said he did not want to see my boyfriend next year if he did not have a stable job with a good salary, which also put a lot of pressure on me.’ In Beijing, because of the strict *hukou* system and high housing prices, cohabitation is an alternative choice for a couple who do not have the material conditions to get married. It is a way to avoid the ‘responsibility’ of marriage and raising children. In the interview, Anne told me if someday she did get married, she would marry her boyfriend, but she was still not satisfied with his career choice and tried to convince him to have a more profitable job. If her boyfriend does not follow her advice, Anne has to make some changes by herself. Anne told me she was thinking about borrowing some money from her parents and buying a house herself or giving up her career in Beijing and moving to a smaller city with lower living costs. Anne’s boyfriend’s economic circumstances were worse than Anne’s and he did not expect to be the main family supporter in his future relationship with her. Even though Anne’s parents put pressure on her to marry someone in a better economic situation, she did not give up her relationship with her boyfriend because of that. She was resisting the conventional marriage tradition and gendered division of labour in the relationships because she found mutual understanding and support to be more important for her.

However, mutual understanding and support can also exist in an intimate relationship which follows the conventional tradition of gender division of labour. By showing mutual understanding and support, they achieve a more ‘subjective equality’ and disguised inequalities (Bittman and Lovejoy, 1993). Yuxin’s

boyfriend had bought a house with his Beijing *hukou* and had a stable job as an engineer in a state-owned company. He already had the material circumstances to get married and start a family in Beijing. He had already proved he had a sense of responsibility towards his family and took care of Yuxin well. However, Yuxin knew her boyfriend lied about his past emotional experiences, which made Yuxin feel disappointed. However, she still chose to forgive him, because she sees a sense of responsibility as more important for sustaining a marriage. In her story, she mentioned another reason why she stayed in the relationship. They ‘get along well’.

For instance, when we went shopping together, we could reach an agreement on the goods we wanted to buy. We have similar tastes in clothes and shoes. There was a time when he sent me a pen as a birthday gift. The pen was the same as the one I bought myself before...Both of us think families are more important than friends. So, we are willing to spend more time with our families. Compared with the other male friends I have, we really match better.

Yuxin felt it was important for her boyfriend to share a similar taste in goods and living habits with her. This was actually consistent with her position in an intimate relationship. For her, being a wise family goods consumer was an important aspect of her family responsibilities. When her boyfriend supported her shopping decisions, she felt understood and supported. In intimate relationships which are based on conventional gendered division of labour, couples can still generate a sense of intimacy by caring and respecting each other’s contributions. Couple relationships cannot get rid of gendered structural factors, such as the gendered labour market, gendered distributions of income and wealth and gendered divisions of domestic labour (Jamieson, 1998), but intimacy can be expressed through actions, such as working hard and earning wages, or sharing housework (Barannen and Moss, 1991; Hochschild, 1990). Yuxin used the word ‘like’ to describe her emotional attachment to her boyfriend in the interview. She

was attracted when her boyfriend showed his support towards her shopping decisions and his capacity to do housework, such as taking care of pets, purchasing furniture and cleaning the house. In her relationship with her boyfriend, the lack of trust and mutual confession coexists with mutual care and support. The couple tried to manage these complicated emotions in the premarital relationship and develop it into marriage.

Unlike Yuxin, Both Feifei and Aima regarded if someone could share their career ambition and support their career decisions as an important criterion when choosing a potential boyfriend. However, their expectations of future intimate relationships and attitudes to marriage were completely different. Feifei was a product manager in an online education company. When talking about her private life, she shared with me what she wanted from an intimate relationship.

I do not admire someone who has a family and children. What I really admire is someone whose children can get very good education, and whose husband has a successful career and works in a very promising industry, and the material quality of the life of the family is very high...I not only want to buy Lego for my children, I also want to buy them intelligent robots. I not only want to send them to international schools, I also want to send them to international summer camp. When I have time, I can watch plays or listen to music performances in the theatres with them at weekends.

Feifei described her vision of middle-class family life in Beijing. For her, working hard was a method to achieve the goal of having this middle-class family life in Beijing. A capable husband who had a successful career in a promising industry was also part of this picture. In her version of a middle-class family, she did not expect her husband to be the only family supporter and to rely on his high income. Instead, she wanted to have a successful career too. She expected to have an intimate relationship with equal gender power relations.



However, unlike the realistic women who wanted to ‘marry up’, the material circumstances of a man was not the primary aspect she considered when choosing a boyfriend. She had dated several men who had a middle-class family backgrounds, stable jobs in public institutions and Beijing *hukou*. However, she did not really like them.

The man I am looking for must have ambition in his career so he can give me advice on my work. We do not have to work in the same industry, but we must be the same kind of person. After I graduated, I found I have strong self-learning skills. So, I really want a man who I admire. He does not need to have strong self-learning skills like me, but he must have some personality which can encourage me. He must have something to stick with. Only this kind of person can give you motivation.

Then she told me the reason why she did not get along well with her ex-boyfriend.

His work experience was much less than mine. It was hard to communicate and reach an agreement with him on some issues. He usually spent the weekend on his interests, such as traveling and skiing. It is ok if you already have a high position in your company and a very successful career in your industry.

However, he is just a workplace newbie. I told him to bring a notebook and some business cards with him, but he kept neglecting my advice until he made some mistakes at work. Having poor work ability is really a horrible thing. People with different values cannot live together. He’d just graduated, maybe he still wanted to have a period of time to play.

Her ex-boyfriend was not the capable life partner Feifei wanted, even though his family was rich, and he could provide her with a good material life in Beijing, she still ended the relationship. Feifei is a young woman with career ambition. In Feifei’s industry, having the capability to support a good material life in Beijing was one of the criteria to judge career success. In this sense, Feifei would be

attracted by someone who have strong earning capacity and entrepreneurial spirit, which is central to the construction of contemporary Chinese masculinity (Hird, 2009; Zhang, 2010). They could strive for a middle-class life with good material condition in Beijing together.

The other story is about Aima. She left her job in the Army and went to Beijing to develop her career in the music industry. Aima also had great passion towards work and she expected to have a successful career. She shared her romantic experiences with me.

I never develop any long relationships with men. This is how I deal with my relationships. After I dated them for maybe three months, the feeling was gone and I felt it was no longer that interesting, then I broke up with them.

Aima was usually involved in short-term relationship which could not be developed into a long and stable one. I wanted to explore the reason why. She described what kind of person she usually dated.

It is impossible for me to date any white-collar men; they are too boring. I used to work in an office in the Army, I asked my colleagues to go to a live music show after work with me. They knew nothing about it. I felt so isolated when I was with them...I want to be with someone who can also play music. I want to feel excited every day when I am with him. We can write songs together. I care more about if he can really understands me and what I'm doing. We can travel together and watch the films we like. It is important for us to have something to talk about. For me, he must be an interesting person. That is all I need. If I cannot find someone like that, I do not care about staying single for a period of time.

The next time I interviewed Aima, she had found a job in one of the biggest indie music companies in China. She did not mind dating men who worked in the same industry, so they had a lot more in common. Almost all of her

ex-boyfriends were musicians. Then I asked her if she cared about a man's material circumstances, such as how much he earned and if he had a house in Beijing. She told me about her own values on money and wealth.

My friend said I am a strange person. Working in the music industry does not earn much. The money I earn in this company even cannot cover the house rent and living expenses in Beijing, but I really enjoy my work every day. It is the same with choosing a boyfriend. Maybe they will say someone's conditions are good, but I really do not care. If we can get along well, then we can travel or do something interesting together. If things do not work out, then we break up...Of the six roommates I had in university, four of them have already got married. I do not admire them. I do not really need someone who can cook and do laundry with me every day. It is boring.

Like Feifei, Aima also compared herself with her university classmates who had already married and settled down. Both of them wanted to find someone who could understand their passion towards their work and career. However, in contrast with Feifei who was striving for her middle-class dream, Aima was not fighting to have enough money to start a family in Beijing. The reason was that she chooses to work in an industry which does not 'earn that much'. Aima knew the chance for her to settle down in Beijing was low. She was making preparations for leaving Beijing. 'After I accumulate enough social network resources and professional skills, I will try to start my own business and run a live house in a second tier city, the market there does exist.' Aima did not consider starting a family in Beijing. The uncertainty of her career also brought uncertainty to her personal life.

I am a little too emotional in relationships. I care about why he does not reply to my messages, why he does not call me, where he's been. I quarrel with them on those little things. Then I say 'let's break up'. Then they say 'ok', but I don't really mean it.

Aima feels depressed when her short-term relationships end. She and her previous boyfriends were not certain about their future. Their relationship was weak and they made less effort to maintain the relationship. The men Aima used to date with did not have the strong earning capability or consume power, which are central to contemporary Chinese hegemonic masculinity. A stable intimate relationship which could develop into marriage was not indispensable for them. As we can see from cases of Aima and Feifei, professional women with strong career ambition in Beijing expected their partners to share their career ambitions and interests. However, women in industries with a low income also had to cope with more uncertainties in their intimate relationships.

Common interests and mutual understanding is important for the young women I interviewed. The meaning is different for them. Both Yuxin and Feifei wanted to date men who wanted to start a family and had the economic circumstances to live a decent middle-class life in Beijing. Both of them wanted to have their partners' understanding and support. However, they expected to have different forms of gender relations in their intimate relationships. Yuxin wanted to take a more conventional role in the family, so she explained 'getting along well' as sharing 'similar tastes in consuming goods and living habits' with her boyfriends. Her partner understood and supported her role in the family. Feifei wanted to have a more equal gender relation in her relationship. For her, both the man and the woman should contribute to the family financially. Both of them should have professional skills and career so they can understand, motivate and support each other. Feifei defines 'getting along well' as both 'having ambition in their career and a strong work ability'.

Both Anne and Aima went to Beijing for better career development in the industry they are interested in. Both of them have strong enthusiasm for their career, like Feifei. They also expected more equal gender relations in their relationships. However, the industries Anne and Aima were in were not highly

paid. They wanted to be with someone who supported and understood their choices and shared their enthusiasm with them, so they are more likely to choose partners who are in similar industries. Because of the difficulty of living a standard middle-class life in Beijing, they have to think about strategies to deal with the economic pressure. Anne chooses to cohabit with her boyfriend and delay marriage. Aima keeps being involved in a series of short-term relationships without thinking about the future. Both of them try to keep away from the responsibility of starting a family and raising children.

Farrer argues that young people in the market economy face the pressure of ‘the dilemmas of sexual choice and a desire for ethical and practical resolutions’ (Farrer, 2002, p.15). He found in women’s discourses on sexual motives, ‘feeling’ and ‘conditions’, or ‘love’ and ‘money’ are paired opposites. In the stories of Beijing migrant women, women who emphasise the importance of ‘the attraction of disposition’ as the foundation for developing an intimate relationship regarded considering material conditions and pragmatic demands as ‘not pure enough’. The women who want to find someone who is reliable and would be responsible for a family downplayed the value of appearance and sexual pleasure in their relationships. No one denied the importance of ‘mutual understanding and support’ in their relationship. Lili started her relationship because she was physically attracted, she acknowledged dating someone who shared similar interests and ideas made her feel happier in the relationship. Yuxin was dating her boyfriend because he had the economic circumstances to be the future main family supporter, but his support towards her consumer choices and lifestyle made her believe they matched well compared with other men in good economic circumstances she had met. This is a factor which relieves the pressure brought by the dilemmas of ‘feeling’ and ‘condition’ faced in women’s intimate relationships.

## Summary

In this chapter, I analysed young migrant women's premarital intimate relationships. Without the intervention of *danwei*, women had more diversified choices on the forms of sexual relationships they wanted compared with the last generation. The professional women had more freedom to express their sexual desires and enjoy sexual pleasure. The idea that 'sexuality is seen as part of human nature' is popular among the young women. Moreover, women's 'class' and 'tastes' is also taken into consideration. Young women's aesthetic tastes in their love partner are made on the basis of the surface signifiers which represented middle-class tastes and lifestyle in metropolitan city like Beijing. The body they found attractive is the product of hedonistic and capitalist consumerism.

Some middle class women in this research valued autonomy and freedom in intimate relationships. They wanted to be free from the traditional women's role of having children and taking main care-taking work in the family. Some of the professional women in Beijing voluntarily chose to postpone or replace marriage with other relationship forms, such as living apart together and cohabitation. The emergence of these new forms of relationship cannot be separate with the rise of 'professional subject-hood' in the reform era (Hoffman, 2008). Having a partner who could respect them to have the freedom to do exploration on their career was more important. However, their choice was also made out of pragmatic reasons, such as avoiding bearing the economic pressure of purchasing an apartment or raising children in Beijing. Women changed their intimate relationship out of both pragmatic and ideological reasons.

Migrant women emphasized their emotional quality of their intimate relationship and developed more diversified emotional attachments with their partners.

Women were attracted to someone who shared common interests, ideas, and living habits with them. For the well-educated women in Beijing, it means that they expected their partner to share their high consumption tastes or their professional career ambition. 'Mutual understanding and support' can also develop in the intimate relationship in which there is conventional gender division of labour. As for the women who are in relationship with men who share common interests and ideas but not have the capability to be the main family supporter, they also postpone or replace marriage with cohabitation or short term intimate relationship. Next, I will look at the post-marital life of young migrant women in Beijing and discuss how they deal with the work-life conflicts in relation with their husbands, parents, and children.

