DREAMS OF

**THE LIVES OF
CHINESE WOMEN
STUDENTS
IN THE WEST**

Fran Martin

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THE LIVES OF CHINESE WOMEN

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FLIGHT

This book is dedicated to Chinese women
everywhere pursuing the dream of overseas study

Contents

Preface *After Mobility?*

This book is about the international education industry, human mobilities, and neoliberal subject formation, especially its gendered aspects. Late 2020 feels like a strange time to be completing the manuscript, since, even as I write, the COVID-19 global pandemic is scrambling the conditions of possibility for each of these operations in ways that were unimaginable when this research project began.

Dreams of Flight examines the central role that geographic movement plays in shaping human lives in the era of global capitalism. It explores how transnational educational mobility—desires and potentials for it as well as representations and practices of it—has enabled young, middle-class Chinese women to elaborate and embody emergent forms of subjectivity and feminine gender. This is a particular example of a more general phenomenon: the defining influence that mobilities of all kinds have had in making the social world of capitalist late modernity and the types of human subject possible within it.

In recent decades, higher education, neoliberal rationality, and mobilities have become mutually entangled in historically distinctive ways, both in China and Australia—this study's primary foci—and globally. In many countries, amplified capacities for the transnational movement of capital, bodies, information, and technologies have been instrumental in refashioning higher education according to the principles of the market, such that degrees have tended increasingly to become framed more as a commodity for private consumption than as a public good. The young Chinese women whose stories are told in this book represent the human face of this marketization of education. Privileged to be able to opt out of the Chinese system and enter the global higher education market, they invested in expensive degrees at Australian universities in order to develop themselves as human capital for the high-paying tertiary and quaternary industries that dominate economies in late capitalism, especially finance and related fields. This book addresses their subjective experiences of that journey and the way those experiences in turn shape the women's understandings of themselves and the world.

At the time I am writing this preface, the havoc wrought by the global coronavirus pandemic has exposed more starkly than ever the reliance of the Australian higher education system on these mobile students. Their enrollments have dwindled to a trickle as a result of virus-related border restrictions, leaving a multibillion-dollar budget black hole in the national higher education sector and a question mark over its future.

Beyond the specific—and devastating—impacts of missing international student fee revenue in higher education, the immobilization enforced by the pandemic also throws into sharp relief the former taken-for-grantedness of everyday mobility capacities more generally and raises pressing questions about their sustainability and future. In many places worldwide, geographic borders are closed or heavily restricted in an effort to curb the virus's spread. Airlines and travel agencies are in an unprecedented state of crisis. This preface is being written under a "hard lockdown" that sees the residents of Melbourne, the city where I live, confined within our homes for twenty-two hours a day, and movement outside the home restricted to a five-kilometer radius. University teaching, for both domestic and international students, has moved almost completely online, obviating the need for physical movement by staff and students.

Looking back from our immobilized and uncertain present, then, this project appears like a kind of time capsule: a window back onto the not-so-distant boom times when logics of physical mobility were the commonsense grounding not only of higher education but also of virtually all aspects of late-modern life and the kind of people it enabled us to be and become. The viral crisis reminds us of the precarious fragility of a world whose incessant movement recently felt as reliable as the orbit of the planets.

Although both human mobilities and international education markets are bound to revive in some form postcrisis, many questions remain. Will nations like Australia make a decisive turn away from reliance on private international student fees to prop up public higher education? Will mobility reassert itself as our era's cultural dominant? Is neoliberal globalization experiencing a crisis that will fundamentally reshape the world we know? Does this book provide a snapshot of a lost past or an insight into forms of being that will return as a defining feature of future times? While the answers to these questions remain unclear, I hope that the book can offer some fresh understanding of ways of being, moving, and knowing oneself and the world that have been central to Chinese, Australian, and transnational middle-class cultures in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Acknowledgments

Worlds in Motion

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Growing Up on the Move

Summer storms delay my flight from Shanghai, derailing Mr. and Mrs. Qiu's plan for us to discuss their daughter Yiruo's imminent journey to Australia over dinner.[1] *Instead, I meet the family in the lobby café at my hotel minutes after skidding in from the airport. We chat for an hour and a half, sipping tea and hot chocolate as discreet piano music tinkles in the background, punctuated now and then by the beep-beep of incoming business calls on Mr. Qiu's cell phone. The initial polite reserve between Yiruo's parents and me gradually dissolves as we realize we're the same age: all born around 1970. When Mr. Qiu learns that I studied in China in the late 1980s, he visibly warms up: "Ah, then you understand how different China was in our student days." I nod, smiling: no need for further elaboration, the changes are too obvious—from socialist state in the dusty throes of early development to rising economic superpower with a string of shining megacities like the one where we meet tonight; from everyday austerity to superabundant consumer culture; from a mainly rural to a largely urban population; from geographically static lives to people everywhere on the move; from comparative economic equality to a widening wealth gap; from relative cultural insularity to ever deeper internationalization. Illustrating some of these transformations, although today Mr. and Mrs. Qiu—both university-educated professionals—belong clearly to China's new urban middle classes, when they were their daughter's age they had virtually no chance of studying abroad: such a dream was beyond reach for the vast majority owing to insuperable economic and bureaucratic constraints. In contrast, Yiruo has already spent four years in Malaysia for high school and is about to embark on an undergraduate engineering degree in Melbourne, after which her parents expect her to remain abroad for postgraduate study and probably to live and work outside China long-term, in Australia or perhaps the United States, Canada, or Britain.*

The Qius have an easygoing manner with each other and with me, and the affection between parents and daughter is obvious, expressed in jokes and friendly banter that, as the evening progresses, reveal some interesting family dynamics.

Evidently Mr. and Mrs. Qiu think eighteen-year-old Yiruo needs to work on becoming more independent. She is too emotionally attached to them, they say, and should concentrate on developing her own independent career and personal life. For Mr. and Mrs. Qiu, Yiruo's overseas study supports this goal, and they push the idea that she should live independently overseas after graduation. Yiruo, however, resists this narrative. While she shares her parents' vision of herself as simultaneously a Chinese patriot and a developing global citizen—someone who is proud of her homeland but, in her words, "suited to traveling around everywhere, . . . fitting in anywhere"—she hopes to prove her worth by prospering professionally to the extent that she could bring her parents overseas to live with her and support them financially. Her father gently scoffs at this idea, interpreting it as a sign of Yiruo's immaturity. "After all, your parents do have some capacity for independent survival!" he chuckles.

Yiruo's parents' vision of how she should grow up also includes overtly gendered elements. Mrs. Qiu tells me she hopes Yiruo will grow out her hair, which is cut in a boyishly short style. "I mean, in Malaysia the weather's so hot, so she's always kept her hair short like that. But when she goes [to Melbourne], I hope she'll style it more like her mum's. . . . Grow her hair long. . . . That way it'd be more girly." Another disagreement arises over the question of marriage. Mrs. Qiu hopes Yiruo will follow gendered convention: "[One should get married] when one's finished studying and one's about twenty-five or -six. . . . As parents, we feel she shouldn't leave it too late, just follow the normal way: when you've finished studying, start a family. . . . So that [marriage] happens before age thirty." But Yiruo disagrees: "These things are impossible to plan. . . . Everything depends on whether you meet the right person. . . . If you never meet the right person, then there's nothing you can do about it, is there!" But Mr. Qiu repeatedly urges Yiruo to find a boyfriend at university to avoid finding herself left on the shelf. "You shouldn't think: this time is purely for study, I can't have a life. . . . While you are studying, you can also find love. . . . [Otherwise,] later on, when you want to find a boyfriend, . . . you're in trouble." "The good ones will all be taken," her mother concurs. Yiruo sits listening respectfully to her parents' imprecations, smiling a small, self-contained smile and nodding, saying little. But when her parents go on to foretell Yiruo's inevitable lifelong loneliness if she fails to make a timely marriage, she speaks up: "You're overthinking it!" she chides her father, laughing. "Let's not discuss this topic. I don't want to talk about it." "She's quite attached to her parents, you see," her father interprets to me. "But," turning to Yiruo, "you can't refuse to grow up! You do have to grow up sometime."

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This discussion, which took place shortly after the commencement of my field-work in mid-2015, reveals gendered tensions that surfaced repeatedly, in different forms, in my interactions with young women in the Chinese student diaspora over the next five years. At issue in the (superficially) lighthearted disagreements between Yiruo and her parents on the eve of her departure for overseas study are generational, gendered, and personal divergences in their understandings of what it means for a young woman to grow up. For Mr. and Mrs. Qiu, for Yiruo to grow up meant that she should emulate a more normatively feminine look, find a boyfriend, loosen her reliance on her parents, and exchange her ideal of long-term co-residence with them for timely marriage and a family of her own. They hoped study abroad would help push Yiruo along this route, increasing her capacity for emotional independence while also throwing eligible bachelors into her path (later Mrs. Qiu pointedly asked me about the male-to-female ratio among Chinese students at the university her daughter would attend in Melbourne).