## CHAPTER FIVE CHOOSING TO BE A NEW MOTHER? Young Migrant

### Women's Marriage and Childcare Strategies in Beijing

I was brought up in a small village. My father worked as a driver when I was a child. Then he worked in a coal factory with my uncle for several years. After that, he only did temporary work and ran some small businesses. Recently, he told me he wanted to open a small shop in the village. My mother stayed at home and took care of us. I have been working in Beijing for several years. I told my father I wanted to give my mother some money to open a small shop of her own. But I did not get his support. In his opinion, as an old woman who is already 50 years' old, the only thing she needs to do for the rest of her life is to take care of her grandchildren...My father does not know what my mother really wants. I discussed this with my brother. He agreed with me. In my mother's diary, she wrote 'I am not your puppet. I do not want to do something just because you told me to.' My brother said our mother also wanted to take control of her own life, but she did not know how. I recommended some books and magazines to her. I hope she can have some new thoughts about her life through reading. I also told her about my future career plans. I am glad she is really interested in my experiences...The marriage of the last generation seems to be more stable. However, women like my mother cannot live the life they really want in their marriage. The women of my generation are not that dependent on our husband or children. We want to explore ourselves instead of only playing the roles of someone's wife or a good mother. Our marriages may be more unstable, but it is not a bad thing. My friend still lives a good life after she got divorced.

This quotation came from Hongdou's story. She grew up in a working-class family: a father who worked as a manual worker or ran small businesses in the village, and a mother who was a housewife. She came to Beijing to do a Master degree and then stayed after she graduated. When I interviewed her, she was already the mother of a two-year-old boy. Her husband worked as an architect in a state-owned enterprise. They met each other at university. After her husband



bought an apartment in Beijing, they married and she had the child. She expressed her opinions on the difference between the marriage of ‘the last generation’ and ‘her generation’. As the daughter of a housewife, Hongdou had her own thoughts on women’s traditional roles in the family as a wife and a mother. She also did some new exploration of her own career development and family roles. In her opinion, playing a traditional gender role was ‘living for someone else’, while having her own career or business was ‘living her own life’. Even though in some other cases in my interviews, women identified more with their roles in the family, what Hongdou was trying to do was to reconstruct her roles based on a comparison and reflection on the life of her mother.

The statistics show that more than 90% of women were married by their early 30s in China (United Nations, 2013). Even though the marriage age has been increased in recent years and college-educated women in urban area have the lowest marriage rate compared to other groups (Qian and Qian, 2014), marriage remains universal and early in China compared to other Western and East Asian societies (Ji and Yeung, 2014; Jones and Gubhaju, 2009). In their late 20s and early 30s, young well-educated women in Beijing have to deal with the social pressure to get married, the challenge of affording high living expenses of settling down in Beijing, the role transition of being a wife and mother, and balancing between career development and family life. They adopted different strategies and actions to choose between career development and family life. Before delving into the outcomes, I will introduce the macro constraints Beijing migrants have on marriage, childbirth and caring for children.

### **Age and Marriage**

The pressure coming from parents, colleagues and friends makes the young women in Beijing begin to think about the issues of marriage, child bearing and

children's education when they are in their late 20s. The Chinese media uses the term 'leftover women' to describe urban, well-educated women who have not married by their late 20s (Fincher, 2012; Magistad, 2013; Subramanian and Lee, 2011). This is a derogatory term which means they have had difficulties finding a marital partner (Ji, 2015; Fincher, 2012; To, 2013). Numerous studies show a delay in marriage timing due to education and women's employment in both developing and developed countries (Blossfeld and Huinink, 1991; Coale and Treadway 1986; Isen and Stevenson, 2010; Oppenheimer, 1988; Rosero-Bixby, 1996). In China, even though the marriage rate continues to fall, more than 90% of women are still married by their early 30s (United Nations, 2013). China's case challenges conventional marriage theory (Jones, 2007).

According to a national survey in Qian and Qian's research (2014), in China, regardless of educational level or gender, marriage rates peak at the age of 25 to 29 for both men and women in urban areas. While women have a higher marriage rate than their male counterparts in their 20s, men have a higher marriage rate than women in their 30s. Men with a university education have much higher marriage rates than their less-educated counterparts in their 30s, while for well-educated women who are in their 30s, the marriage rates fall substantially lower than their less-educated counterparts. Most men and women in urban China still marry spouses at same educational level. While the percentage of men married to spouses with a lower educational level is much higher than the percentage of women married to less-educated spouses. The results suggest that more education is associated with a higher likelihood of never marrying for women. In urban China, university-educated women have the lowest marriage rate.

Marriage becomes an inevitable public topic among a women's family, friends and colleagues when they are in their late 20s. Xiaohui was 31 when I interviewed her. Most of her friends were in their early 30s and already married.

‘When we were together, the topics of conversation were all about whether to have a child or not, and how to make a choice between living their own life and playing the traditional roles of a women. We have already put off having children.’ Most of Liyuan’s colleagues were in their late 20s and early 30s. She was 25 when she started at the company. ‘In the first two years, I was the main target of my married colleagues introducing potential marriage partners. But, they gave up after I rejected all the men they introduced.’ The older colleagues in the company pushed the younger women to think about marriage and child bearing. They also shared their experiences and other colleagues’ stories in the workplace, which provided the young single women with advice on when and what kind of man they should marry and when to have their first child.

The pressure also came from parents who lived in small cities and villages. In China, parents are still actively involved in choosing mates (Jennings, Axinn, and Ghimire, 2012; Riley, 1994; Xu and Whyte, 1990). Their daughter’s or son’s marriage is regarded as the ‘combination of two natal families’. Parents’ ideas on their daughters’ marriage mainly came from the local youth, who were the migrant women’s childhood friends and high school classmates. ‘They could see what their future would be like. When I went back to my hometown, the topics of conversation were all about their husbands, children, stock prices and discounts on basic supplies.’ As a single woman who was 32, every time Dou went back to her hometown, she felt isolated when chatting with her old friends and classmates. ‘They did not talk about their career or work at all. They did not know my life in Beijing. So I had to respect them.’ The normal marriage age in small cities and villages is early 20s and they have their first child after one or two years, while marriage is put off until the late 20s or early 30s in Beijing. Chenxiang was 25 years old and had been in Beijing for one year when I interviewed her. She also felt the difference. ‘My cousins in the village are all married and have children, but I am not in a hurry. Most of my colleagues and friends in Beijing who are my age are still single.’ The young women’s parents

used their social networks in Beijing to introduce potential marriage partners to their daughters, which put pressure on them to get married and start a family.

In the West, with the rise of the post-industrial society, the decrease in marriage rate was related to the expanding demand for labour in the service sector of the economy and the increasing employment opportunities for women after the Second World War (Osawa, 1994). Before that, it was normal for married women in the United States and North-western Europe to be housewives.

'De-housewifisation' of women is part of the 'second demographic transition', with a decline in legal marriages and an increase in divorce, a dropping of the fertility rate below replacement levels and an increase in children born outside marriage (Van de Kaa, 1987; Lesthaeghe, 2003). The number of people living outside of marriage increased dramatically, which encouraged public policies to change to support the upbringing of children outside marriage. The social welfare system tries to protect the rights of children who are born to unmarried parents and promises them the same benefits as children with married parents.

Child-raising is detaching from the parents' marriage status.

In the UK, nearly half of all children are born to unmarried parents, mostly to cohabiting couples (Jackson, 2015). In the UK, people get Child Benefit if they are responsible for a child under 16. Each week, they receive £20.70 for the eldest or only child and £13.70 for additional children. All 3 and 4-year-olds in England are entitled to 570 hours of free early education or childcare a year. All children in the UK between the ages of 5 and 18 are entitled to a free place at a state school. In the UK, a parent who does not live with the child needs to pay maintenance for them, which accounts for 20% to 30% of their monthly income (Government UK, 2017). Unmarried parents and divorced parents have the same parental responsibilities as married parents. Their parental responsibility is more related to the birth of the child instead of the existence of a marriage. For women in the UK, marriage was not essential if they want to have children. In China,

giving birth to a child outside marriage is illegal. A single mother would be fined when she registered the child with the local government. There is no free childcare in China and parents need to pay for public education and all living costs of their children. The government in Beijing leaves the responsibility of supporting the upbringing and education of children to the parents. The policy of childbearing not only influences the benefits and rights of children, but also how the couple understands the meaning of their intimate relationship and marriage. In China, marriage is still the exclusive gateway to parenthood (Yong and Wang, 2014). Stepping into a marriage is bound up with the responsibility of bringing up children.

Compared with the 'elective' family relationships of the West, the situation in Asia is different. In Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China new shifts in marriage have also emerged, such as a higher age of first getting married, fewer barriers to divorce and declining marital fertility (Chang and Song, 2010; Davis and Friedman, 2014; Fukuda, 2013; Raymo, 2003), which can be ascribed to more education of young women and the rise in the labour-force participation rate for women. However, Chang and Song argue the trends in 'defamiliation' do not suggest a fundamental transition to an individualist society, but rather 'manifest the continuing primacy of institutionalised familism and women's attitudinal attachment to it' (Chang and Song, 2010, p.546). Like China, South Korean society is highly family-centred. A married women's role is dominant in the family, which means they have a heavy burden of supporting the children, husband and elderly parents. Moreover, with the relocation of labour-intensive industries to low-wage countries, the employment opportunities are reduced in South Korea. Neoliberal labour reform measures have been taken, which decreased long-term regular occupations. The social security system cannot provide any help for the unemployed population. Individuals have to turn to their family for assistance, which in particular further increases the burden of married women. Nearly half of all married women leave their job and become full-time

housewives in order to take care of their family. Less women in their early 30s participate in the workplace compared with those in their late 20s (25-29). The employment rate begins to increase for women in their late 30s. The employment rate figure shows an inverse-V shaped curve. The women in Taiwan and Japan also show a similar employment pattern (Yu, 2015). The trends of defamiliation go along with women's 'risk-averse' individualisation since the mid-1990s in South Korea. Families separate from one another in order to avoid increasing each other's burden. Women avoid taking on the role of mothers and wives by delaying marriage and giving up having children. Chang and Song argue that women's individualisation has 'taken place primarily as a matter of practicality rather than ideational change' (Chang and Song, 2010, p. 539). East Asian (South Korean, Japanese and Taiwanese) women are undergoing 'individualisation without individualism'. Neoliberal labour reform since the 1980s returned the responsibility of raising children and taking care of elderly parents to the household in China. However, the female employment rate was constantly high in mainland China. Most women did not leave work after they got married. Young women in South Korea face more conflict between having a career and getting married. Young Chinese women use strategies other than giving up marriage or their work in order to take the double burden of the workplace and the family

Through comparing the case of China with the UK and South Korea, we can see that neoliberal policies leave the family responsibility to the household in China, and the prevalent 'leftover women' discourse in the mass media pushes women to step into marriage as early as possible. After discussing marriage and child-raising from the macro perspective, next, I will analyse four cases of middle-class families and see how they solve the problems of housing, childcare and public education, and how it is related to their marriage.

## Housing, Child Benefit and Public Education

Yoyo was 32 years' old. She got married and had her son four years ago. She had a degree in Media Studies from a tier one university in Beijing. She had been working in the entertainment industry for 8 years. Yoyo currently worked for an online media company as a marketing promoter. Because of her professional skills and work experience, her current wage was 20,000 *yuan* per month. Her husband had a degree in Accounting. He worked in a commercial insurance company as a manager. His monthly wage was about the same as Yoyo's. Neither of them have Beijing *hukou*. According to the Beijing *hukou* policy, migrants were entitled to buy a private apartment in Beijing after they had paid social insurance for more than five years by working in Beijing. Supported by their parents financially, they bought their apartment a year ago. There was a community nursery which provided childcare services for residents in the community. The couple considered several options for their child's preschool education and finally decided to send their child to the community nursery.

We applied for the community nursery successfully. It is very difficult to apply for the well-known, high-quality public nurseries and the extra schooling fees are high because we do not have Beijing *hukou*. We also considered sending him to a private nursery, but it costs 150,000 *yuan* to 200,000 *yuan* a year, which is too expensive for us...Many young people migrate to Beijing because they want to provide their children with high quality education. Actually, it is not possible for most ordinary families like us. The education children can get in Beijing depends on the economic strength of their parents. You can get married without having a private apartment in Beijing, but how will your children get educated?

Yoyo and her husband bought a private apartment after she found she was pregnant, so their son could go to the community nursery. However, they only could afford an apartment with a community nursery. The apartment price was

much higher if there was a well-known, high-quality public nursery in the community. After they bought the apartment, they needed to pay 100,000 *yuan* a year on their mortgage. Community education is not free, it usually costs 1,000 to 5,000 *yuan* a month. The costs of food, basic supplies and transport were about 100,000 *yuan* a year. In this sense, in order to pay for the apartment, education and living expenses, a middle-class couple in Beijing needs to earn more than 260,000 *yuan* a year. Thus, it was impossible for Yoyo's husband to support the family by himself. With Yoyo's help, the family could afford their daily costs and save some money every year. This explains why they thought private schools were unaffordable for them.

Hongdou's husband bought an apartment in 2013 when he and Hongdou were engaged. In order to pay the deposit on the apartment, both of them borrowed money from their relatives. Borrowing money from relatives was a method widely used by young people whose parents' could not afford the deposit. In the past three years, they had been paying off the money. Hongdou had two years' work experience in finance and marketing when I interviewed her. Her monthly wage was about 10,000 *yuan* a month before she resigned her job one month previously. Her husband had been an architect for 5 years. His monthly wage was about 20,000 *yuan* a month. Their annual household income was 36,000 *yuan* a month. Hongdou's husband had Beijing *hukou*, so their son had Beijing *hukou* and was entitled to enjoy the benefits and welfare which are attached to it, which includes being educated in local public schools. Hongdou told me even though she was the main caregiver for her son and she wanted to spend more time with her son, she still needed to have a job because of the economic pressure on the family was high.

Jing bought her apartment in 2015. She had been working in a public institution for two years since she graduated. After she received a Beijing *hukou*, in order to buy an apartment as soon as possible, she and her husband borrowed money from



their relatives and her husband also borrowed money from his boss. Jing's monthly wage was only 5,000 *yuan* a month. Her husband had a bachelor degree, as a marketing promoter, he earned 15,000 *yuan* a month. When she was asked how she expected her child to be educated, she said she had bought the apartment because there was a public primary school nearby.

The quality of school education can be ordinary. We want our child to explore more interests and learn more knowledge outside school. Some of my colleagues bought new apartments for their children to go to high quality public schools. We do not have that economic strength and expectation. I went to schools in small villages when I was a child. But I could still go to a tier one university in Beijing through my own efforts. Our life in Beijing is satisfactory. It is ok to be ordinary. We do not want to sacrifice too much for our child. We have bought an apartment for our child to have a Beijing *hukou*. We do not want to put too much pressure on our child for his academic performance at school. As long as he is happy, we are happy.

Yoyo, Hongdou and Jing all bought an apartment in Beijing so they could send their children to public or community schools in their area. They could not afford an apartment in an area with high quality public schools. The tuition fees for private schools were also too expensive for them.

The last case came from Kailin. She was preparing to have children when I did the interview. Her first child was born one year after. Kailin had a degree in Finance from a tier one university in Beijing. It had been seven years since she graduated and started to work in a state-owned bank. Introduced by a mutual friend, she met her husband five years ago. He had a PhD in Computer Science and worked as an IT project manager in a public institution. When they first met, both of them earned several thousand *yuan* a month. Five years later, both of them had Beijing *hukou* because of their work. Kailin earned 200,000 *yuan* a year while her husband earned 400,000 *yuan* a year. They married and bought

their apartment in 2014, with the support of their parents. As we can see from the cases, the four women all married well-educated migrant men who had professional skills. Their salary continued to increase with the accumulation of work experience. The work and income of four middle-class families can be seen from Table 3.

**Table 3: Work and income of four middle-class families**

| Wife                                    |                 |                    |                          |                    |
|---|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Name                                    | Yoyo            | Hongdou            | Jing                     | Kailin             |
| Occupation                              | Market promoter | Finance specialist | Social policy consultant | Bank data analyst  |
| Age                                     | 31              | 27                 | 28                       | 30                 |
| Work experience                         | 8               | 2                  | 3                        | 7                  |
| Approximate annual income (yuan)        | 240,000         | 120,000            | 60,000                   | 200,000            |
| husband                                 |                 |                    |                          |                    |
| Occupation                              | Finance manager | Architect          | Marketing promoter       | IT project manager |
| Age                                     | 31              | 27                 | 28                       | 32                 |
| Work experience                         | 8               | 5                  | 6                        | 4                  |
| Approximate annual income (yuan)        | 240,000         | 240,000            | 180,000                  | 400,000            |
| Husband and wife                        |                 |                    |                          |                    |
| Approximate family annual income (yuan) | 480,000         | 360,000            | 240,000                  | 600,000            |

The women in all four cases shared the deposit and mortgage on the apartment with their husbands. Even though all of them paid less than their husbands, the apartment was bought in the names of husband and wife, which proved both of them owned the property. In some cases, the men had paid the deposit on an

apartment with the help of their parents when they were single, so they owned the apartment. After getting married, even if the woman helped to pay the mortgage, she did not own the property. Both Yuxin's and Yuzi's boyfriends bought an apartment in Beijing in their own name. I asked Yuzi if she cared about not owning the property. She told me she trusted her boyfriend and they were going to get married.

Our relationship (*ganqing*) is the most important thing. I have the confidence to say our relationship is solid enough now, so we are going to get married. When you are going to get married someday, you will know how I feel now. If someday, something really bad happened to our relationship and we were going to divorce, an apartment would be such a small thing compared with our marriage so it would not be worth mentioning.

The women who paid less than their husbands but owned the property also told me they did not care about the issue as it was because of their *ganqing* that their husbands were willing to share the property with them even if they paid less. *Ganqing* is regarded to be more important than an apartment. *Ganqing* discourse is widely accepted among the migrant women in Beijing, so they were not willing to discuss who owned the property or finances with their husbands. The couples were covering the gender inequality on purpose. However, the evidence shows that most residential property is still solely owned by men (Fincher, 2016). Men are expected to be the head of the household according to the Chinese custom. Fincher argues that because women were so afraid to be 'leftover women', they rush into marriage without considering their own interests. Even though they contribute to the deposit or mortgage payments, they do not insist on adding their name to the deeds. The 2011 interpretation of Marriage Law by the Supreme People's Court specifies that husband and wife are entitled to keep a property which is registered in his or her name if they divorce. All the women in the above cases were married after 2011. My research shows that more husbands

were willing to add their wives' name to the deeds and used this action to prove their *ganqing* and their loyalty to their wife. Their future married life needed both the husband and wife's income to support the family's living expenses. Women's economic power helped them to increase their power and position in the marriage relationship.

As we can see from the above cases, it is nearly impossible for an individual to afford a mortgage, children's education and living expenses in Beijing. This conforms to the results of a quantitative social survey on the new middle class in China. The survey collected questionnaires from around 500,000 professionals. Mortgage, living expenses and children's education are the top three items on the expenses list (Zhaopin, 2017). This also partly explains why full-time housewives are not common in Beijing (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2000). The normal middle-class family needs a young working mother's income to afford household expenses. This is also a pragmatic reason why marriage still has to be the exclusive gateway to parenthood (Yong and Wang, 2014). It is unlike in the West, where it is not uncommon for couples to marry after the birth of a child. The high cost of living makes it expensive to bring up a child. The responsibility for bringing up children was actually taken by the parents, the parents' family and their relatives together. The decision to divorce is hard because the economic pressure on single parents is very high. Cohabitation is an alternative choice for a couple who do not have the material circumstances to buy an apartment to get married, as in Anne's story. It is also a choice for a couple who do not want to have a child or spend money on an apartment and education, as in Xiaohui's case. The high expenses, Beijing *hukou* policy and neoliberal social welfare policy are all structural factors which constrain the marriage choices of young migrant well-educated women in Beijing.

## **Employers, Parents, and Husband**

According to the Regulations on the Protection of Female Workers (2012), female employees can take 98 days maternity leave, which includes 15 days leave before the child is born, and 83 days after the child is born. Apart from this, pregnant women can have another two and a half months' leave before the child is born. After the child is born, the new mother can have six and a half months' leave to take care of a new baby. However, apart from the 98 days' maternity leave, it is the company which needs to pay for the costs of their female employees' maternity leave. The maternity leave regulations of an institution impacted women worker's career development and birth plan.

Bao worked for an international foreign fashion company as a human resources specialist. She had rich experience in on recruiting new employees. Bao told me the company did consider the applicants' gender when recruiting. She discussed how the interviewees' gender and marital status influenced the recruitment process and final decision.

When considering the candidates' gender in the recruitment process, we do not think the average professional skills of our male and female candidates have that much difference. What really matters for us is female employees need to have maternity leave. Even though all the female candidates say they do not plan to have children in the next few years, we would make the judgment ourselves. Before the two-child policy was brought in, we prefer married women who already had a child. Now it is possible for them to have another child. So no matter whether the female candidates have any children or not, it does not make any difference to us now. We always consider that female candidates have the risk of giving birth to a child while they are working for our company. If her work ability is very strong, we would like to take the risk and hire her. But if she is not that good, it is not necessary for us to take that risk.

With similar work abilities and experience, the employers prefer male candidates compared with female candidates. Marriage and child-bearing remain universal for women in their late 20s and early 30s in China, so employers still think all female employees have the risk of taking maternity leave while working at the company. Because of women's presupposed family responsibilities, men had the advantage in the recruitment process. However, because companies followed the market economy principles of honouring 'efficiency and productivity' and 'equal competition', when a female candidate shows strong work abilities, the employer does not mind paying the costs of her maternity leave. Women were 'naturally discriminated' against in the workplace because of the presupposed gender division of labour in the family.

Different institutions have their own regulations on female employees' maternity leave. One of the professional women's strategies is adjusting their career development plans with their child raising plans. Jing was working in a public institution in Beijing. She was pregnant and preparing to give birth to her first child. When asked about her career plan after the baby was born, she told me she was considering applying for a job in a big software development company, which is a private company. However, she wanted to leave her current job when the baby went to nursery. When asked why she had made that plan, she told me the welfare for child bearing in public institutions was much better compared with private-owned companies.

Other than the three months' maternity leave I can have, my leader and other team members have really taken care of me well while I'm pregnant. They do not bother me with tough work. After the baby is born, I can go back home one hour earlier every day in order to take care of my baby. This is only possible in public institutions in Beijing. In private companies, you may be fired when your boss knows you're pregnant. At least, that will not happen in my unit. Even though I could earn a lot more money if I did the same kind of work in a private company, I still want to stay until my child goes to nursery.

Jing's description of child bearing welfare in public institutions and private companies, and the different attitudes of managers and colleagues towards pregnant workers is supported by Luqi. She was currently working in a private start-up company. When considering having a baby, she also made changes to her career plan. She worried about the risks of having a child while working for a small company. 'It depends on your team leader. If you're unlucky, team leaders will give you a heavier workload and more pressure when they know you're pregnant. Even if you're not fired, you feel that the company wants you to leave.' According to the Labour Law, it is illegal to fire employees while they are pregnant. However, in order to save costs, the company puts more pressure on pregnant women in order to make them quit. As a newly married woman who was preparing to have a child, Luqi was applying for jobs in larger, more mature companies. 'I need to be more stable before we have children. At least, I can have the welfare and benefits I should have.' Women wanted to work in the state sector or mature and large companies in non-state sectors while they were pregnant. These organisations are more regulated and have conditions which support pregnant women on maternity leave. However, women were more easily discriminated against in start-ups and developing companies in non-state sectors, which were more vulnerable in the competitive market economy.

However, giving up having any children is not a good strategy for the working women to avoid being discriminated at work. Based on previous discussion, Chinese young people's marriage is still highly related to their intention to have children. In other East Asian societies, like Korea and Japan, young women avoid taking the role of mothers and wives by delaying marriage and giving up having children. Even though the working women in China also considered giving up having children, they have to deal with great public pressure at workplace. Bao shared her opinion on the discrimination towards 'old single women' in her company.

When we are recruiting new employees, unmarried female candidates who are older than 35 will be considered unqualified. It is not about her work experience or professional skills. It is more about her personality. They are thought to be too emotional and very difficult to cooperate and communicate with. Most of the older women I meet in my company do not want to be single. They did not meet the one they wanted to marry, so they had to stay single. So they are really not satisfied with their current lives. They complain a lot and bring too much negative emotion to their colleagues. It is really horrible to work with them.

For women, a stable marriage brings them a good reputation of being easy to communicate and cooperate with. For men, marriage also brings them a good reputation of being stable, reliable and having a strong sense of responsibility. The pressure of marrying 'before it is too late' not only comes from professional women's parents and friends, it also comes from their employers. Studies show that particular types of women are more likely to be discriminated against in the workplace. Elderly women are less likeable and less hireable than elderly male workers because they are perceived to be high in competence and low in warmth by their colleagues in the workplace (Fiske et al., 1999, 2002). Mothers are also less likely to be promoted because they are perceived to be low in competence and lacking in deservingness (Fiske et al., 1999, 2002; Hebl et al., 2007; Morgan et al., 2013). In the workplace in China, people especially have negative feelings towards single women who are older than 35, because they are perceived to be 'too emotional and very difficult to cooperate and communicate with'. This negative stereotype impedes them in being recruited or promoted. Women of childbearing age fall into the socially constructed dilemma of being discriminated against for having the risk of taking maternity leave and being stigmatised for remaining single.

After a woman decides to have a child, the birth of a new child put economic, housework and care-taking pressure on the couple. A woman has to adjust to the



new role as a mother in a family. When a professional wants to pursue a higher position and salary in a company, he or she has to devote more time to work, which put pressure on other members of the family due to heavier housework and care-taking work to be done. More often than not, it is husbands who devote themselves to work because the discrimination on women in the workplace. Housework and caring responsibilities are left to wives and parents. Because of the family-centred culture in China, it is normal for parents to play an important role in helping the new mother with young children (Gaetano, 2015). Thus, they have more time to spend on work. In return, when the parents are older, the younger generation also needs to take care of them and support them financially. Because of the lack of sufficient public welfare to support childcare and the aging population, mutual responsibilities and duties tie family members together. In the American context, some middle-class women solve the problem of career and childcare responsibility conflicts by using immigrant domestic workers (Hochschild 2003; Wrigley, 1995). Caring responsibilities are pushed down to working-class women. However, this responsibility was taken by older women, usually the mother-in-laws of the middle-class working mothers in China. Due to the family-centred culture and patriarchal tradition, living far away from the husband's hometown geographically makes providing mutual support inconvenient.