Yiruo, however, had different opinions on these issues. This was borne out over subsequent years as I continued to meet with her during her study in Melbourne. Yiruo stuck to her tomboyish style. She kept her hair short; favored androgynous, sporty clothing; and once jokingly referred to herself as "half-girl, half-boy." Gradually, she also revealed to me her same-sex sexual preference. In these ways, while living abroad, Yiruo defied many of the rules of normative femininity that her parents held dear. A couple of years after the event, Yiruo provided some insight into our conversation with her parents that night in her home city. She told me that because she had studied abroad since the age of fourteen and before that had lived away at boarding school, her parents actually didn't know her nearly as well as they thought they did. That night she hadn't felt able to contradict them directly on the boyfriend issue and instead just tried to change the subject. Rereading the discussion in light of this, we see Yiruo tactically deflecting her parents' attempts to have her conform to their gendered ideal of how she should grow up. To circumvent the marriage question, she emphasizes instead her emotional attachment and filial duty to her parents (which by no means implies that her sense of these is not sincere). For Yiruo, then, growing up seems connected with staying true to her alternative version of gendered selfhood and finding ways to resist parental pressures pushing her toward a normatively feminine identity, while remaining filial toward her parents.

However, notwithstanding these conflicting understandings of the meaning and appropriate conduct of female youth, overseas study was able to "work" for both Yiruo and her parents and to some extent mediated the conflicts between

them.[2] Both parents and daughter shared the assumption that spending some years studying abroad is a normal and desirable experience for a middle-class Chinese woman in her late teens or twenties. Yiruo's study abroad was very much a family project, with her parents financially supporting her studies; encouraging her emergent mobile, cosmopolitan outlook; and hoping that overseas study might facilitate their daughter's progress toward normative feminine adulthood. Yet, in and through these family-supported overseas study ventures, Yiruo was actually able to hew out a space and time of partial insulation from her parents' concerned efforts to mold her gendered self, sexuality, and life trajectory.

My evening with Yiruo and her parents illustrates this book's core claim: that understandings and practices of gender are inseparably entangled with middle-class Chinese students' experiences of educational mobility. Indeed, Yiruo's story prompts us to consider a whole series of questions about gender, class, and mobility in (and beyond) China today. What does it mean, and how does it feel, to grow up within the category "girl" in China's urban middle classes in the new millennium? How does the personal mobility newly available to members of these classes impact youth, women, and families? How does traveling abroad for study transform gendered practices and understandings of the transition from adolescence to adulthood for young people like Yiruo and her contemporaries? In short, how are experiences of gender and transnational educational mobility entangled and mutually transformative for the current generation of Chinese women students? These questions are all the more pressing given that since economic reform, the proportion of women leaving China for study has increased fivefold, so that today 60 percent of outgoing students are female—even though men significantly outnumber women in the birth cohorts of this generation (Kajanus 2015, 1; *Renmin Ribao* 2016).[3]

During that first month of fieldwork during which I met the Qiu family, gendered aspects of study abroad were everywhere apparent in my discussions with students and their families. I met a young woman from a lower-middle-class family who was to be the first in her circle of acquaintance to study abroad and who came to our interview accompanied by an elder female cousin who spoke at length about how she had married too young, now faced intense pressure from her mother-in-law to have a baby and devote herself to familial care work, and regretted losing opportunities for further education such as her cousin now had. I met several young women who, like Yiruo, hoped for various reasons either to delay marriage or to avoid it altogether and saw studying overseas as a means of distancing themselves from family pressure and buying some extra time. I met daughters who hoped to overcome what

they saw as the gendered limitations of their mothers' lives by expanding their own geographic, cultural, and professional horizons through international education, and mothers who framed overseas study as an attempt to compensate for the gender bias in professional employment markets that might otherwise hinder their daughters' chances of landing a decent job in China. I engaged in a WeChat conversation over several months with a young rural woman whose dream of studying in Australia was shattered at the last minute by her parents' divorce and the consequent withdrawal of her paternal grandfather's financial support for her education. Of course, not everyone I met was critical of the gendered status quo. The educational choices of many reflected orthodox views about careers that "naturally suit" women, being relatively safe, stable, and undemanding (office work in the corporate sector or as a civil servant in China's government bureaucracy were the most commonly cited examples; Hoffman 2010, 121–41; J. Zheng 2016, 84). Some opted for a one-year master's course on the grounds that although it might be taken less seriously by employers in China than a standard-length degree, "that's all right for a girl." A couple put aside their hopes to remain abroad for work or further study in order to "follow" boyfriends already settled into employment back in China (Y. Hao 2019). But whether they criticized the gendered status quo or saw it as natural and inevitable, all of these women's stories point to the deep entanglement of gender with educational mobility for the generation of Chinese youth born around and after 1990 (commonly called the 九零后 *jiuling hou* or "post-90" generation). This entanglement, and the subjective and affective dynamics to which it gives rise, provides the central theme of *Dreams of Flight*.

In addition to questions about the gendered social life of the Chinese student diaspora, Yiruo's story also raises a number of broader questions. How does the Chinese educational exodus reflect China's economic rise and the attendant in-process transformations in the world order? Within this new order, what will it mean to think of oneself, as Yiruo and many of her contemporaries do, as a global citizen and simultaneously a patriotic Chinese one? How do the massive and ever-growing numbers of mainland Chinese students studying abroad impact the societies overseas where they live and study? How will Chinese students living in multicultural Western cities be interpellated, construct themselves, and interpret others around them in relation to discourses of ethnicity and race? While this book's central theme is the entanglement of gender with educational mobility, around this thread are woven concomitant questions concerning the lives of China's new middle classes, students' negotiations of the ideals of cosmopolitan selfhood and global citizenship alongside loyalties to the Chinese state, and the ways in which China's intensifying trans-

national reach through educational mobilities reconfigures aspects of urban social life, including the workings of race (and racism), in the Western cities where these young people study. The chapters that follow explore these gendered and other questions across the full life cycle of international study, from Chinese students' and families' hopes, expectations, and motivations predeparture, through my fifty core research participants' experiences of everyday life abroad, to their peripatetic postgraduation lives in China, Australia, and other locations around the world. The following pages provide contextual background by discussing China's transforming economy and class structure in the reforms era and the concomitant new cultural centrality of mobility as a form of value, as well as the shifts in available frameworks for interpreting gender over this same period, which have produced the tensions outlined earlier.

Market Socialism and the New Middle Classes

Following the death of Mao Zedong, from 1979 the Chinese Communist Party under Deng Xiaoping initiated a series of reforms (改革开放 *gaige kaifang*) based on market liberalization, the decentralization of economic planning, the partial privatization of state enterprises, and the opening of the nation to foreign investment. Processes were thereby set in motion that, four decades later, have thoroughly transformed the structure of class in China, both by intensifying social stratification and by complicating its underlying logics. Whereas under high socialism (1949–78) access to resources depended almost wholly on one's political and institutional relationship to the party-state, in the reforms era a hybrid of market and reconfigured state forces has enabled increasing numbers of professionals, managers, and entrepreneurs across private, collective, and state sectors to accumulate unprecedented levels of private wealth (Bian et al. 2005; Goodman and Zhang 2008; Li Zhang 2010; Goodman 2014). Today these groups may be characterized—albeit contentiously—as constituting China's new middle classes.[4] The expansion of these classes has not been autonomous from the party-state but was actively encouraged by it. Whereas, during the Mao years, the bourgeoisie was represented as the enemy of the people, and the material basis for its existence was removed through the abolition of private enterprise and property ownership, in 2002 the Sixteenth Party Congress explicitly endorsed enlarging the "middle-income strata" (中等收入阶层 *zhongdeng shouru jieceng*), framing this class as a bulwark to economic stability and a "harmonious society" (Tomba 2004; Cheng Li 2010). This stance continues to the present day (figure I.1).

FIGURE I.1 Government slogan outside the Shanghai Exhibition Centre (formerly the Sino-Soviet Friendship Building), December 2017, mixing socialist rhetoric with the language of lifestyle: "It is the people's aspiration toward the good life that is the objective of our struggle." Photo by the author.

Connected with economic and income growth, urbanization, and increasing higher education and white-collar jobs in the reforms era (Chunling Li 2010), the new entrepreneurial, professional, and managerial classes to which the participants in this study belong emerged through a number of stages. Between the late 1970s and the 1990s, social mobility was relatively high as opportunities to accumulate wealth in the emerging private sector expanded (Bian 2002). Chunling Li (2010, 150) observes that most members of the first generation of China's entrepreneurial middle classes previously held blue-collar jobs. David S. G. Goodman and Xiaowei Zhang (2008, 10) trace the history behind this upward mobility in more detail: first, a wave of small-scale individual business operators (个体户 *getihu*) emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, followed in the 1980s to early 1990s by entrepreneurs in rural township and village enterprises who developed the nation's manufacturing base. The 1990s saw a third wave of entrepreneurs emerging in the construction and resource industries, followed by a fourth in the real estate and finance sectors.[5] But the high levels of social mobility supporting the emergence of today's middle classes were short-lived (J. Lin and Sun 2010). Writing in 2014, Goodman describes contemporary China as "a society characterized by its low social mobility and high intergenerational transfer of privilege and disadvantage" (33; see also Bregnbæk 2016). By now, the new class structure formed during the first two decades of reform has to a great extent solidified (Goodman 2014, 79).

In China the concept of the middle classes circulates widely in a number of linguistic forms—from the classic Marxian *zhongchan jieji* (中产阶级), or *middle-propertied class*, to *the middle stratum* (中等阶层 *zhongdeng jieceng*), *the well-off* (小康 *xiao kang*), and *the petite bourgeoisie* (小资 *xiao zi*)—and refers to a commonly recognized (and self-recognized) group associated with specific resources, lifestyle practices, anxieties, and aspirations. The middle classes as they are generally understood are largely urban, with a social status based on higher-than-average income, occupational prestige, education, and leisure consumption (Chunling Li 2010; M. Chen and Goodman 2013). They own property in the form of apartments, cars, and financial assets; use commercial financial services like credit cards; and travel internationally for tourism and education (Cheng Li 2010; Li Zhang 2010). Recent research with people belonging to these groups also points to some collective preoccupations. In particular, the middle classes seem pervaded by a fear of falling: an underlying anxiety about their capacity to maintain and reproduce their class status in the face of an uncertain economy, risks attaching to income derived through "gray" channels in a time of hard-hitting anticorruption drives, and the disappearance of socialist-era safety nets (Li Zhang 2010, 7–10; Osburg 2013). For those within them, China's new middle classes feel like a precarious place, surrounded on all sides by new risks that are the underside of the opportunities brought by economic reform (Ren 2013; Ji 2017; Zhu and Zhu 2017).

The family backgrounds of the core participants in this study reflect this sociohistorical background. Most of the students' families belonged to the professional, entrepreneurial, and managerial middle classes. They mainly lived in larger cities on the wealthy eastern seaboard and in central and southwestern provinces, although about a quarter were from smaller, less developed cities in these areas. The parents worked in state or private enterprises as managers or in a range of professional roles, including as engineers, editors, designers, teachers, doctors, accountants, and media workers; many were also entrepreneurs running their own trading, manufacturing, or other small businesses. Some were government cadres; a smaller number—largely mothers—were nonprofessional employees. But although all participants' families could be classified at the broadest level as belonging to China's middle classes, they demonstrated a spread from the lower to the upper segments of this diverse and fragmented class formation.[6] At one extreme, one or two families subsisted on income from small-scale family businesses that involved parents in hands-on manufacturing and retail activities; at the other extreme, some parents were high-ranking cadres and wealthy professionals with significant investment holdings. The class history of participants' families was also diverse, including some parents with only basic levels

of education who began life as smallholding farmers (or "peasants": 农民 *nong-min*) and struck it rich as entrepreneurs in the manufacturing and construction sectors during the 1980s and 1990s, alongside other parents who were born into far more privileged situations and held postgraduate qualifications.

Despite the pervasive sense of precarity experienced by members of China's middle classes, with the state's endorsement of an expanding middle stratum and ordinary people's desires for a comfortable life, the concept of middle-class identity nevertheless has a largely positive public image: a set of idealized representations and aspirations attaching to the "good life" that is spread through government campaigns, popular media, and literary print culture (figure I.1; Y. Zheng 2014; T. Lewis, Martin, and Sun 2016). In particular, middle-class people are represented as having high levels of *suzhi* (素质): a term that originated in state discourse in relation to the goal of optimizing population quality for national development and today has taken on a life of its own in everyday speech and become deeply polysemic, broadly indicating something like cultural civility (Kipnis 2006; Hsu 2007; D. Lin 2017). As the term is popularly understood, the individual with high *suzhi* is well educated, tasteful, cosmopolitan, and cultivated and displays civic virtues including good manners and ethical engagement with others. As an exemplary norm and new form of human value, *suzhi* is indicatively associated with the urban middle classes, in contradistinction to rural and laboring populations (Bakken 2000; H. Yan 2003; Anagnost 2004; Jacka 2006; Wanning Sun 2009; Tomba 2009; Hoffman 2010).

Class, Education, and Transnational Mobility

High levels of education are central to both the image and the practices of China's new middle classes. First, the emergence of these classes is structurally linked with the expansion of educational institutions and opportunities (Chunling Li 2010; J. Lin and Sun 2010); and, second, the government-supported popular ideal of middle-class identity hinges centrally on the embodiment of *suzhi*, which is itself based in significant part on educational attainment (Anagnost 2004; Kipnis 2011, 57–89). The central place of academic achievement in China's middle-class imaginary is well established. Fengshu Liu (2008, 206) demonstrates how the academic endeavors of successful university entrants are fueled by their aspiration toward a middle-class lifestyle ideal (小资生活 *xiaozi shenghuo*) characterized by financial security, material comfort, social status, and pleasure. Other studies show how children become vessels for middle-class aspirations and anxieties, undergoing multiple forms of private training to

enable them to excel academically while embodying a middle-class habitus and high *suzhi* (Donald and Zheng 2008; Li Zhang 2010, 124). Thus, argues Liu, "in present-day China, education, *suzhi*, qualifications, social mobility, and the 'good life' have become inter-related concepts," fueling the formation of a credential society (following R. Collins [1979]): "the widespread assumption . . . that one should get as much (credentialized) education as possible in order to cash in on as much career advancement as possible" (F. Liu 2008, 197–98).

A number of factors have combined in recent decades to extend the geographic range of educational credential seeking among China's middle classes to a transnational scale, producing student outflows of unprecedented size and with them a new, education-based economy of Chinese transnationalism. Overseas study at destinations including Europe, the United States, Japan, and the Soviet Union has a long modern history in China, commencing in the late nineteenth century and proceeding through a series of stages, with different destination countries predominating at different historical moments in reflection of current social, economic, and political imperatives.[7] Since the turn of the twenty-first century, though, outward student flows to Western study destinations have grown exponentially and taken on a new character reflective of their times. Chinese government statistics reveal that more than four and a half million Chinese students studied abroad between 1978 and 2016, with an annual average growth rate of 19 percent and over half a million outbound students departing China annually since 2015 (*Renmin Ribao* 2016; Xinhua's China Economic Information Service 2017). This dramatic upsurge in privately funded Chinese young people traveling overseas for education has been fueled, on the most basic level, by rising wealth and the Chinese middle classes' belief that standards of tertiary education in Western nations and Japan are in general higher than those in most Chinese universities (aside from the very top tier). "Study-abroad fever" (留学热 *liuxue re*) is also fed by the middle classes' anxieties about the reproduction of their social status in light of an ever more marketized, inequitable, pyramid-shaped, and competitive secondary education system at home. In this regard the situation mirrors Johanna L. Waters's findings in Hong Kong, where "overseas education provides a means of escape and sanctuary [from a highly demanding local education system], as well as an opportunity to acquire more valuable cultural capital" (2008, 109–10; see also Fong 2011; Nyíri 2010, 37; Kajanus 2015, 46–72). These factors have in turn driven the emergence of elite, fee-supported internationally oriented secondary school programs, encouraged by neoliberalizing state education policy, which, as Shuning Liu (2020) argues, further exacerbates class inequality in China's education system.

These interconnected contexts were reflected in study participants' educational experiences and orientations. In line with their families' middle-class privilege, the urban secondary schools that participants had attended included many selective-entry, designated key state schools and elite private and international schools and streams, as well as some mid-to-high-ranked ordinary public schools. Based on National College Entrance Exam (高考 *gaokao*) results, however, most had middling levels of academic capital. Although, unusually, two participants had actually turned down places in first-tier Chinese universities in order to study abroad, many other undergraduates had gained entry only to second- or third-tier courses and saw an Australian degree as a preferable alternative.[8] A handful had skipped the stress of the *gaokao* altogether to enroll directly in Australian foundation studies programs geared toward university entrance.

In Australia over half of the participants (twenty-eight) enrolled in degrees in business, accounting, and finance-related areas; smaller numbers majored in media, construction, health, education, design, and arts. The interest in accounting qualifications partly reflects Australian immigration policy at the time, which designated accounting as a skill-shortage area and hence a preferred occupation for skilled migrants. But the concentration in finance-related fields also reflects a broad trend among Chinese students studying abroad (Australian Department of Education and Training, International Research and Analysis Unit 2016)—with a gendered dimension. Many parents consider office-based work in finance and accounting fields an appropriate choice for women, and anecdotal reports from study participants confirm that a significant majority of the Chinese international students taking such courses are female. The most common career aspiration I heard these young women voice was to be hired by one of the Big Four multinational accounting firms (Deloitte, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ernst and Young, and KPMG). Through their transnational education ventures, they hoped to develop themselves as human capital for the female professional labor force that fuels global finance capitalism, especially in its ongoing expansion into East Asia (Nonini and Ong 1997; Sklair 2001; Duthie 2005; A. Ong 2008; Hoffman 2010; Brown 2015, 175–200; Rottenberg 2018).