With the help of her parents, Kailin was able to work in a more challenging environment after her child was born. She and her husband had their own apartment in Beijing. Rather than inviting her husband's parents to live with them, she preferred to ask her own parents for childcare assistance. 'I am afraid I may have some problems living with his parents. My parents are already retired. So they have plenty of time which can be used to take care of their grandchild.' However, for the new working mother whose parents are not yet retired or who does not have an apartment which is big enough to have a spare room for parents, it is more difficult to seek childcare assistance from other family members. Sisi

was the mother of an 8-year-old boy. She worked in a community hospital as a doctor.

One of my colleagues has just had her second child. She is still on duty overnight in the hospital. With the help of her parents, she has more time to spend working and learning new skills and professional knowledge, which brings her more opportunities to get promoted. She does not cook or do any housework. But she still has some time left for her children after work.

For the career-oriented working mother in Sisi's story, even though she devoted more time to work and developing her career, she still 'has some time' to be with her children. 'This generation of young mothers has different education ideas compared with the last generation. They do not want to leave their children with their parents in their hometown. They prefer to keep their children with them in Beijing.' The new migrant working mothers in Beijing prefer to invite one of the couple's parents to live with them to help with housework and looking after the children. The grandmother was usually responsible for cooking, cleaning and other manual work at home. The young mother was usually responsible for doing emotional work and educating her children. However, when a young mother has a conflict with this division of labour, some women insist on looking after their children themselves. Hongdou took care of her son herself in Beijing.

There was a period of time when I was too busy and had to send my son back to my hometown. My parents took care of him for one month. After I brought him back, I found he had become so naughty. I read an article on early childhood education research. The research said it was not good for children to be brought up by different caregivers. They feel insecure if they have to leave a familiar environment and get used to someone new.

What Hongdou was emphasising was her son's social and emotional development. She learnt from scientific research about how to take care of her

child. She looked for a more appropriate child rearing method by engaging in reflective encounters with expert systems (Giddens, 1991). She treated the advice of experts seriously, instead of trusting the experience of her parents who had a working-class background in a village. Like Hongdou, Yoyo also wanted to make sure her son felt he was loved.

The companionship our children need is not only physical companionship, it is also emotional companionship. We take our children to the playground at weekends. You can see lots of parents just sit outside the playground and play on their phones. What the parents really need to do is to join their children in their games and share the time together... Even though I often have to be away on business and leave my children for several days, I tell my son how long I am going to be away, how we can keep in touch with each other during this period of time, and ask if there is any gift he wants me to bring for him. I want my son to feel I am always with him and I love him even when I am not at home.

Instead of emphasising good material circumstances, the young working middle-class mothers wanted their children to be brought up with 'emotional companionship', a 'sense of security' and 'the feeling of being loved', which needed them to do more emotional work with their children. This is different from the responsibilities of a mother's traditional gender role, which includes being good at cooking and cleaning the apartment. They were anxious that what they did was always not enough for their children. This anxiety is shared by middle-class mothers in other social context (Hays, 1996; Hakim, 2000; Vincent and Ball, 2006). They were 'professional mothers' who practised 'intense mothering' and invested time, energy, money and emotional commitment into enhancing their child's intellectual, physical, social and emotional development (Vincent and Ball, 2006). Middle-class mothers have more pressure from constructing themselves as professional mothers who know the most appropriate ideas on how to bring up a child compared with other groups. Therefore, they go

about the task of child rearing with the greatest intensity (Hays, 1996).

Even though economic pressure drives men to invest more time and make more effort in order to have a successful career, working fathers are also expected to be involved in the task of child-rearing and emotional companionship. A working mother complained to me about her husband because of his absence from bringing up the children. Sisi often quarrelled with her husband about his lack of concern about their son's upbringing within the family.

He does not make any effort with our son's upbringing. Maybe he thinks our son will grow up by himself. The reason is, he does not think it is important. That is his problem. He really does not have the sense of responsibility for the family. But I care about the development of our son. So I spend my weekends on parent-child activities and children's dramas with my son. I have made great sacrifices for my family. I discussed this problem with other mothers. It is very common that fathers are absent in bringing up children. It is the mother who thinks it is important, so it is the mother who makes an effort with it.

For these working mothers, being a responsible working father did not only mean he should be the main family provider, it also meant that he should care about the children's well-being and development. This suits well-educated women's expectations of a future husband when they were choosing their mate. If their husbands rejected the responsibility of participating in bringing up the child, it was their wife who negotiated with them about their roles and responsibility at home and told them what they should do in order to be a qualified working father. Yoyo's husband's work required him to travel for business frequently. Yoyo told me about her husband's important role in taking care of their son.

His father is even busier. He spends less time looking after our child than I do. However, he still does his share. Last week, he spent 500 *yuan* and bought our son some toy soldiers. Only fathers can do that. Fathers and

mothers play different roles in bringing up the child. We have made a pact. No matter how busy we are in the week, we will always have family dinner together with our son at every weekend.

Toy soldiers are a highly gendered toy. Yoyo's husband was a big fan of toy soldiers when he was a child. He gave toy soldiers to his son as a gift and spent time playing with him. In this process, he shared his childhood memories with his son and taught him about wars and heroism. Fathers play an important role in cultivating a son's masculinity. Yoyo loved reading. She bought her son lots of picture books. Every night, she spent time reading books with her son after work. 'While he was reading, he became very quiet and focused.' Through reading, she taught her son to be sympathetic, understand other people's stories and be reflective about himself. She was bringing up her son from her perspective. Yoyo understood men and women bring up their sons in different ways, which are all important for the growth and personal development of their son. She tried to involve her husband in bringing up their child and 'made a pact' to have some time together every weekend. Yoyo's husband did not show his love and concern towards his son by spending chunks of time with him or being physically intimate with him. Instead, he showed his love and sense of responsibility by being good provider and maintaining a close connection with his son. Even though for his son, he was a 'distant dad' (Vincent and Ball, 2006) geographically most of the time, he was not emotionally.

Middle-class mothers' concern and anxiety about their children's upbringing is driven by two factors in Beijing. Firstly, children only get a comparatively low-quality education from state schools. As we can see from the above discussion, most middle-class families cannot afford private school tuition fees in Beijing. In a private school, students can get a Westernised formal education and they have more advantages for being admitted to secondary schools and universities in the UK and America. Because migrant middle-class families in

Beijing cannot afford apartments in excellent school districts, the only choice left is to send their children to a state school in their district, which has a lower quality of education. Their friends' and relatives' children in their hometown can get comparatively higher quality state or private education. In this sense, when middle-class mothers in Beijing find they cannot rely on the state education their children get in school, they make more effort to provide a more culturally nurturing upbringing at home and make use of public cultural resources, such as museums and theatres, in Beijing in order to provide a better environment for their children's growth and development.

Secondly, the middle-class mothers are all well-educated. They have already accumulated professional knowledge through education and work. The strong learning skills they have enable them to seek help from professionals for scientific child education methods. In this sense, because of their high expectations about their children's education and the constraints of the environment, middle-class working mothers are anxious about bringing up their children and try to build a more intimate relationship with their children compared with the previous generation. However, this needs a close cooperation between all family members. The husbands must also be willing to get involved in bringing up their sons and daughters from a man's perspective. More support must be given by the parents in doing work at home. Things do not always go well in this close cooperation. Apart from the unconcerned working father who does not want to make an effort with his children's upbringing, another common problem comes from the parents who want to take control of their grandchildren's upbringing and their daughters' lives.

Chunhua worked in a state-owned enterprise as a human resources manager. Her parents moved to Beijing and lived with her. Chunhua had a little girl a year after she got married. She wanted to be promoted in the workplace. Therefore, she was busy and needed to work at weekends. Her parents did most of the housework

and helped to take care of their granddaughter. However, Chunhua had different opinions from her parents on whether to have a second child or not.

My mother really wants me to have a son. She talks about this every day, which puts too much pressure on me. I do not want to have another child because I feel I am already exhausted being a competent mother to my only child now. My mother expects me to be successful at work, and she also expects me to do housework and bring up my daughter at home. She criticises me a lot, which makes me very angry sometimes. I even do not have the courage to be a good mother to my daughter any more. If I had a second child, all the family members would have to adjust to their new roles and new responsibilities. I really do not want to bother to do that. I feel society expects too much from a woman. If I was a man who was busy at work and did not do any housework, people would say it is ok. But as a woman who has to work, people criticise you if you do not take good care of your children.

In Chunhua's story, we can see that she wanted to please her mother. For her, her mother's expectation represented the expectation of the society towards a 'competent mother'. Chunhua's mother had a say on Chunhua's family division and the roles she should play in the family because of her deep involvement in the housework and childcare work. Young couples in China are less likely to co-reside with parents. They prefer to establish an unclear household of their own, which helps the young people to gain autonomy to some extent and decreases the authority of parents in the family (Yan, 2009). However, the choice which was preferred by my participants was asking their mother or mother-in-law to live with them when the new baby was born. The parents' involvement in the housework and childcare made the relationship between mothers, especially the mother-in-laws and daughters closer and more complicated. While Chunhua found her role at work as a responsible employee was in conflict with her role at home as a caregiver, she felt exhausted emotionally and physically. When her mother continued to put pressure on her to have another child, she refused. The grandmother's power in the family threatened the autonomy the young working

mother had in deciding their career development and role at home. In this sense, after the new baby is born, because the economic, housework and childcare work pressure become heavier, new mothers need to be more dependent on their husband financially, and they also need childcare assistance from elder parents, which means they have to sacrifice their autonomy to some extent.

### **Interpreting Women's Roles at Work and in the Family**

After discussing the roles employers, parents, and husbands can play in relation with married women, next I continue to explore how women themselves interpret their roles at work and in the family. Some women were more career-oriented. They identified more with the high social status acquired through having a professional job. Another type of women was more family-oriented. They identified more with their roles as a middle-class wife and mother in the family. These two types of women can be seen as located on a spectrum with housewife at one end and career women who do not have plan to give birth to the children at the other. Their plans for career development and family life changed at different stages of their life. Different types of middle-class women had their own agency to negotiate the public expectation of women to be 'virtuous wives and good mothers', and interacted with their colleagues and partners in different ways.

The first type of middle-class women acquired a sense of self worth through having successful career development. Kailin wanted to continue pursuing her career in a more challenging and competitive work environment after her baby was born. In the state-owned bank she was currently working in, most new mothers came back to work after their baby was born. There were still a very small number of women who left after they were pregnant. I asked her opinion



on married women who chose to be housewives.

Maybe they married someone rich. I want to see them in a tolerant way. It is ok if they really want to stay at home, but I will not be a housewife myself. I cannot feel the value of myself if I do not have a job. I do not know what I am doing and what my life will be like after my children grow up and leave home someday. I need to have my career and income.

Kailin acquired a sense of self worth from working. In this sense, she pursued promotion, further skills training and a higher wage. Kailin did a part-time MBA at a university in Beijing while she was working for the bank. After her baby was a year old, she planned to look for a job in a small commercial bank, which would provide her with a higher wage and more chance of promotion. She thought it was fine for her parents to be the main caregivers for her children. Even though she did not refuse to have a child, she did not feel being a full-time caregiver for her children could provide her with a sense of self worth. Her sense of self worth came from her position in the market economy. The more money she made with her professional skills, the higher self worth she felt from work.

Kailin also told me how her career choice was related to her relationship with her parents and her husband-choice decision. When Kailin was in high school, she found her father had betrayed her mother and had affairs. Her father had a bad temper and did not treat her mother well. Kailin felt her mother was afraid of her father at home. 'I was shocked when I found out he betrayed my mother. At that time, I felt I should have the capability to protect my mother against my father. So I kept encouraging myself to study and work hard.' Kailin's parents' bad relationship not only motivated her to be a capable women, it also influenced her husband-choice principle. 'I told myself I did not need my partner to have a good economic circumstance, but he must have a good temper and respect me.' The economic conditions of her husband's natal family were worse than Kailin's. They shared the deposit on their apartment in Beijing and also paid the mortgage

together. Having the capability to be the main family provider was not the primary criterion for Kailin in choosing a partner. She expected to have a more equal couple relationship in her marriage. The high social and economic status brought by her professional occupation empowered her in the domestic sphere.

Juanzi was also a career-oriented woman. In my interview with Juanzi, when I asked about her love stories and marriage plans, she was a little upset. 'I thought this was an interview about professional women. Why are you asking me about the men I've dated? Why does my boyfriend have anything to do with my career?' What Juanzi really meant was that her identity as someone's girlfriend or wife would not influence the effort she would make at work. Her emotions at the questions came from her job interview experience. She felt she was discriminated against, because employers asked about her marital status. 'But when a young man went to an interview, the interviewers would not ask about his private life. They thought women would not have that passion for work after they got married and had a child.' Juanzi told me she was the kind of women who 'would not sacrifice for the family'. However, she also told me she would take good care of her family while she was pursuing her career. 'I can do it all. I know that the more I want, the more effort I need to make.' I continued the interview and asked her why she did not give up having children if she really thought childcare work at home would hinder her career development.

Ambition is not a good word when used of a woman, don't you think? When used of a man, it is definitely a good word. It is recognised by society that women should be the main caregiver in the family. They should spend most of their time in the kitchen preparing food for their husbands and children. Even if the women have the passion for their work and want to be successful, they would not say so.