But the cultural capital students hoped to attain was not only the direct result of educational credentials that would help them land desirable jobs. It also connected to transnational mobility and cosmopolitan habitus as themselves carriers of value. As in Waters's Hong Kong example, students and parents hoped that Western education would "inculcat[e] [students] into the mores of a cosmopolitan and *hypermobile* middle-class lifestyle" (Waters 2008, 10), so

that such education could be seen (drawing on Katharyne Mitchell [1997]) as "an essential component of . . . a 'self-fashioning' process, undertaken by East Asia's transnational middle-class seeking inculcation in the 'language of the global economic subject'. . . . It symbolizes the possession of more than just a credential, representing a whole host of cultural, embodied traits conducive to professional success in a global economic arena" (Waters 2006, 181; see also S. Zhang and Xu 2020). In China today, Western education has become a commodity that indicatively expresses and consolidates middle-class social status (Xiang and Shen 2009). In the case of Australia, where immigration pathways may open out from tertiary study, transnational education may also be part of a broader family strategy of flexible residence, providing a hedge against the possible economic, political, or environmental risks of remaining in China (Osburg 2013, 14, 190; Robertson 2013; Liu-Farrer 2016).

The valuation of transnational mobility as a good in itself reflects a broader context in China, where, as Pál Nyíri (2010, 6) has shown, after 1978 and particularly since the 1990s, cross-border mobility has taken a central place in state discourses of what it means to be Chinese in the modern world (see also Oakes and Schein 2006). The state's rhetorical valorization of mobility is supported by far-reaching reforms to mobility's bureaucratic regulation at both domestic and international scales. Reforms to the place-based household registration (户口 *hukou*) system during the 1990s have resulted in massive population movements from rural to urban areas as people move in search of work (Pun 2005; H. Yan 2008; Nyíri 2010, 10–34). These new domestic human mobilities are paralleled by rapidly increasing numbers of people traveling outward for tourism, education, business, and migration: annual documented international departures soared from 3 million in 1990 to 130 million by 2017 (Zhongguo Wang 2012; Xinhua She 2018).

Concurrently with this exponential growth in human mobility, as Wanning Sun (2002) illustrates, increasingly deterritorialized media enable new forms of imaginative mobility and the formation of a pervasive transnational imagination and subjectivity, even among those who have not (yet) traveled abroad. The generation of urban dwellers born since 1990 has grown up in an era of near-ubiquitous English teaching in schools and at a time when imported media have become a pervasive part of everyday life through online distribution. This affords China's current generation of youth—the nation's first digital natives (Prensky 2001)—unprecedented opportunities to develop a transnational imaginary and to dream of mobile futures. Participants in this study grew up surrounded by an omnipresent mediated imaginary of "overseas" (国外

guowai), supporting their class-bound capacity to aspire to transnational mobility (Appadurai 2004) and naturalizing educational travel as both a normal part of youth and a step toward membership in a globally extensive, transnationally mobile developed-world community (Fong 2011; Baas 2012; Robertson, Harris, and Baldassar 2018).

In broad terms, for the families supporting their children's study abroad, educational mobility functions as a transnational strategy to enhance human capital and thereby consolidate and reproduce middle-class identity and privilege. However, when Chinese students are living in Western cities, the question of their privilege becomes more complex. Students' privileged class status tends to be undercut by their racialization as Chinese: a national-racial identity more likely to be a liability than an advantage vis-à-vis self-advancement abroad. When they are corralled into underpaid, low-status jobs in Australia, Chinese students and graduates, like the Indian IT professionals in Germany studied by Sareeta Amrute, are both "nonwhite migrant workers . . . *and* upwardly mobile, middle-class subjects" (2016, 2). As well as illustrating the general point that "the impact of individuals' multiple identities is not always mutually reinforcing" (Ho 2020, 70), such complexity within the students' middle-class identity underlines the specific significance of geography for the production—and destabilization—of social privilege. Even in an era of global capitalism and ubiquitous human mobilities, *where you are* continues to matter, materially and intensely, for *who you can be*.

Making Gendered Subjects: Frameworks in Flux

One of this book's starting points is the claim that the subjectivity of China's post-1990 generation of middle-class women is conditioned by multiple historically specific, competing, and sometimes contradictory understandings of what a woman is, what being a woman means, and how one should practice this form of gendered identity. As a result of the multiplicity and fragmentation of the discursive field surrounding femininity in China today, this is the case even before these women leave the country and potentially find their understandings complicated further by experiences abroad. In the following, I delineate some of the main discursive frameworks that may condition these young women's experiences of gendered subjectivity. No single framework can provide a definitive answer about what femininity is or means; instead, it is precisely the gaps and the tensions between them that are most definitive of this generation's experiences of their own gendered situation.

The first framework is a neoliberal-style discourse of enterprising selfhood and competitive self-advancement that has arisen alongside economic liberalization, the end of the "iron rice-bowl" system of state-assigned employment, and the emergence of consumer society. The extent to which China's authoritarian governance and market-socialist economy can usefully be described as neoliberal is the subject of ongoing debate (Harvey 2005; Sigley 2006; A. Ong 2007; Nonini 2008; Dirlik 2012; Osburg 2013; C. Lee 2014). But in the realm of culture, multiple studies of state and commercial media, advertising, work practices, and ordinary people's reflections on their situation point to the pervasiveness of a structure of feeling (Raymond Williams 1977) that posits the self-governing, rational choice-making, independent, and individualized subject as the author of his or her own fate in China's market society (Anagnost 2004; Rofel 2007; A. Ong and Zhang 2008; Y. Yan 2009, 2013; M. Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Hoffman 2010; Kleinman et al. 2011).[9] This idea of the "self-animating, self-staging subject" (A. Ong and Zhang 2008, 1), loyal to the party-state yet also motivated by private accumulation and individualized desire, is central to the emergent understanding of middle-class identity.[10] Such a privatized, self-governing subject is well suited to a time when the state is withdrawing from welfare provision, leaving the individual ever "freer" to navigate both the opportunities and the risks of a rapidly transforming economy and social structure (Thelle 2004; Li Zhang 2010; Ren 2013; T. Lewis, Martin, and Sun 2016).

The model of the enterprising subject whose raison d'être is self-advancement in the market economy has ushered in a new framework for understanding youth. Youth—for both women and men—is today popularly framed among middle-class urban dwellers as a time of "striving" (拼 *pin*) to obtain academic qualifications, training, and capacities for self-management that will increase one's chance of success in the fiercely competitive job market and hence secure the economic foundation for one's own and one's family's future (F. Martin 2014). The idealization of striving in the reforms era is underlined by sociologist Yunxiang Yan: "Driven by the urge for success, the individual strives by all possible means to make it out there, to deal with his [*sic*] anxieties and to strike a balance in the torment between conflicting moral visions and values, resulting in a noticeable change in China's moral landscape, that is, as I will call it, the ethics of the striving individual" (2013, 264–65).[11] As Anders Sybrandt Hansen (2015) persuasively argues, study abroad has in recent years become stitched into this script of youthful striving.

Given the increased opportunities available to singleton daughters of middle-class families, this vision of individualized, striving selfhood exercises an allure for young women as well as men, and women's self-focus and self-reliance have been explicitly promoted by the state (Croll 1995, 150–53; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 54–84; Wu X. 2009). The popularization of the striving-subject ideal commonly sees middle-class singleton daughters encouraged just as strongly as their male peers to acquire the independent capacities, advanced skills, and academic credentials that will enable them to compete and thrive in the market economy (Fong 2002; Kajanus 2015).[12] As we glimpse in aspects of Yiruo's story, above, for many women in the current young generation, the aspiration toward independent self-fashioning underlies their motivation to undertake transnational educational ventures (Kim 2011; F. Martin 2014; Kajanus 2015, 37–44). The arguably neoliberal cast of these ventures is evident not simply in the broad sense that study abroad is usually a privately funded strategy aimed at enhancing the individual's competitive edge in global or national job markets, but even more explicitly in parents' and daughters' frequent description of study abroad as an opportunity for self-development (自我发展 *ziwo fazhan*) and the nurturing of individual independence (独立 *duli*) in a context where, socialist-era safety nets having been largely withdrawn, success is understood to hinge significantly on one's capacity for self-reliance (靠自己 *kao ziji*) (F. Liu 2008).