The patriarchal tradition of men as the main family supporter and women taking responsibility for looking after the family is still firmly in place in China (Zuo,

2003; Zuo and Bian, 2001). Alongside rapid economic transformation, patriarchal Confucian traditions have come back in China in recent years (Fincher, 2014; Ji and Yeung, 2014). Juanzi felt she had the responsibility of having a child. She did not give up taking on the role as a mother and a wife. Juanzi's ideas on the negative evaluation of 'ambitious women' came from her parents, relatives, childhood friends in the village, and her colleagues. It also caused her to have low self-esteem at work. She wanted to be an ambitious woman, but she also criticised herself for being too masculine. She fell into a gender identity dilemma. When Juanzi was a student, she studied hard and did well at school. She was always the pride of her village because of her good academic performances.

It is more difficult for the boys in the village to go to university like me. Compared with girls, they are naughty and less willing to concentrate on their study. Because of their poor academic performance at school, their parents just expect them to get a job as a labourer in a city when they grow up, and earn enough money to get married as early as possible.

Statistics in the related research show that female students perform better at school in China (Wong, Lam and Ho, 2002). They have the qualification to enter professional fields which used to be limited to males (Lin, 2003). Juanzi had a younger sister and younger brother. This family structure was common in her village. Juanzi told me the reason her parents wanted to have a boy was because 'daughters will eventually marry someone else, they need to have a son to help them with farm work'. It is the son who will take over the family business and support the parents when they are old, so the older generation has higher expectations on them. However, because of his poor performance at school, Juanzi's brother did not go to university. In a traditional patriarchal family, boys can access more social resources. However, the education system provides girls with the opportunity to perform better at school. After they finished studying, young women have better qualifications for a professional middle-class job.

Juanzi also wanted to have better success at work. However, she felt she was discriminated against because of her gender identity in the workplace. Juanzi's conflicting feelings towards her gender identity came from the roles she played in different situations, as a good student at school, as a daughter of farmers in a village family and as a female employee in the workplace.

This type of well-educated young women has a strong motivation to gain a sense of self worth from work. They do not want to take the role as the main caregiver in the family, so they look for a partner who can support their career and share the housework, but they also still feel the pressure of taking responsibility for being a mother and wife in the family. Because they felt they were discriminated against, they have low self-esteem at work when compared with male workers. It is easy for them to fall into the gender identity dilemma because of the conflicting expectations in the public and private sectors. They are 'do-it-all women' who want to take full responsibility at work and in the family at the same time. However, when career-oriented women cannot take responsibilities at the same time, giving up taking a role in the family is one method for them to solve the problem. As a full-time writer, Xiaohui migrated to Beijing because she could access the richest business resources there, like literary agents and publication companies. However, by writing novels, her income was unstable and comparatively low.

If you need to buy an apartment and support a child, the economic pressure on you is very high. You cannot be that selfish and only do the work you like. But, if you do not make a plan in your life like that, then you can have more choices on how to develop your career.

The money she earned was not enough to support a child in Beijing. Economic reasons were not the primary motivation for her to work as a writer. She began to reflect on her traditional gender expectations as a mother when the development

of her career was in conflict with supporting a child. However, she still had the skills which could make her financially independent. Therefore, when her choices went against the expectations of other family members, especially her parents, she still had the power to decide if she wanted to have children or not. However, the women working in the finance industry, software industry or other industries with stable and high incomes found it less likely need to consider about give up having children after they married or even never think of that as an option, because they did not have the same problems as Xiaohui. For the women like Xiaohui, giving up having children was for pragmatic reasons. For a couple who have made an agreement not to invest money and effort in supporting a child, marriage was not indispensable or urgent.

The career oriented migrant women in Beijing were high reflective on women's traditional role as main caregiver in the family, which reflects what Giddens called 'detraditionalization' (Giddens, 1991) or what Beck called 'disembedding' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). They were more influenced by the modern institutions, such as the expansion of higher education, the labor market of Beijing, and the state's *hukou* policy. Through migrating to Beijing, they acquired more life chances to have a successful career. Yan (2003) argues that professionals are granted more privileges and opportunities for self-expression and development compared with working class migrants by the government. However, without the support of a welfare state, women still had to rely on the family to provide their future children good material conditions. In an individualized society without cultural democracy, a welfare state regime and classic individualism, the professional women were taking isolated individual action of right assertion by asking a more equal gender division of labour in the family, or resisting by giving up having children. They were changing the traditional patriarchal family system from within.

Another type of middle-class women is more family-oriented. They want to take

the role as the main caregiver in the family. The young mothers continued to work after they had children in order to 'show their value' in the family and gain their husband's respect. As an associate consultant, Yuxin needed to socialise and maintain good relations with her clients after work. She travelled a lot for business. She was not satisfied with her work because she wanted to be more stable in order to get married and have a child as soon as possible.

I am not an ambitious woman. I hope my work will not influence my family life. Family is more important for me. No matter how successful a woman is at work, if she cannot get any company after work, her life is still very pathetic. This is my opinion.

There were many successful business women who were busy with work in Yuxin's company. However, she felt that she did not want to be one of them. She felt sad for them when she saw her manager drink a lot with her male clients in order to seek more funding for her projects. She felt it was too hard for women to have a child while she was working in such a challenging environment. Instead, she wanted to spend more time and make more effort taking good care of her family, keeping the apartment clean and tidy in order to make her husband feel warm and comfortable at home. I asked her why not being a housewife. She said she did not want to earn as much as her husband, but it was still necessary to have an income and help her husband to share the economic pressure of supporting a family.

Even though the main responsibility of married women is doing housework and taking good care of the children and their husband at home, you must have your income. If you do not earn any money and only stay at home all day, then your husband has all the economic pressure of supporting a family. He will look down on you and abandon you because he cannot see your value to him. Compared with those young beautiful girls, you will lose your attractiveness.

For Yuxin, having a job was to show her value and attractiveness to her husband. Yuxin and 'do-it-all women' have different attitudes and choices in their careers. However, they share the same idea of 'devaluing housework and caretaking work women did at home'. Doing housework and care-taking work could not bring any income for the family, the value of housework is regarded as relatively low compared to doing a full-time job. Yuxin also had conflicting attitudes towards her role in the family. She wanted to have a warm home and enjoy the company of her family. However, she also thought the work she did at home could not bring any economic income for the family and would be looked down upon by her husband. In this sense, she still needed to have a stable but not too tiring job, so that she could have enough time to take care of family.

Yoyo also told me she was not an ambitious woman when talking about her aims for career development. 'I only need a job. It is not about my dreams or my ambition. I do this because I think women need to have an income.' As an operations specialist in a technology company, she often needed to work overtime and travel on business. The money she earned was the same as her husband. She started to work for the company a year ago, because her child was three years' old and the couple needed more money to cover the family's household costs, especially their son's education fees.

My husband's work is very promising and he will earn much more money in the next few years. So I only need to do one or two projects every year. When my husband needs me to spend more time on taking care of the family in order to let him concentrate on his work, I will do that. But I need to have my income... We cannot evaluate each other by how much we earn in a family. The best case is, both of us are making progress on the things we are working on. So my husband will appreciate me, that is enough. This progress cannot be evaluated by how much money we earn... No matter how much a man loves you, if you keep asking him for money, year-by-year, he will look down on you.

In Yoyo's family, her husband took the role of being the main family provider. Therefore, he was expected to take on more challenges and spend more time at work. Yoyo took roles at work and in the family in relation to her husband's needs. She also made an effort in maintaining an intimate relationship with her husband by keeping attractive, providing emotional support for her husband by keeping the home warm and comfortable, doing housework and taking care of their child, in order to let her husband concentrate on his career development. In the interview, she told me how much she loved her son and wanted to provide him the best environment to grow up. She was one of the 'professional mothers' who wanted to invest more time, energy, money and emotional commitment into enhancing their child's development (Vincent and Ball, 2006) and was always anxious that what they did was not enough for their children (Hays, 1996; Hakim, 2000; Vincent and Ball, 2006). Therefore, one reason she wanted to leave her highly time and energy demanding job was that she wanted to spend more time bringing up her son.

As a family-oriented woman, Yoyo did not challenge the idea of 'regarding doing housework and childcare as work with comparatively low value' by emphasising the importance of housework for the family. Instead, the same as Yuxin, she argued that women should have their own work and income, which proved their value in the labour market. However, because her husband was taking the role as the main family provider, Yoyo did not have the economic pressure on her own, which allowed her to do work which she liked, but did not give her a high income. She also ran a bookshop with a friend. Yoyo told me if her husband's income could cover most of the household costs one day and he needed her to spend more time taking care of the family, she would leave her current job in the company and only run her own small business. Even though the small bookshop is not very profitable, Yoyo loved reading and had a strong passion for the work she did for the bookshop.



Family-oriented middle-class women are more likely to become part-time workers or even housewives when the family expects them to quit their full-time jobs. When I interviewed Beila, she was preparing to introduce her boyfriend to her mother. She told me she did not want to work in the company after she got married. 'I am a woman. I need to have children and take care of them. If I work in a company, it is not good for myself or the company. I do not really have any ambition at work.' Beila's mother was a housewife. None of the female family members in her boyfriend's family worked, which included his sisters, mother and grandmothers. So he hoped Beila would leave her job two or three years after they married. Beila and her boyfriend's natal family had a very similar labour division pattern. Beila had a brother. Her parents gave most of their money to him and supported him to buy a house and set up a small business in Beijing. I asked Beila's opinion of her parents' distribution of property in supporting their children. She said she could accept it because her brother was a man. 'He needs to earn money to support his family. My parents' money is his money. My boyfriend will buy an apartment for us. My parents will also give me a dowry. So, I do not need my parents' money.' Beila learnt the concepts and ideas on women's roles from her natal family and her boyfriend.

Beila had a Masters in Economics and Finance. When I interviewed her, she was working as a policy consultant, which needed her to often work overtime. Beila had lots of colleagues and friends who were ambitious at work. 'Maybe I am lazy, I feel it is very inconvenient if I want to take my parents to hospital while I have a lot of work to do in the company. I can manage my time more freely if I do not need to work.' For Beila, housework and caring for her family were more important than the work she needed to do in the company. She used 'maybe I am lazy' to explain the reason why she did not want to work, which showed well-educated women were expected and had the qualifications to have a professional middle-class job. However, she made her own choice with the support from her natal family and her boyfriend. Compared with 'do-it-all'

women who feel their duties at home leave them with too much of a burden and influence their career development, 'family-oriented women' are afraid their work takes away the time they need to use to deal with family issues.

Compared with working in the state-owned sector in a smaller and less marketised city, professional work in the non-state sector is highly competitive and time consuming, which drives married middle-class men who take responsibility for being the main family provider to devote more time to their work with a high social status and income. And it also drives their wives to spend more time on taking care of the family. When I interviewed Hongdou, she had just left her last full-time job in order to find a way to balance work with her responsibility for looking after her two-year-old son. She was looking for a part-time job. I asked her if having a comparatively low income made her feel vulnerable because she had to rely on her husband financially, and what she would she do if something bad happened to her marriage. She told me even though she was giving up a full-time job temporarily for her family, she would never give up her profession. 'As long as I have my skills, I do not need to worry. I do not really care about the material conditions of my life. Even if someday my husband left me, I could have a way to support myself financially.' Even for the middle-class women who played a more conventional role in the family, professional skills empowered them and enable them to have more freedom and agency to choose to stay in or leave a marriage relationship.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I explored married and engaged young professional migrant women's experience in the labour market and in the family. The neoliberal welfare system in China leaves the responsibility of child-raising to the

household. The professional women in Beijing delayed their marriage and child-bearing plan compared with their hometown. However, women were still expected to get married and have children in their late 20s and early 30s. Because of the high housing price and living expenses, they were also expected to have a professional job and share the family economic pressure with their husbands. They had different strategies to deal with the double burden from the workplace and family.

In the labour market, professional women of childbearing age were discriminated against because they had the risk of taking maternity leave. They were regarded as less effective and productive compared to male workers. In small and developing companies in the non-state sectors, the discrimination was more serious. However, because single women who were older than 35 were stigmatised, they were even less likeable and hireable in the labour market. In this sense, most women still married and had children in order to have a good reputation of 'being responsible and cooperative'. With the help of their parents, especially their mother, these women could return to work soon after they had their children, which partly explains the high female employment rate of mainland China. They even chose to work in a more competitive and high salary environment after they had finished having children. However, there were some career women resisted the patriarchal system and decided not to have children when their work is in conflict with their childbearing responsibilities, which reflects their occupational identity is the core of their self-identity. This is different from working-class women whose marriage and family role is essential for them (Beynon, 2004).

In the family, new mothers had to ask their parents for help with housework and childcare work, most middle-class families did not have the extra money to hire a nanny. They were still expected to bring up and spend time with their children after work. It was also the woman's responsibility to negotiate with her husband

and teach him how to be a new father and how to love their children. Young mothers were expected to work and have an income, because for most middle-class families, the father's income was not enough to cover the household expenses. The housewives who did not have any income were criticised for being too 'lazy'. However, women who were devoted to their work were criticised for being too 'masculine' and 'irresponsible to their family'. Even though there are career women who have a successful career after they have 'overcome the family burden' and finished the task of looking after their children, the middle-class women's primary role is still in the family after they had children. Because of women's indispensable role in the family as a salary earner and main caregiver, men respected them by actions such as adding their name to the apartment deeds. The couples created a sense of subjective equality by hiding gender inequality in their marriage.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I investigated how migration transformed well-educated young women's gender ideals. This study was initially inspired by my two years' experience of living and working in Beijing as a new migrant before I came to York for the PhD. I interviewed 29 well-educated migrant women in Beijing in the summers of 2016 and 2017 and asked about their migration motivation, work experience, personal relationships and married life. In this conclusion, I begin by examining why I chose this as my research topic in academic terms and some methodological thoughts. Secondly, I discuss the key debates in this research and how they contribute to the original knowledge of the fields of changing family and intimate relationship studies, middle-class studies, and migration studies in reform China. Then I move on to discuss the limitations and some thoughts for future research based on this study. Lastly, I end with some brief concluding remarks.