The metaphor that best distills postsocialist culture's valorization of the individualized, desiring, and striving subject is that of the dream (梦想 *mengxiang*), which saturates Chinese public culture today. Throughout the nation's shopping malls, airports, train stations, and mass mediascape, commercial advertising and self-improvement rhetoric accosts one at every turn with assertions of the importance of dreaming. Authoritative (generally masculine) voices relentlessly demand that one pursue a dream—to drive a luxury car, to realize one's potential, to see the world, to achieve a beautiful lifestyle. Even political discourse has been reconfigured around the dream trope, the old modernist preoccupation with national rejuvenation now repackaged in the metaphor best suited to current conditions (Z. Wang 2013; D. Lin 2017, 127–30). President Xi Jinping's Chinese dream narrative (中国梦 *Zhongguo meng*), first articulated in 2012, aims to harness the energies of individualized desire for the collective project of nation building (Xinhua Materials 2016). The ubiquitous propaganda slogan "Chinese dream, my dream" (中国梦 我的梦 *Zhongguo meng, wode meng*) directly translates the state project of national revival into personalized subjective aspiration.

Echoing this broad public cultural insistence on the imperative to dream, the rhetoric of educational mobility as involving a kind of dreaming was pervasive throughout this study. Participants and their parents frequently framed the aspirations they hoped overseas study would advance—to land a leadership role in an international company, to get an Australian PhD, to start an import-export business, to feel at home traveling the world—as intimately personal dreams. And, as can be seen in this list of examples, many of these dreams involved forms of transnational movement: of people, of knowledge, of money, and of goods. It seems that, for these young women, to dream is to dream of global mobility. Their persistent representations of transnational movement as a deeply held, intimate desire based on the dream of individual self-transformation provide part of the inspiration for this book's title.

NEOTRADITIONALIST FAMILIALISM

However, the story at the beginning of this chapter also illustrates an alternative discourse running counter to the ideal of the striving individual. In the conflict between Yiruo and her parents over the question of her marriage, we glimpse a different discourse based on neotraditionalist understandings of adult women's "naturally" marriage-and-family-oriented disposition. This highly influential (re)emergent discourse holds that it is normal, natural, and beneficial for women to get married and exchange self-focus for family focus by age thirty. It operates through public representations, including government campaigns and popular media, as well as through family and peer pressure (Rofel 1999; Hong Fincher 2014; Kajanus 2015). Some argue that after three decades during which the Maoist state line championed gender equality, the current prominence of essentialist constructions of women's gentle, nurturing, and family-centered nature indicates that gender relations have to an extent become retraditionalized in the post-Mao era (H. Evans 2002; Ji 2015, 2017; S. Sun and Chen 2015; J. You, Yi, and Chen 2016).[13] For example, in her influential Foucauldian analysis of transforming gender ideologies, feminist sociologist Wu Xiaoying (2009, 2010) observes that in the reforms era, the market discourse of individualized self-improvement has formed an alliance with a revitalized gender traditionalism that posits that women innately have lower levels of ability than men. The concept of natural differences is reinforced by commercial culture, where young, hyperfeminine beauty is eroticized and commodified across the fields of fashion, advertising, narrative media, sports, and cosmetic surgery (M. Zhang 2012; G. Chong 2013; Hua 2013; F. Liu 2014; Zurndorfer 2016; P. Ip 2018).

Linking this neotraditionalist discourse with the self-justifying actions of the post-Mao state, Lisa Rofel names the (re)naturalization of gender from the

1980s onward the "postsocialist allegory of modernity" (1999, 217–56). Across wide-ranging examples from employment policies and government rhetoric on family planning to popular media, Rofel traces a gendered allegory about the ills of Maoism, according to which "all along . . . women have merely wished to express their natural femininity in motherhood and wedded love while men have needed to find their rightful masculinity in economic exploits outside of the state sector, in virile sexual expression, and in the mastery of political power" (1999, 219). The state does not thereby cease interceding in social life but actively works to promote gender-role essentialism, representing itself as "enabling 'natural' social relationships to come forth from the repression of Maoism" (Rofel 1999, 219; see also Huang 2018, 1–13). The neotraditional-ist gender discourse provides ideological support for a number of significant structural changes either directly led or enabled by the state. These include the government's pressure on women to return to the family in times of rising urban unemployment (H. Evans 2002; Wu X. 2009; Song 2011), increasingly open gender discrimination by employers (Croll 1995, 117–24; Human Rights Watch 2018), a widening gender-wage gap (Cook and Dong 2011; World Economic Forum 2018, 63), and the intensifying concentration of capital in the hands of husbands at the expense of wives (Hong Fincher 2014).

In recent years, one of the clearest ways in which the state has naturalized gender neotraditionalism is in its popularization of the "leftover woman" (剩女 *shengnü*) stigma attaching to highly educated women who remain unmarried at the age of twenty-seven and over. Leta Hong Fincher (2014) argues that in endorsing the "leftover women" label and urging women's "timely" marriage, the All-China Women's Federation (妇联 Fulian) acted to further state goals in relation to population planning and maintenance of social stability. The state's promulgation of this chrononormative stigma responds to real demographic shifts (E. Freeman 2010). In urban China women's average age at first marriage has risen steadily since 1990. As Yong Cai and Wang Feng (2014, 104) show in their study of trends in age of first marriage between 1950 and 2005, across urban China increasing numbers of women remain unmarried into their late twenties; in Shanghai the last 5 percent of women to marry do so at about thirty, marking a historical high. "Delayed" marriage among urban women correlates positively with their level of education and consequent potential for economic independence (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2012, 26). Thanks to increased government investment, tertiary education became a mass phenomenon in China in the early 2000s, and around 2008 women's enroll-ment in higher education reached, then surpassed, parity with men's (Bai 2006; World Bank 2016). In this context increasing numbers of urban women resist

marriage pressure and the patriarchal power it represents, delaying marriage or avoiding it altogether (Z. Zhang 2000; Gaetano 2014; Ji 2015; Y. Chow 2019; Hong Fincher 2018). The state responds with its own particular style of gendered chronobiopolitics by stigmatizing that choice in the name of protecting social stability (E. Freeman 2010).

Popular media regularly throw up reflections on and critiques of the leftover-women discourse (SK-II 2016; S. Cai 2019), and many middle-class young women—including the study participants—are openly and sharply critical of it. It remains, however, a shaping force keenly felt by virtually all young women, even if ultimately resisted. References to the concept emerged frequently during my fieldwork, including in mild anxieties expressed by some mothers that their daughters may run the risk of "getting left over" (剩 *sheng*) as a result of their educational attainments and in some participants' ambivalent jokes about this risk.

These anxieties and ambivalences illustrate one of this study's grounding contentions: that the coexistence of the discourse of striving selfhood with the neotraditionalist gender discourse means that the post-1990 generation of women become caught in an unavoidable contradiction as they move through their twenties (Hoffman 2010, 121–41; Fong et al. 2012; J. Wu 2012; Gaetano 2014; F. Liu 2014; F. Martin 2014). As Anni Kajanus (2015, 90) neatly summarizes, while women *as daughters* are encouraged to pursue overseas study, *as wives and mothers* they are expected to focus on family care work instead. Moreover, the *anticipation* of women's (presumptively inevitable) marriage tends to frame their experiences of youth in multiple ways, including family pressure to find a fiancé (sometimes beginning as soon as their early twenties) and the shaping of educational and career choices by women's anticipated family care responsibilities postmarriage.[14] For the young, mobile women of Yiruo's generation, the imperatives of individualized striving selfhood and of neotraditionalist familialism stand in fundamental conflict, so that their self-understandings and life plans are beset at a basic level by a gendered contradiction. One of the central questions this book investigates is how time spent studying abroad affects their negotiation of this contradiction.

DAUGHTERLY FILIALITY

But Yiruo's parents' insistence on the importance of timely marriage is not the only factor complicating her identification with the ideal of striving selfhood. While on the one hand Yiruo hopes to live a life of global mobility, pursue academic excellence and professional success, and remain true to her counternormative sex-gender identity, on the other hand the apparent individualism

of these aspirations is tempered by her desire to carry out a filial (孝 *xiao*) duty toward her parents by living with them overseas in the future and providing for them financially. In suggesting this, Yiruo is following a broader trend in the single-child generations whereby daughters, both rural and urban, increasingly shoulder the filial responsibilities of elderly parent care that were traditionally the province of sons (Zhan and Montgomery 2003; Fong 2004b, 130–15; Shi 2009; M. Hansen and Pang 2010; Kajanus 2015, 29–33; Ji 2017; Hong Zhang 2017). This is linked with contemporary women's independent earning capacities, simple necessity in sonless single-child families at a time when the state has retreated from elderly care, and parents' increasing valorization of a filial bond based on an emotional attachment between parents and child rather than simple moral duty—a type of attachment that is popularly assumed to be stronger with daughters than with sons (Shi 2009; Kajanus 2015, 33). Many of the young women I got to know in the course of this study expressed a similar wish to bring their parents abroad to care for them in their old age (养老 *yanglao*). Other expressions of affective filiality also arose frequently. Many participants expressed a strong sense of duty to repay their parents for their financial and emotional investments in their upbringing and expensive overseas education, for example, by earning enough to buy their parents luxury gifts and support them financially in their elderly years or by eventually moving back to China to care for them personally.