Migrating to another city or even a metropolis for a better career has become a popular choice for young well-educated women in China. However, there is little research that deals with their experiences. Most studies on internal migration in China focus on the working class. One possible reason is that these middle-class women have more advantages than stigmatised working-class women because of their higher educational backgrounds and social status. Working-class women are seen as situated in a more vulnerable position than middle-class women.

Research on the rising middle class in China and the discrimination professional women face in the workplace and marriage market is closely related to this research. However, there were three main gaps in the research in this area: 1) Well-educated women's migration experience has a lack of research. This research reveals how a higher educational background differentiates women's

migration experiences. 2) There is some research on the masculinity of middle-class men in China, but no research has looked into middle-class women's femininity. 3) Most research on professional women's personal lives is on the phenomenon of leftover women (*shengnü*). More research should be done on the trend of changing intimate relationships of professional women and how their personal life is related to their middle-class social status. My research fills these gaps by exploring the way migration transformed young professional women's gender ideals.

In discussing the methodology used in this research, I would like to emphasise my reflections on how the researcher's position as 'insider' or 'outsider' influences the data collection process. There is a large amount of research on the advantages and disadvantages of being an 'insider' or 'outsider' in an interview (Bart, 1987; Berger, 2015; Fawcett and Hearn, 2004; Fontes, 1998; Padgett, 2008; Kacen and Chaitin, 2006). My two years' experiences of living and working in Beijing equipped me with a perspective as an 'insider' of the migrant women I was studying. This position enhanced my confidence when doing the interview, diminished my distance from my interviewees and made it easier for me to understand the implied content of what my interviewees said. However, I felt I was also an 'outsider' when my participants were talking about an experience or situation that was completely new to me, such as an industry I was not in or a childhood memory in a remote village I had never known. In these cases, it was more challenging for me to ask in-depth follow-up questions or resonate with them. However, I could approach these unfamiliar experiences from a fresh and different viewpoint and ask for a detailed explanation of some of the ideas and concepts which for them were taken-for-granted.

I further discussed how I presented myself as an 'insider' or 'outsider' using strategies in the interview. When I was recruiting participants, I disclosed my experiences in Beijing in order to let professional migrant women feel that we

shared similar feelings and it would be easy for us to understand each other. During the interviews, I told nervous or shy participants some of the similar experiences that I had had in Beijing at the beginning of an interview, which was a useful strategy to put them at ease, create a rapport and make them more willing to talk. When my participants showed strong emotions in the interview, I also felt their emotion and showed my empathy in order to let them feel that I could understand what they were saying. However, I did not volunteer information about my experiences in Beijing when it was not asked, especially when I was not yet familiar with the participants and not sure how they would feel about my ideas. This avoided the participants feeling too much pressure to share different thoughts.

While I felt I was an ‘outsider’ to some experiences, I presented myself as a humble learner. In the recruitment advertisement, I introduced myself as a full-time PhD student at a university in the UK. My professional status made participants more willing to share sensitive experiences and feelings with me, because I was not in their social circle. In the interview, when they were telling me information I was completely unfamiliar with, I would let them control the agenda and only nodded and smiled while listening carefully. When I had different ideas from my participants, after they shared their ideas, I would also disclose mine and encourage them to tell me how they felt about the differences from their perspective, which often raised new discussions on an issue and enriched the data. Disclosing my identity as an outsider with different experiences and thoughts had to be managed properly in order to let participants feel they could trust me and their opinions were always respected. In the fieldwork of this research, I especially reflected on self-disclosure and presenting myself as an ‘insider’ or an ‘outsider’ using strategies in order to generate as much grounded, rich and detailed information from the fieldwork as I could, which provided a foundation for the data analysis.

In the recent history of China, women were always regarded as a group which had been enlightened, liberated and mobilised. The liberation discourse has been passed to this generation and adjusted to the context of the reform era. In urban areas, the lifelong security of employment and welfare which was supported by the work unit (*danwei*) system was dismantled. Well-educated graduates had the freedom to choose jobs and employers. The responsibility for social reproduction and care returned to the household. Without the intervention of the work unit, marriage became something which was more private and personal. In this neoliberal context, Chinese women were still ‘born to be mothers’ and had the family responsibility of having and bringing up children. Unlike the advanced urban women in the Mao era, who were mobilised to contribute to and sacrifice for socialist production, middle-class women in the reform era were ‘mobilised’ to be ‘self-responsible professionals’ (Hoffman, 2008) and make full use of their skills and knowledge in the market economy.

As migrants in Beijing, young well-educated women faced specific economic, social and political structural contexts. Beijing is more marketised compared to inland areas. More job opportunities in indigenous private or shared-ownership enterprises and foreign enterprises are open to well-educated graduates. The welfare and advancement of professionals in non-state sectors is more determined by the workings of the market. In foreign and private companies, which are dominated by the market and entrepreneurial culture, women’s individual effort and innovations were encouraged and rewarded. Promotion is more decided by work capability, regardless of gender. However, in enterprises which need their employees to work overtime and travel frequently, women were still easily excluded because of their ‘family responsibility’. In the enterprises that place more emphasis on engaging personal relations (*guanxi*) with their superiors, women were either excluded from political struggle, or enduring sexual harassment at work. The market economy is still dominated by masculine culture (Osburg, 2008; Shen, 2008; Tam, 1996; Zheng, 2006; 2009).



Another institutional factor which influenced migrant women's life in Beijing was China's Household Registration (*hukou*) system. Unlike migrant workers who cannot settle down in Beijing, middle-class migrants have an opportunity to acquire a Beijing *hukou* and they also have the economic strength to purchase a private commercial apartment and become permanent residents who have the legitimacy to live in Beijing. For migrant professionals, the economic pressure is higher than for professionals who work in small cities because of the higher price of commercial apartments. The economic ability of men to purchase an apartment in Beijing became an important criterion for women in choosing a potential marriage partner. The migrant family also needs a working mother's income in order to pay the mortgage. In the reform era, the Beijing *hukou* system functions as a sorting mechanism (Fan, 2002) and select migrant professionals who have a high income and consumption power to stay.

Because of migration, young women were away from their families, and they were also away from their families' intervention on the issues such as choosing a potential mate or a job. Compared with the well-educated young women in their hometown, who with the help of their parents' *guanxi* worked in state-sector organisations which were dominated by a clan and hierarchy culture, and who married early, these well-educated young women, through migrating to Beijing, enjoyed greater independence, comparatively higher incomes and a better opportunity to develop and make use of their professional skills at work. The increased geographical mobility promoted migrant women's individualization (Yan, 2003). The same with migrant working class women, the market force pulled well-educated graduates to leave their natal family and hometown to enter the unknown market competition of Beijing without the support from the welfare state. The migrant women's freedom was not without constraints in Beijing. They had to have the ability to apply a Beijing *hukou* and afford the high living expenses in Beijing in order to have the legitimacy to stay. For my participants,

the main reason why they wanted to achieve this legitimacy was to provide their children with a public education opportunity in Beijing. The successful middle-class migrant story in Beijing was actually centred on proving their ability to ‘take the family responsibility by being responsible parents’. This confirms the argument for the revival of the patriarchal family-centred Confucian tradition in recent years (Fincher, 2014; Ji and Yeung, 2014). Yan (2003) argues that Chinese individuals had to fall back the support from their personal networks because the individualization in China has little institutional protection. For migrant women, the family still has the function of providing support for the old and the children.

The ‘family responsibility discourse’ is closely connected to a woman’s role in marriage. In order to be responsible, well-educated women in Beijing were expected by their parents and colleagues to get married and have a child before their early 30s. When they were choosing a potential marriage partner, they were attracted by middle-class men who had a sense of responsibility, which meant men who had the economic power to purchase an apartment and support a family in Beijing. After the child was born, women were expected to take the main responsibility for bringing up and providing emotional support for their children. ‘Being a responsible husband’ also meant a middle-class husband should help his wife and participate in his children’s upbringing and provide emotional support for them. However, this does not mean they had an equal division of labour at home. The main responsibility for men was to be the family provider. For middle-class women, being a wage-earner also had the aim of sharing the economic pressure with her husband and providing good economic conditions for their children to grow up in. Therefore, they should choose a stable job which was not stressful and did not need them to work overtime or travel frequently. Having a successful career and high status at work was certainly not required for being a responsible middle-class woman. The discourse of regarding career women as ‘too masculine’ and regarding a housewife who did not have income

as ‘too lazy’ pushed them to be ‘responsible women’ who took a double burden of home and work. Even though a middle-class husband and wife were expected to care about each other and help each other, the gendered division of labour at home always existed. Women had comparatively lower economic power and status at home and in the workplace. The family relation was not centred on the intimate relationship of husband and wife. It was more centred on child-raising. It fits the ‘dutiful spouse’ model (Jankowiak and Li, 2016). The intimate relation between parents and children was more emphasised compared with the intimate relation between husband and wife. Being ‘virtuous wives and good mothers’ was central to the ‘emphasized femininity’ (Connell, 1987, p.187) for middle-class women. However, because of their higher educational background, they were expected to have a professional job at work, and learn more ‘scientific’ knowledge to provide good upbringing and emotional support for their children. Being ‘working wives and a professional mothers’ were important traits of ‘emphasised femininity’ for migrant professional women in Beijing.

Family responsibility discourse is also popular among working-class migrants in China (Choi and Peng, 2016; Gaetano, 2015; Lin, 2014). For migrant parents, the aim of working in big cities and earning money was for the welfare of their family members, especially to pay the living expenses and tuition fees for their children. Being responsible parents was also out of filial devotion to their parents. The difference is, middle-class migrants have the qualifications to apply for a Beijing *hukou* and buy an apartment in Beijing, so their children can go to local public schools. Working-class migrant parents do not have the qualifications or economic ability. Therefore, they have to send their children back to their villages to go to school. The grandparents of working-class migrant parents help to take care of their grandchildren and migrant parents work in cities and send money back regularly. Middle-class migrant parents could provide their children with more companionship and emotional support. They were more concerned and anxious about their children’s upbringing. Comparatively, working-class

migrant children accumulated less cultural capital compared with middle-class migrant children without the participation of their parents in their upbringing.

However, 'being a responsible middle-class mother was not the only choice for migrant women in Beijing. When people find themselves failing to match some gender ideas, they sometimes distance themselves from a given gender identity and have strategies to cope with the conflicts (Connell, 1987). They adopt other strategies than compliance to deal with hegemonic masculinity at workplace and in the family, such as resistance or cooperation. In the interview, Xiaohui said she felt she was exploring new possibilities and new lifestyles to find out what kind of life she really wanted to live. Liuyuan said women like her were in a minority, but she did not mind being in a minority, as long as she was happy with her life. The young migrant women had recognised the prevailing gender order; however, not all of them were satisfied with this order. They were making different choices and new explorations within the structure and making new changes.

Firstly, women had more freedom to express their sexual desires and enjoy sexual pleasure instead of only accommodating men's sexual desires. In the Mao era, sexuality was strictly controlled by the state and incorporated into the planned economy (Dikotter, 1995; Edward, 2000; Evans, 1997). Sexual feeling was negatively contrasted with a sense of social duty in contributing to socialist development. Premarital sex and sexual relationships outside marriage were not accepted. However, in the reform era, Maoism was portrayed as having repressed human nature and sexual desire was described as part of human nature (Rofel, 2007). The idea that sexuality is part of human nature is popular among the migrant women in this research. Sexual desire was described as 'pure, physical and aesthetic'. Women had positive attitudes towards expressing their sexual desires. The discourse first appeared in the May 4<sup>th</sup> era among urban intellectuals in order to show their rebel spirit against the feudal patriarchal system (Farrer, 2002). Based on an ethnographic study on the sexual practice and culture in

Shanghai in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Farrer (2000) argues that in the reform era, having sex for aesthetic reason was in contrast to having sex for pragmatic reasons, such as to marry someone who had good economic circumstances.

My analysis of young women's understanding of sexual desire confirms and complements Farrer's and Rofel's arguments. When analysing professional migrant women's sexual desire in Beijing, I took women's 'class' and 'tastes in men' into consideration. Young women's aesthetic tastes in their love partner were actually made on the basis of surface signifiers, such as clothing, appearance, ways of eating and drinking, and ways of taking up physical space. They were attracted by someone who shared similar middle-class tastes to them, such as having afternoon tea, wearing designer brand clothing, using beauty products to maintain a neat and healthy appearance. Hird's (2019) research on middle-class men in Beijing is also closely related, because it reveals these professional women were attracted by love partners who shared similar middle-class tastes. Johnson and Lawler (2005) argue that our love relationships are constructed by social class. In my study, professional women's sexual desire and aesthetic tastes in men were structured by their middle-class social positions. The body they found attractive was the product of hedonistic and capitalist consumerism in metropolitan contexts.