To some extent, the habitus of daughterly filiality interrupts the neoliberal paradigm of striving selfhood insofar as it complicates that model's basis in individualized self-interest. Young, mobile women like Yiruo and her contemporaries may simultaneously espouse a version of the self-enterprising model and complicate that model by understanding themselves as morally and emotionally bound to a hierarchical family collective and family interests.[15] Moreover, paradoxically, it is precisely such women's capacity to earn and control their own income independently that *enables* them to enact such new (feminized) forms of filiality. In this sense, the daughterly filiality of these middle-class women blurs the boundaries between what might initially seem like contradictory models of the autonomous enterprising self and "traditional" familial ethics.

MASCULINE *GUANXI*

One bright late-winter afternoon a couple of years after our first meeting, I was chatting with Yiruo outside a campus library in Melbourne while she took a break from studying. When I asked about her current plans for after graduation, she said her father had mentioned that his former classmate who ran a

construction firm in her hometown could arrange a job for her if she wanted it. Yiruo wasn't very keen on this idea, since she hoped to remain in Australia for postgraduate study and possibly immigration, but job offers like this from an extended family member or associate of the family—usually male—were quite common for young women who had studied abroad, and some did land jobs this way. Such opportunities, referred to colloquially as *pin die* (拼爹, leaning on dad), are based on *guanxi* (关系): the particularist, instrumental influence networks that underlie many aspects of social life in contemporary China across state, commercial, and personal domains and across scales from multimillion-dollar business deals and the tendering of government contracts right down to ordinary people's negotiations to secure a child's place in a particular teacher's class or obtain other minor everyday benefits.

Some anthropologists have argued that the prevalence of *guanxi* practices among government and business elites in China evidences a fundamentally distinct structuration of governance and economy that precludes understanding the system as simply neoliberal. Donald M. Nonini (2008), for example, argues that China in the reforms era is characterized by an oligarchic state and party and the rise of a new cadre-capitalist class whose operations rely on *guanxi* ties that blur the distinction between state and market. For Nonini, the forms of subjectivity engendered by this situation cannot be described as neoliberal, with all of the individualist connotations that brings, but rather are "constructed around contextual and relational definitions of the self within a pre-existing society distinguished by status differences and . . . around a fluidity between the self and others" (2008, 168; see also Nonini and Ong 1997; A. Ong 2006, 219–39; 2008). John Osburg concurs, finding that post-Mao China does not instantiate neoliberal capitalism; rather, the end of the Maoist system "created the space for *guanxi* practices to evolve and proliferate, and the moral economy specific to *guanxi* has . . . served as an ethical counterweight to market individualism" (2013, 184–86).

In cases where graduate students rely on *guanxi* to land a job, it is not usually the type of elite-level *guanxi* studied by Osburg, who focuses on the nexus between superrich entrepreneurs and high-level government officials. Instead, it generally takes more middling forms, as when Yiruo's father's classmate offered her a job in his firm. Nonetheless, these middling forms of *guanxi* practice, like the more elite forms, still trouble some of the central tenets of neoliberal ideology as it is usually understood in Euro-American contexts, particularly meritocracy, individualism, and the subjugation of social life by market norms. Like elite forms of *guanxi*, too, they are also often markedly masculine in character, based largely on networks connecting fathers or other elder male relatives with male associates.

Thus, somewhat like daughterly filiality, for young middle-class women, *guanxi* practices overlap the seemingly contradictory models of the autonomous striving self and patriarchal familialism and trouble their opposition. When *guanxi* is leveraged to help female graduates find employment, this *both* relies on masculine, hierarchical familial and social networks *and* advances young women's independent professional careers, with all the opportunities for female individualization and posttraditional gender practice that entails.[16]

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My aim in delineating these frameworks has been to give some sense of the heterogeneity and internal contradiction of the conceptual resources available to middle-class urban women in understanding their gendered situation. Sometimes these plural frameworks work against each other so that one may be exploited tactically to undercut another: for example, the autonomous, enterprising self as a riposte to neotraditionalist, familial femininity—seeing oneself as a proud career woman resisting pressures to become a subordinated daughter-in-law, wife, or mother. At other times, apparently contradictory discourses paradoxically reinforce one another, as with daughterly filiality facilitated by women's economic independence, or women's professional career building enabled by paternal *guanxi* (see also Kajanus 2015, 8–9). Nor do these four basic frameworks by any means exhaust the field of influences on how young women can understand their gendered situation. My naming of them is heuristic: to make the simple point that the available symbolic structures are plural and in tension rather than monolithic.

Transnational Education Assemblage

The dramatic increases over the past two decades in the outflow of students from China and the inflow of international students to Australia result from the commercialization of education in both nations (S. Liu 2020). Rising numbers of Chinese students going abroad are linked with an understanding among China's middle classes that a privately funded overseas degree is an educational commodity that facilitates the accumulation of cultural and mobility capitals. In the case of Australia, the development of education as what is widely characterized as an "export industry" results from declining government funding for universities. While between 1988 and 2014 the number of domestic students attending university more than doubled to over a million (Norton and Cakitaki 2016), from 1994 to 2004 public funding of universities fell by 27 percent per student (Marginson 2007), and by 2014 government contributions made up less than 40 percent of universities' revenue: the sixth lowest of all nations in

the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2017, 193). Alongside the introduction of university fees for domestic students in the late 1980s, the marketing of degrees to international students, largely from Asia, has been a key strategy to fill this funding shortfall (Welch 2002; Ramia, Marginson, and Sawir 2013, 59–71). Governments have encouraged universities' targeting of international markets by providing pathways for students to convert to skilled-migrant visas postgraduation (Robertson 2013). Under these conditions, international student numbers have increased dramatically since the early 1990s, recording double-digit annual growth in recent years (Australian Department of Education and Training, International Research and Analysis Unit 2017c, 2018). From 2004 to 2014, the number of places for international students rose by over 40 percent. In the same period, the revenue to universities from the fees they paid—on average three times those charged to domestic students—increased by around 75 percent (Universities Australia 2015, 14; OECD 2017, 293; Universities Australia 2018; H. Ferguson and Sherrell 2019). By 2017 international fee income accounted for over 23 percent of Australian public universities' revenue, making it their single largest nongovernment revenue source (Norton and Cherastidtham 2018, 45). Australia has been recognized as having "the most organized and aggressive [international] recruitment and marketing strategy" for its universities in the world (Brooks and Waters 2011, 117) and is the world's third-largest destination country for international students after the United States and the United Kingdom (OECD 2017, 287).[17] In 2016, during the middle years of this study, the average proportion of international students in Australian universities was over 21 percent, and a third of universities had more than 25 percent international students (Australian Department of Education and Training, International Research and Analysis Unit 2017b). This places the concentration of international students in Australian universities at one of the highest levels among OECD countries (OECD 2017, 286). For many successive years, mirroring a global trend, students from China have composed the largest group studying in Australian higher education (over 38 percent in 2019), more than double the size of the second-largest group, from India (H. Ferguson and Sherrell 2019). Most Chinese students study in the big east coast cities; Melbourne, this study's primary field site, is their second-largest host city, after Sydney (Australian Department of Education and Training 2017c).

The regional aid model on which Australia's international education policy was based before the mid-1980s has thus been replaced by a market approach that has seen international student numbers and fee levels deregulated, "enabling universities to run international education as an expansionary capitalist business"

(Ramia, Marginson, and Sawir 2013, 60). As Simon Marginson and Mark Considine (2000, 4) argue, in the era of the enterprise university, Australian education institutions are driven by a "frankly commercial and entrepreneurial spirit" to compete for private income from international student markets, with the students themselves conceptualized essentially as consumers (see also Marginson et al. 2010; Kell and Vogl 2012). The language in which international education is couched by Australian governments is that of international trade. In a typical example, the Department of Education and Training reported triumphantly that activity linked with international education contributed $28 billion to the national economy in the 2016–17 financial year, making education the nation's third-largest export after iron ore and coal (Australian Department of Education and Training 2017).[18]

The serendipitous fit between ever-intensifying educational demand from China's middle classes and an Australian higher education sector characterized by increasing costs, decreasing public funding, and government support for privatization and internationalization has produced a vigorous transnational education vector linking the two countries. Indeed, extremely high concentrations of Chinese international students in some courses—participants and university staff report that in some master's courses in the business and finance fields, such students account for over 80 percent of enrollments—lead some to feel that Australian universities seem like extensions of the Chinese education system. Certain courses are designed from the outset to target these students and are direct-marketed to them by commercial education agents in China who have cooperative business arrangements with Australian universities. The Australian university classroom may feel at such times like a kind of floating, geoculturally ambiguous space: a node in a transnational education assemblage connected just as firmly to China as it is to Australia (figure I.2; Collins 2014).[19]

The social, political, and economic factors within China that have resulted in rising numbers of students studying in Australia have also increased their numbers in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and other Western nations. While Chinese students have been studying in all of these countries since early in China's reforms era, across all of them the current cohorts differ from the much smaller numbers who studied abroad during the 1980s and 1990s in that they are wealthier and overwhelmingly funded by family rather than the state; are more likely to study business and management than earlier groups, who focused on science and technology; are younger overall, with more studying at the bachelor's degree level; and are increasingly dominated by women (C. Qin 2012, 196–200; Kajanus 2015, 54–61; L. Liu 2016b, 11–49). Although, during the period of this study, Australia was only

The Three Special
Administrative Regions
of China

Macau   Hong Kong   University of ▓▓▓▓▓

the third most popular destination for Chinese students after the United States
and the United Kingdom, the proportion of Chinese students within the
group of international students as a whole was and remains very similar in each
country (Australian Department of Education and Training, International Re-
search and Analysis Unit 2016), while the proportion of international students
within Australia's tertiary student body is comparable to levels in the United
Kingdom and significantly higher than those in the United States (OECD 2017,
286). To the extent that a broadly comparable situation exists or may develop in
other Western study destinations beyond Australia, some of this study's find-
ings may prove relevant to those contexts as well, although undoubtedly each
country's (and city's) experience of educational transnationalization will also
be somewhat geospecific.

Thinking beyond the Nation: Transmigration,
Translocality, Liminality

To capture the pervasive transnational connections that mark students' every-
day experiences, in this book I conceptualize Chinese international students in
Australia as *student transmigrants*. I choose this term over other alternatives—
transient migrants, *sojourners*, *international students*, or *student-migrants*
(Robertson 2013; X. Zhao 2016; Gomes 2017; Tran and Gomes 2017)—for
two reasons. On one hand, while studying in Australia, these students *are*,
structurally, a type of migrant: they reside long-term in Australian cities and
participate in urban social life; avail themselves of many national, state, and
local services beyond education; work in local businesses; pay taxes; and in
many cases ultimately become holders of Australian permanent residency or
citizenship. Their residence in Australia may be transient, but it is not always
or necessarily so. Recognizing them as a category of migrant brings into focus

the significance of their presence in local communities while complicating traditional conceptualizations of migration-as-resettlement through attention to increasingly common practices of open-ended migration and flexible residence. On the other hand, these students also maintain links back to China and outward into the worldwide Chinese diaspora, reinforced by ubiquitous communicative connectivity through mobile technologies (Robertson 2013, 7; F. Martin and Rizvi 2014). The moment-to-moment transnational interconnections that characterize the experience of these mobile subjects resonate strongly with Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc's (1995) theorization of the transmigrant. In contrast to the traditional understanding of the immigrant as someone uprooted from one society and transplanted permanently into another, the transmigrant's experience is marked by "multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and . . . public identities [that] are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state. . . . They are not sojourners because they settle and become incorporated in the economy and political institutions, localities, and patterns of daily life of the country in which they reside. However, at the very same time, they are engaged elsewhere in the sense that they maintain connections, build institutions, conduct transactions, and influence local and national events in the countries from which they emigrated" (48). This conceptualization works well to illuminate the experience of the multiply connected student transmigrants who are the subject of this book.

Flowing from this recognition, a central argument of the book is that Chinese students produce the Australian city as a *translocality* and, more broadly, inhabit *translocal worlds*: topological geographies marked by the entanglement of near and distant locales (Amin 2002b). This argument draws on recent work in geography that advances the concept of translocality as a means of appreciating both the intensifying transborder connectedness of people's experiences of place and the persistent effects of geographic localities in everyday life (Appadurai 1996; Conradson and McKay 2007; Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013). As Tim Oakes and Louisa Schein (2006) note, translocality provides a particularly apposite framework for understanding contemporary social life in (and beyond) an increasingly mobile China. Such an approach allows us to sidestep unhelpfully dichotomous thinking about place in globalization, for example, the opposition of the "space of flows" to the "space of places" (Castells 1996) or of global "non-place" to local authenticity (Augé 1995). Instead, translocality as a concept underlines the experiential interweaving of human and nonhuman mobilities with states of fixity, and of ubiquitous transnational connections with more grounded forms of geolocal experience. It also helpfully

unsettles the primacy of the nation-state as a presumptive frame for analysis through an alternative focus on material links between specific localities such as cities or neighborhoods. Lives like Yiruo's, lived across geographies stretched between near and distant sites, may in turn produce translocal subjectivities: "the multiply-located senses of self amongst those who inhabit transnational social fields" (Conradson and McKay 2007, 168).

But exactly what difference does translocal experience make to one's sense of oneself in everyday experience? How might it reconfigure, for example, one's sense of gendered subjectivity in the present and of the gendered time of one's future life course? At the same time as I argue that participants' experience abroad produces and takes place in translocal space, I also propose that while studying overseas, these young women inhabit *liminal time*. In developing this analysis, I draw on Saulo B. Cwerner's (2001) work on the temporal dimensions of migration. In his typology of experiences of time among Brazilian immigrants in London, Cwerner describes liminal time as characteristic of transitional stages of migration, noting that such a temporality may be a central feature of the experience of migrants who are, or perceive themselves to be, temporary. Such migrants' "condition is suffused with liminality. They are 'betwixt and between' all the recognized points in the space-time of structural classification" (27). For Cwerner, liminal temporality is marked by indecision, disorientation, and often significant mental stress as migrants navigate between discordant life-course regimes in home and host societies—and this was certainly often the case with participants in this study. But, equally important, liminality also "creates a time 'out of the ordinary,' when anything can happen. The old rules do not apply, while the new ones are still to be internalized" (27). In the chapters that follow, I explore how time abroad functions as a liminal time for these mobile young women, in which they reconfigure the meanings of youth, gender, intimacy, and the life course by rescripting and sometimes contesting gendered norms that are dominant within China.

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This book addresses emergent cultural phenomena conditioned by far-reaching in-process transformations in the character of *nation*, *gender*, and *space*. The educational transmigrants who are the book's focus make their journeys in a world in which the Chinese nation is deterritorializing and self-globalizing, available discourses of femininity are multiplying and fragmenting, and space and place are being remade on a translocal and topological model. By asking how it feels for young Chinese women to live and move under these volatile conditions, the book invites new conversations among China studies, gender studies, and studies of human mobility in globalization.

In the context of China's expanding global influence and increasing outward human mobilities, *Dreams of Flight* contributes to studies of Chinese transnationalism (A. Ong and Nonini 1997; A. Ong 1999) by exploring what it is like to participate in the forms of middle-class movement that characterize a globalizing China (Conradson and Latham 2005a). Attending to deterritorialized articulations of ethnonational identity by Chinese citizens abroad, the book enriches the study of Chineseness beyond the frame of the nation (Ang 2001; Shih 2007, 2011). And while Western media have tended in recent years to depict China's globalization as simply the transnational extension of state and party influence, this study unsettles totalizing views of nationhood—whether promulgated by the Chinese state itself or by its critics abroad (Mankekar 2015). It reminds us that China is not just an abstract political entity but is composed of people and their embodied experiences of place, mobility, gender, and subjectivity.

This emphasis aligns the book with materialist studies of globalization as a series of concrete social processes rather than a network of frictionless flows (Bude and Dürrschmidt 2010). In conversation with the mobilities turn in social research (Sheller and Urry 2006), the book unpacks in empirical detail the dialectics of mobility and containment—gendered, racialized, spatial, academic, and social—that shape educational transmigrants' experience, and pays attention to how these women's practices of personal, imaginative, and mediated mobility and immobility reconfigure place as translocality. Thus, while *mobilizing China* beyond the nation's geographic borders, this study simultaneously *grounds the global* through focused attention to people's embodied and subjective experiences of both locality and movement. By taking a feminist ethnographic approach that centers young women's everyday lives, the book offers a critical alternative to the masculinism and abstraction of both state discourses of nationhood and macrotheories of globalization (Dána-Ain Davis and Craven 2016). At the broadest level, this book illuminates how *gender shapes mobility* and how *mobility shapes gender*, demonstrating the inextricable entanglement of the two for Chinese student transmigrants and furthering the evolving conversation between gender studies and mobility studies (Hanson 2010; Penttinen and Kynsilehto 2017; F. Martin and Dragojlovic 2019).