Secondly, because sexual desire was justified, sexual relations out of marriage or without the aim of marrying were more widely accepted among the well-educated migrants in Beijing. In order to avoid bearing the economic pressure of a house deposit and mortgage payments, young women postponed getting married and replaced it with cohabitation, short-term casual sexual relations or informal romantic relationships. Their professional career improved their economic power and status and promised them an income to afford a decent single life in Beijing. They could have a better career in other mega cities or

overseas so they still had the possibility of migrating again. Other big cities like Shanghai, Hangzhou or Chengdu also provided them with more potential mate choices compared with the migrant women's hometowns. The young people rented their own place to live, so they could get away from their parents' intervention in their private romantic relationships. They could live a more independent life and had a more tolerant attitude towards different forms of romantic and sexual relationships. My analysis complements the research on the phenomenon of *shengnü* in mega cities in China. The research on *shengnü* shows it is patriarchal constraints which hinder professional women's marriage in big cities (To, 2013). My research shows some of the professional women in Beijing voluntarily chose to postpone or replace marriage with other romantic relationship forms. Their choice of being single while facing pressure to get married from their colleagues and family was made out of the special economic, social, and cultural context of mega cities like Beijing. Women changed their intimate relationship out of both pragmatic and ideological reasons.

In my research, women also had a tolerant attitude towards sexual relationships out of marriage. When discussing husbands or partners' extramarital affairs, women told me as long as men took responsibility for the family, they could accept the affairs. Because sexual desire was 'out of human nature', it was understood as something which could not be constrained by any external factors, such as marriage. In this sense, 'having a sense of responsibility' was used to cope with the uncertainty sexual desire brought to their marriage. As long as men were still willing to sustain the marriage, take the family roles and responsibility of paying the mortgage and household expenses, participate in the children's upbringing and provide emotional support for them, any extramarital affairs could be tolerated. There is already some research on the 'second wife phenomenon' in mainland China (Lang and Smart, 2002; Osburg, 2008; Xiao, 2011). The research shows that in extramarital relationships, compared with women, men had comparatively higher social and economic status and provided

economic support for the women in the relationship. Young, beautiful women were regarded as successful men's trophies. My study shows wives' attitudes towards husbands' extramarital affairs and their roles in constructing masculine culture of capitalist economy.

Thirdly, unlike working-class migrant women, who regarded marriage as essential for their life and worked for the welfare of their families after they married, some middle-class migrant women worked in order to fulfill their personal values and would not 'sacrifice for the family'. They felt doing housework or bringing up a child could not provide them 'any sense of self-worth'. Their sense of self-worth came from the high status they achieved in the work they were interested in. Even though they did not refuse to get married or have a child out of a 'sense of family responsibility', they would find strategies to cope with the conflicts between family responsibility and their work. When they were choosing potential husbands, whether a man could really understand, support and respect their choices and decisions was regarded as being a more important criterion than a man's good economic conditions. Therefore, they could accept men who had equal or even worse economic conditions than them and paid the deposit and mortgage on the home together, so they had comparatively equal power in the marriage. When they could not afford to buy an apartment or did not plan to have children yet, they preferred to replace marriage with cohabitation, or even give up marriage when family responsibility was in great conflict with their career development.

After a child was born, they expected their husbands and other family members to help with housework and childcare, so that the women could go back to work as soon as possible. They expected a more equal division of labour in the family and in the workplace. Because they had less of a 'family burden', they could compete with men for the positions which needed them to work overtime or travel frequently. They did not want to be discriminated against because of their

gender, so they preferred to work in organisations which were more dominated by a market or entrepreneurial culture and regarded employees' work performance as the most important criterion for promotion. Good welfare and the stability of work in their hometown were not attractive to them so they preferred to work in more competitive and marketised non-state sectors in Beijing. They were ambitious, aggressive and adopted a strongly masculinised way of working. These career women resist the masculine power in intimate relationship; however, they cooperated with hegemonic masculinity at work. Their attitudes towards work and family were more like the 'iron girls' in the Mao era, housework and childrearing work was regarded as women's 'family burden' which they should overcome in order to achieve career success and win men's respect at work. It was still a male-centred culture, in which women were encouraged to take men as the norm in order to win social respect. The economic reform of China is highly masculinised.

There were also career women like Xiaohui. She rejected the ideology of regarding a high salary and position as being successful, instead, she pursued self-development at work by sticking to the profession which she felt emotionally attached with. She gave up working as a business consultant with a high salary and worked as a full-time writer, which did not even bring in a stable income. In order not to spend money and time on bringing up children, she cohabitated with her boyfriend and chose not to have children in her early 30s. Xiaohui adopted the most resistant strategy to deal with the hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal order at work and in the family. Aima and Anne adopted similar strategies to Xiaohui. They all had academic qualifications in the humanities. They had a comparatively lower salary compared with professional women who worked in technology and finance industries. Their skills were under-valued in the labour market. Without the intervention of work units, women could have the freedom to 'give up' this 'family burden' by choosing not to marry or have children. However, they were most rebellious in the



masculinised market economy.

The reason why professional women's attitudes towards marriage and family were able to be different from working-class migrant women was because of their middle-class status. Because of working-class migrant women's low educational background and low economic status, they were regarded as a social group which is uncivilised, ignorant and lacking cultural quality (*suzhi*) (Gaetano, 2015; Jacka, 2014; Yan, 2003). In the reform era, in order to promote the marketisation of the economy, the party needed creators of wealth and consumers. The image of the middle class is primarily associated with high cultural quality, high consumption power, high economic and social status and a high quality lifestyle (Guo, 2019). However, housework and childcare work at home cannot bring in any income, so it is regarded as unproductive and having low value. Because well-educated women had professional knowledge and skills, they had the potential to have a successful career relying on their ability and become a new generation of the middle class. Compared with doing housework and childcare work at home, career women felt their work in the public sphere would bring them more 'sense of self-value'. They were 'professional subjects' who were highly responsible for developing their professional skills and their career success (Hoffman, 2008). They defined 'who they really are' through making choices on their work and career. Their professional status won middle-class women autonomy in public and private spheres. In neoliberal China, the state's management of the 'professional subjects' actually happens through this freedom.

This research is not without limitations. It was limited by the time and funding I had. Even though I conducted follow-up interviews one year after the first round of fieldwork, the overall time spent on doing fieldwork was only half a year, which is a short amount of time to undertake an in-depth and comprehensive qualitative study. My fieldwork was conducted in Beijing. Because of Beijing's

specific social and economic environment, with the Beijing *hukou* policy and high housing prices, the experiences of the well-educated migrant women in this research cannot represent well-educated migrant women in other cities or even other international metropolises, such as Shanghai and Shenzhen. Every city has its own migration policy, which may influence migrant women's experience in different ways. However, I did use different recruitment strategies and theoretical sampling methods in order to ensure that my sample was as diverse as possible. I used online platforms and public events to do open recruitment and then I used a snowball sampling method and acquaintance introduction method to find participants with special characteristics. I identified seven characteristics which diversified my participants and I included as many people as possible in every category with these characteristics. I did not intend to represent every well-educated migrant woman in Beijing in this research. I wanted to explore how these characteristics diversified the migrant experiences of my participants, and how they worked in this particular social, cultural and economic context.

There are several issues which can be expanded on based on this research. Firstly, more research could be done on the well-educated migrants who eventually left Beijing. Not all well-educated migrant women acquire a Beijing *hukou* and settle down in Beijing. When I came back one year after I did the first round of fieldwork, some of my participants had already left Beijing. They either went back to their hometown or migrated again to other cities. Exploring their migration pattern and how their experiences in Beijing influenced their life course would present a more rounded description of the free flow of professionals in China. Secondly, I would like to investigate the migrant experiences of well-educated men in future research. There is already research on middle-class men and masculinity in China. It is necessary to take migration into consideration. The issues of a fathers' absence on children's upbringing, migrant men's attitudes to women's different choices in marriage and intimate relationships and their strategy for choosing between career, family and private

life all lack research. Thirdly, I have observed sexism in the workplace hinders women employees from accessing high position, affects women's well-being and drives them away. More studies should be done on how to make a change and create a more democratic and equal work environment for professional women, and how to apply these measures in the context of Beijing. This is an exploratory study. China is undergoing rapid social change. I hope this research can raise issues for gender studies about China in the future.

This thesis provides an insight into the changing gender ideals of young well-educated migrant women in Beijing. Neoliberal capitalism opened up new opportunities and chances for professional women to do self-exploration. Migrating to a more marketised mega city like Beijing make them more individualized brought them freedom and autonomy in their lifestyle and career choices. However, migration also created new vulnerabilities, such as higher living expenses, greater market competition and the constraints of the Beijing *hukou*. The labour market, workplace and family are still dominated by patriarchal order and masculinized culture. Whether a 'professional mother' who follows experts' advice and practises 'intense mothering', or 'career women' who starved for their personal career success, their professional skills and knowledge empowered them with higher social and family status. Migrant professional women in Beijing have adopted different strategies in order to deal with the risk and uncertainties in their life, and established 'feminized professionalism' in a masculinised market economy, which brought potential changes in the gender order as a whole.

## **APPENDIX A: RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET**

### **What is the research title?**

The Self-identity Dilemma of Young Well-educated Female Internal Migrants in Beijing

### **Who is the researcher?**

My name is Shuaili Wang and I am a PhD student at the Centre for Women's Studies, University of York. I am conducting this study to collect data for my PhD thesis.

### **What is the research about?**

My research project concentrates on understanding how the young well-educated female migrants construct their self-identity while working and living in Beijing. I will interview at least 20 young migrant Beijing women about their migration experience. The topics include their career, families, consumption patterns, friendship and future life aspirations.

### **Why is the research being carried out?**

Marketization and globalization brings the young generation of Chinese a lot more opportunities and choices. And this can be reflected by the dramatic population mobility in China. The previous sociological research on China's population mobility concentrates on understanding the migration experience of peasant workers and the second generation of peasant workers. However, it is the well-educated and skilled young migrants who are telling their migration experience in mainstream media. Well-educated young migrants are assumed to have professional skills and live a middle-class lifestyle because of their education background. However, the problems they met are neglected and lack of research. In this sense, I hope this research can help to understand how the well-educated female young migrants understand the society, negotiated with their gender identity and take actions accordingly.

### **Do you have to take part?**

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to take part but later change your mind, you are still free to withdraw for any reason and at any time up to 6 months after the interview or the focus group discussion. If you decide to withdraw, I will destroy all the data relating to you.

### **What do you need to do if you take part?**

You are going to have a conversation with the researcher in Chinese. The conversation will last for one hour or two. You can decide where to do the interview. And you can also discuss with me about the interview afterwards. You may also be invited to take part in a focus group discussion on further questions based on the interview results. And I will send you the summary of the research results after the fieldwork finishes, and you are welcome to make comments on the results based on your experience.

**What will happen to your data?**

The information you provide in the interview will be transcribed in Chinese. Parts of the interview transcripts will be translated into English and used in my PhD thesis, conference papers and related academic publications. I will ensure confidentiality and anonymity in my research. All the data will be stored safely, and only my supervisor and I can see the original data.

If you agree, I will archive my fieldnotes and transcripts in the UK data archive after I complete my research. During the whole process of this project, you can ask to read your information in the fieldnotes, transcripts of the interviews, PhD thesis and related publications. My research has been reviewed and approved by the Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology (ELMPS) Ethics Committee, University of York. If you are concerned with any ethical issues in my study, please email the ELMPS Ethics Committee or my supervisor.

I sincerely invite you to participate in my research project. If you have any questions before, during or after my research, please feel free to contact with me. Your participation is much appreciated and thank you very much for your cooperation.

**Contact details:**

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Supervisor: Professor Stevi Jackson  
Email: [stevi.jackson@york.ac.uk](mailto:stevi.jackson@york.ac.uk)

The ELMPS Ethics Committee, University of York  
Email: [elmps-ethics-group@york.ac.uk](mailto:elmps-ethics-group@york.ac.uk)

## 项目信息表

### 这是一个关于什么的项目？

北京外来年轻职业女性生活状况调查。

### 研究者的身份是什么？

我是王帅利，现在是英国约克大学性别研究中心的在读博士。我的这次研究是为博士论文提供材料和数据。

### 本次研究的研究内容是什么？

这项关于北京外来年轻职业女性的调查主要涉及其在北京的事业发展，社交生活，家庭关系和消费习惯，以及未来生活规划等几个方面。通过这几个方面的调查，去试图解释其女性的性别身份对于其建构个人身份的影响和相互关系。本次调研会采访至少二十名受访者，并了解他们对相关问题的态度。

### 本次研究的意义和价值是什么？

相对于我们的父辈来说，这一代的年轻人受教育和成长于 80 年代后期和 90 年代前期——是中国经济和全球化影响渐深得时期。我们面对的是更多文化和个人发展的选择和机遇，这在很大程度上反应在中国的人口迁移上。之前相关社会学研究的关注点是中国“现代化发展”释放出的巨大劳动力需求，以及由此引发的农民工进城和二代农民工的现象。但是，现在主流媒体所关注的，以及在主流媒體上讲述自己的“漂泊”故事的，是受过高等教育、有一定学历和专业技能，并且从事专业化职业的白领阶层。而且他们同时也被这样的言论和价值观深深影响，例如“北上广还是回老家”“体制内还是体制外”“创业梦想”和“理想与个人价值的实现”等等。但是，与媒体热议形成对比的，是社会学意义上对于这一流动人口群体所面临的社会处境的探讨的缺失。所以，我想借由这个调查，去重新认识都市外来职业人，特别是高知识女性群体所面临的社会处境，以及她们在此处境中做出的个人选择。

### 您如何选择参与或者退出这个研究项目？

参与这个研究完全出于自愿。如果您决定参与这个项目但是后面又改变主意，在我数据采集结束后六个月之内，您可以随时选择退出。如果您决定退出本项目，与您相关的数据都会被彻底删除。

### 我会怎样参与到这个项目中来？

你会被安排一个一两个小时左右的采访，采访的时间和地点以你方便为准。在这个采访结束之后，你还可以用邮件或者其他方式对于采访的内容进行讨论。你另外会被邀请参加一个小组讨论，讨论的问题会是基于采访问题的延续，讨论的目的是听取在群体中，你对于这个问题的看法和对相互观点的回应是什么。再调查信息采集结束后，我根据采集到的数据，写一个调查结果总结，发到您的邮箱，也欢迎您对于结果发表个人意见和评论，您的意见和评论对这个项目非常珍贵，也会被写入最后的研究报告中。

### **我会怎样处理收集来的信息？**

采访的音频会存入我的个人电脑中，并且一部分音频会用中文记录和编辑，从中会有一些被翻译成英文并写入最终的项目报告中。这是一个匿名的调研，所以我会保证写入报告的信息不会对您的个人生活造成影响，也不会有人因此辨认出您的真实身份。而且只有我和我的导师会分享原始的数据信息。

在征得您的同意后，我将在研究结束后把笔记和采访数据存入英国数据档案中。在我的博士研究期间，您可以随时要求阅读我的笔记、采访记录、博士论文和相关出版物。这项研究已经通过了英国约克大学经法管政社科伦理委员会的批准。如果您有任何疑问，欢迎您邮件联系英国约克大学经法管政社科伦理委员会或我的导师。

**非常真诚得邀请您参加这个项目。如果你在项目过程中和这之后对此有任何的疑问，请和我联系。非常感谢您的合作！**

### **联系方式：**

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英国约克大学女性研究中心博士生  
邮箱：sw1134@york.ac.uk

导师：Professor Stevi Jackson  
邮箱：stevi.jackson@york.ac.uk

英国约克大学经法管政社科伦理委员会  
邮箱：elmps-ethics-group@york.ac.uk

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

Research title: The Self-identity Dilemma of Young Well-educated Female Internal Migrants in Beijing

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This form is for you to state whether or not you agree to take part in the study. Please read and answer every question. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

1. Have you read and understood the project information sheet about the study? Yes  No
2. Have you had an opportunity to ask questions about the study? Yes  No
3. Do you understand that the information you provide will be held in confidence by the researcher? Yes  No
4. Do you understand that the information you provide may be used for PhD research and future publications? Yes  No
5. Do you agree to take part in the study? Yes  No
6. Do you agree your interviews will be audio recorded? Yes  No
7. Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study up to six months after the completion of the interview and the focus group discussion? Yes  No
8. Do you agree to allow the researcher to archive your data in the UK Data Archive? Yes  No
9. Do you understand that the researcher will anonymise your name and disguise your personal information in her thesis and future publications? Yes  No
10. Do you understand that if you choose to withdraw from this project after the interview, the recording and transcript will be destroyed? Yes  No

Your name (in BLOCK letters):

\_\_\_\_\_

Your signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Your contact details:

\_\_\_\_\_

The researcher's name:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## 知情同意书-采访

项目题目：北京外来年轻职业女性生活状况调查

研究参与者请填写此表格来表达是否愿意参与研究，请认真阅读并回答下列问题。如果您有任何问题请咨询研究者。

1. 您了解此研究内容并阅读了项目信息表吗？ 是 否
2. 您了解您有机会提问吗？ 是 否
3. 您了解您所提供的信息研究者将予以保密吗？ 是 否
4. 您了解您所提供的信息将用于研究者的博士论文和相关学术研究的发表吗？ 是 否
5. 您同意参与此研究吗？ 是 否
6. 如果同意接受采访，您同意此次采访全程录音吗？ 是 否
7. 您了解您可以在采访和小组讨论结束六个月内随时退出此次研究吗？ 是 否
8. 您同意研究者将研究数据提交给英国数据档案馆么？ 是 否
9. 您了解研究者会在论文中将您的信息匿名处理么？ 是 否
10. 您了解如果您选择退出这次研究，您所提供的信息会被删除吗？ 是 否

姓名: \_\_\_\_\_

签名: \_\_\_\_\_

您的联系方式: \_\_\_\_\_

研究者姓名: \_\_\_\_\_

日期: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX C: ONLINE RECRUITMENT OPEN LETTER**

### **THE FIRST ROUND RECRUITMENT OPEN LETTER**

Hi, I am Sally, a PhD student on sociology in a university in the UK. I am recruiting participants for my social investigation project 'The Lifestyle of Professional Migrant Women in Beijing.

The whole investigation plan is based on my two years' experience of living and working in Beijing as a new migrant. I worked as an editor in a publication company and lived in an apartment in Anzhen [a district in Beijing]. It only took me half an hour by bus to go to Gulou [a district in Beijing, in the centre of the city]. In those two years, I met lots of girls who came to work in Beijing, just like me. And we became very good friends. We had lots of interesting and creative thoughts on what kind of life we wanted to live.

Just like meeting a new friend, we can talk about our jobs, families, friends, the clothes and skin care products we like, or some events we recently went to. If you are interested in my story, I can share my experience of studying and working in the UK with you. No matter it is about my Master or PhD application, or my non-fiction writing skills.

So, if you are a girl who is from somewhere outside of Beijing, no matter where your hometown is, no matter how long you have been living in Beijing, and it does not matter if you have a boyfriend or not, please contact with me directly before the end of August if you are interested in the project. And all the interviews will be made face to face in Beijing. My Wechat Number is: wsl2193072 (Sally).

In the whole research process, your real name will not be asked, nor any other personal information, such as your work address or home address. The data collected will only used for academic research.

## **THE SECOND ROUND RECRUITMENT OPEN LETTER**

The fieldwork has been started for one month. I have finished ten interviews. I have interviewed journalist, headhunter, consultant, and women in many different industries.

In order to cover a more diversified group, I am currently looking for participants:

Who have degrees on Science or Engineering

Who have degrees on Economics, Law or Management

Who have been living in Beijing for more than 5 years

Who work for government, public institutions or state-owned enterprises

Who graduated from the universities in Beijing

Who are from villages

If you are interested in this research, or know anyone who has such backgrounds, welcome to contact with me. In the whole research process, your real name will not be asked, nor any other personal information, such as your work address or home address. The data collected will only used for academic research. My Wechat Number is: wsl2193072 (Sally).

## 第一轮网络招募公开信

Hello, 我是 Sally, 在英国中部的一所大学里学习社会学和人类学。目前在为一个关于“北京外来职业女性生存状况”的调查招募受访者。

计划的缘起,是我刚毕业时在北京两年的工作和生活经历,那时在一家出版社做策划编辑,住在北三环的安贞门,到鼓楼只需要半个小时的公交车程。两年中结识了不少和我一样在毕业后专程来这座城市工作的女孩子们,大家都有很多可爱的想法。

访谈更像是交往一个新认识的好友,关于对方的工作,生活,亲戚,朋友,喜欢衣服和护肤品的牌子,喜欢乐队的演出……

如果你对我的故事感兴趣,我也会分享给你我在英国读书和工作的经验,不论是硕士、博士申请,还是社交,找工作,或者是非虚构写作,和虚构写作的方法。

如果你是从外地来京工作的女孩子,不论老家在哪,不论你在北京已作多久停留,不论有没有蓝盆友。如果对访谈感兴趣,都可以直接联络我报名参加访谈,报名时间为4到8月,访谈地点在北京,我的微信:ws12193072 (Sally)。

会让大家放心的是,整个访谈会是以全匿名的方式,所以我不会知道你任何重要的个人信息。在访谈之前会签订非常严格的保密协议,收集到的信息只用于学术,不会有任何商业用途。

## 第二轮网络招募公开信

“北京外来职业女性生存状况调查”的 Project 已经开展一个月啦！我也顺利完成了 10 个正式的访谈。受谈者的职业涉及网站视频编导、独立音乐厂牌运营、上市公司猎头、商业品牌咨询、保险销售，手游 APP 运营……

接下来，还有十几位已经报名的受访者要和我约访啦！但是因为这次访谈项目一直都是通过我个人的微信朋友圈进行招募的，所以大家其实分享了很多类似的“特质”，但是为了研究可以尽量覆盖到更多不同的人群，我还在寻找可以有如下一项或多项“特质”的受访者：

- 理工背景
- 经管、商科类背景
- 在京从业 5 年以上
- 公务员、事业单位、国企员工
- 京内高校毕业生
- 农村家庭背景

如果对项目感兴趣，请与我取得联系，我也在通过我个人的社会关系来寻找一些合适的访谈对象，但是是一件非常困难的事情，因为在日常的社交生活中大家通常不太会去讨论对方的家庭背景。欢迎符合相关条件的女性直接联系我，参加这个严格匿名和对个人信息保密的访谈。我的个人微信号：ws12193072

**APPENDIX D: SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT INFORMATION**

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Year of Birth</b> | <b>Working experience</b> | <b>Education</b> | <b>Occupation</b>             | <b>Marital status</b>     |
|-------------|----------------------|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Dou         | 1984                 | 8 years                   | MA               | Finance Professional          | Single                    |
| Qiu         | 1990                 | 2 years                   | MA               | Civil Engineer                | Single                    |
| Kailin      | 1987                 | 5 years                   | MA               | Bank Data Analyst             | Married, with no children |
| Chunhua     | 1988                 | 4 years                   | MA               | Human Resource Manager        | Married, with a child     |
| Yuxin       | 1992                 | 1 year                    | MA               | Project Consulter             | In a Relationship         |
| Bao         | 1992                 | 1 year                    | MA               | Human Resource Manager        | Single                    |
| Hongdou     | 1989                 | 3 years                   | MA               | Finance Manager               | Married, with a child     |
| Sisi        | 1979                 | 16 years                  | BA               | Doctor                        | Married, with a child     |
| Baixue      | 1981                 | 14 years                  | BA               | Engineer                      | Married                   |
| Jing        | 1990                 | 3 years                   | MA               | Project Consulter             | Married, Pregnant         |
| Luqi        | 1989                 | 4 years                   | BA               | Internet Operation Specialist | Engaged                   |
| Beila       | 1992                 | 0.5 year                  | MA               | Project Consulter             | In a Relationship         |
| Liuyuan     | 1989                 | 3 years                   | MA               | Researcher                    | In a Relationship         |
| Mingming    | 1991                 | 2 years                   | MA               | Journalist                    | Single                    |
| Juanzi      | 1987                 | 0.5 year                  | MA               | Executive secretary           | Single                    |
| Chenxiang   | 1991                 | 0.5 year                  | BA               | Event planner                 | Single                    |
| Yuzi        | 1988                 | -                         | PhD candidate    | PhD student of Film Study     | Engaged                   |
| Yoyo        | 1985                 | 7 years                   | BA               | Internet Operation Specialist | Married, with a child     |
| Aima        | 1993                 | 0.5 year                  | BA               | Internet Operation Specialist | Single                    |
| Qixi        | 1993                 | 1 year                    | BA               | Internet Operation Specialist | Single                    |

|         |      |          |    |                                  |                      |
|---------|------|----------|----|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Su      | 1993 | 0.5 year | BA | Headhunter                       | Cohabiting           |
| chengzi | 1986 | 5 years  | MA | Project Consulter                | Single               |
| Mifei   | 1988 | 5 years  | BA | Sales in Insurance<br>Company    | Single               |
| Lili    | 1992 | 1 year   | BA | Internet<br>Operation Specialist | In a<br>Relationship |
| Anne    | 1991 | 2 years  | MA | Director                         | In a<br>Relationship |
| Xiaohui | 1985 | 5 year   | MA | Project consulter                | Cohabiting           |
| Feifei  | 1987 | 5 year   | MA | Product Manager                  | Single               |
| Liuyue  | 1988 | 4 years  | MA | Project consulter                | In a<br>Relationship |
| Hong    | 1987 | 4 years  | MA | Editor                           | In a<br>Relationship |

## GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS AND PHRASES

- Dagongmei 打工妹 Female Peasant Migrant Worker  
Funü 妇女 Woman  
Ganqing 感情 Feelings  
Gaokao 高考 National University Entrance Examination  
Gongxin xiaoqu 工薪小区 Lower-Income Neighbourhoods  
Guanxi 关系 Networks  
Hukou 户口 Household Registration  
Hunhun 痞子 Yob  
Liudong renkou 流动人口 Floating Population  
Lunzi paibei 论资排辈 Being Promoted Based On Length Of Service  
Mendi 门第 Family Status  
Nei 内 Inside  
Nüxing 女性 Female Sex  
Pai mapi 拍马屁 Kiss The Asses  
Qingchunfan 青春饭 Rice Bowl Of Youth  
Qundai 裙带 Nepotism  
Sancong 三从 Threefold Following Or Dependence  
Shabi 傻逼 Idiot  
Shengnü 剩女 Leftover Women  
Sushi 素质 Culture  
Tongmenghui 同盟会 Chinese Revolutionary Alliance  
Touji quqiao 投机取巧 Shady Transactions  
Unit 单位 Danwei  
Wai 外 Outside  
Xian 贤 Virtuous  
Yingchou 应酬 Entertaining Clients  
Yuan 元 Chinese Dollar  
Yuanfen 缘分 Fate



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