Moving Subjects: Approach and Methods

As discussed earlier, the younger generations in China's middle classes draw on multiple discourses to understand and enact gender. But in addition to such shared symbolic structures, ethnography also throws up affective experiences that

are far more idiosyncratic and less amenable to codification. These are highly contingent aspects of the microlevel of everyday experience that proponents of affective ethnography suggest occur at a pre- or noncognitive level, in excess of representation (Thrift 2008; Overell 2014). To take seriously the place of affect in ethnographic practice is to keep in mind the corporeality and multisensoriality of experience, both that of research participants and that shared between researcher and participants in the ethnographic encounter (Pink 2015); to pay attention to the nonverbal traffic of feeling between human (and nonhuman) bodies beyond conscious will and intentionality (Knudsen and Stage 2015); and to be alive to visceral forces other than conscious knowing (Seigworth and Gregg 2010). In Kathleen Stewart's feeling words, the "ordinary affects" that ethnography generates and uncovers are "more directly compelling than ideologies, as well as more fractious, multiplicitous, and unpredictable than symbolic meanings" (2007, 3). Moreover, "models of thinking that slide over the live surface of difference at work in the ordinary to bottom-line arguments about 'bigger' structures and underlying causes obscure the ways in which a reeling present is composed out of heterogeneous and noncoherent singularities" (4). Ordinary affects of the kind Stewart refers to here are another referent for the "dreams" in the book's title. As already discussed, on one hand, the trope of the dream connects with a structure of feeling particular to the current era. The idea of a person who "has a dream" conjures a visionary, desiring, striving subject defined by independence, aspiration, individualism, and upward and outward mobility: such dreams are the imaginative fuel of the mobile, enterprising self that takes center stage in the reforms era. On the other hand, I also intend the "dreams" of the book's title to refer to the far less structured realm of affective experience; the strange singularities of the inner worlds of sense and consciousness that make up the present from moment to moment. *Singularity* in this sense does not stand in opposition to shared cultural practices but rather designates an ineffable kernel of subjective experience—whether individual or collective—that resists capture by the generalizing abstractions of theory. Nor does singularity simply mean particularity or specificity; as Dipesh Chakrabarty reminds us, "The very conception of the 'specific' . . . belongs to the structure of a general that necessarily occludes our view of the singular. . . . 'Singularity' . . . comes into being when we look on things in such a way as not to see them as 'particular' expressions of that which is general" (1997, 42–43). The dreams on which this book focuses are in this sense double: at once the aspirational dreams consciously pursued through educational mobility and the unreflexive, half-sensed daydreams that comprise people's singular affective experiences of mobility as it is lived.

In the chapters that follow, while I do not attempt to adhere to a purely or rigorously affective method, I try to take the affective dimensions of social and subjective experience into account in order, at least, to give some sense of how educational mobility *feels*. To do this, I go beyond transcribing participants' words and describing their everyday practices, then analyzing these with reference to symbolic frameworks. I also include graphic and creative material meant to capture something of the experiential texture of these mobile women's singular experiences, as well as my own experiences while working with them. These include photos, maps, and social media posts created by participants in which they represent their worlds in ways that exceed verbal description and I hope may capture, to varying degrees, an atmosphere, a feeling, and a sense of the always ongoing, always in-motion "specificity of present being" that exceeds the fixity of symbolic structures (Raymond Williams 1977, 128). As in this introduction, many of the chapters include segments of my own nonanalytical writing about particular encounters and stories, in which I include sensory and affective elements—recollections of smell, taste, temperature, qualities of light and sound, emotional atmosphere—to augment the theorized analysis with some sense, however shadowy, of the embodied human experience that is the live core of the research.

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This book draws on a multisite ethnographic study carried out with a core participant group of fifty Chinese women students between 2012 and 2020 across China and Australia. First, I conducted a pilot study in Melbourne in 2012 with in-depth, semistructured interviews of fifteen female undergraduate and master's degree students. This provided the basis for the main study, to which I was able to dedicate myself full-time between 2015 and 2020 thanks to funding from the Australian Research Council. Over the years of the main study, I remained in contact with seven of the pilot-study participants; reinterviewed six of them in Melbourne, Sydney, and Hong Kong; and added one of them to the core group.

In 2015, with the assistance of five Australian universities, three Chinese universities, and four Chinese education agencies, I sent out a call for participants via WeChat and email to Chinese students about to commence study in Melbourne. In mid-2015 I traveled to China for four weeks and conducted initial interviews with thirty commencing students and ten of their families in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hefei, Kaifeng, and Shenyang. These thirty students became part of the study's core participant group. During the same trip, I also attended predeparture briefings for students run by Australian universities and Chinese education agents and gave presentations about life in Melbourne at

two Chinese universities to large cohorts of students soon to depart on joint-program courses. I also conducted focus-group interviews with thirty female undergraduates at Shanghai University to get a sense of how domestic students thought about gender and educational mobility, as well as an understanding of their reasons for *not* studying abroad (overwhelmingly economic). I remained in contact with this group throughout the years of the study via a WeChat group and reinterviewed some of them on annual return trips to China. They provided an informal comparison group to the mobile students who are the main focus of the study.

Back in Melbourne in late 2015, I gathered a further twenty core participants who had already commenced studies in five universities at the (pre-undergraduate) foundation, undergraduate, or master's degree level. Over the next four years, I met regularly and often with the core group of fifty in large groups, small groups, and individually. In addition to conducting periodic recorded interviews, I hung out with participants and their friends, housemates, boyfriends, classmates, and visiting parents at activities organized by them and met them periodically for chats over coffee or meals, or at home visits. With the help of the project research assistant, Can Qin, I organized a series of eleven large-group activities to allow further participant observation, create a sense of group cohesion, and increase the group's identification with the project. These included weekend day trips to scenic spots, film screenings, barbecues, community festivals, public events, gatherings at my place, and discussions and other research activities conducted at annual meetings over a pub lunch. Between 2015 and 2019, I also maintained virtually daily contact with the group via WeChat, both in a dedicated chat group for the study and via private messaging and our shared Moments feeds (similar to a Facebook wall). Inevitably, with some participants I established a strong rapport and met and communicated with them frequently, sometimes weekly or more; with others, interactions were less frequent, perhaps once every six or nine months.[20]

When participants graduated from their courses, I remained in touch with them via social media. Between 2018 and 2019, I traveled to interview the participants postgraduation, both to Sydney and Canberra, where some were undertaking further study, and to various cities in China, where some had returned to work. On regular trips to China each year between 2015 and 2018, I also conducted interviews with a number of additional female graduates from Australian universities who had returned to China to work, and with professionals working in the international education industry. I also kept in touch with those participants who remained in Australia to work after graduation and spoke with them about their postgraduation experiences. My analyses are

contextually enriched by my wider social involvement with Melbourne's diasporic Chinese communities and by my experiences teaching and supervising increasing numbers of students from China in Australian universities over the past twenty years.

Organization of the Book

Chapter 1 asks why studying abroad should be such a common aspiration for Chinese women. Drawing on initial interviews with study participants and their family members, it explores in detail the gendered risks that young women and their mothers hoped to mitigate through the daughters' transnational study. These include gendered bias in China's professional labor markets and the limitation of opportunities for personal and professional development by women's too-early corralling into marriage. Through this discussion, this chapter lays out the cultural logic underlying young Chinese women's "dreams of flight" from gendered disadvantage through transnational education. I conclude, however, with a counterstory intended to complicate a simplistic understanding of international student motivation based on an instrumentalist model of rational, agential choice making.

Chapter 2 is the first of three chapters focusing on participants' sociospatial practices in Australia. Introducing this study's primary field site, it considers participants' imagination of the city of Melbourne pre-arrival, their practices of the city postarrival, and the ways in which the city's sub/urban architectures shaped their habitation. I introduce what I call the *expatriate microworld* of Chinese student sociality in Melbourne and contextualize this with reference to students' wider sociospatial exclusion. Aiming to convey a sense of the complexly variegated experiential textures, affective ambiences, and subjective meanings of participants' sub/urban lifeworlds, the chapter shows how, for participants, Melbourne was both a translocality—a place constituted by the everyday intertwining of near and far locations—and an environment that interpreted their bodies in racialized and gendered terms. In these ways, the chapter demonstrates Melbourne's dual character as both a place of self-extension and (trans)local belonging and a site of social encapsulation and exclusion for these student transmigrants.

Chapter 3 explores how participants' uses of mobile social media decisively shaped their experiences of Melbourne. I consider how translocal media connections produced the city and what kind of place(s) and subjectivities emerged from this mediatization. Extending chapter 2's discussion of the tension between encapsulation and extension in participants' sub/urban placemaking, chapter 3

analyzes the operations of ethnicization, racialization, and class in participants' media practices in the superdiverse city. Focusing on local WeChat public accounts, it explores the tension between extension and encapsulation that is expressed in the contrast between, on one hand, lifestyle and leisure accounts' capacity to facilitate spatial extension by mapping ways into the city through consumption and, on the other, popular tabloid news accounts' tendency to cocoon students in a defensive capsule based on the essentialization of Chinese ethnicity and the racialization of classed Others, including "Africans" and "refugees."

Following the previous two chapters' discussions of how sociospatial practices of habitation and communication produce the translocal city, chapter 4 considers students' work practices through analysis of their verbal and photographic narratives. I analyze two types of feminized labor: underpaid casual waitressing work (打工 *da gong*) in Chinese-run restaurants and the microentrepreneurial activity of parallel trading (代购 *daigou*), a type of informal e-commerce in which individuals buy local goods to on-sell to customers in China via social media. I show how participants' restaurant work linked them to fixed, localized, diasporic employment networks, while their e-trading connected them to mobile, transnational, digitally mediated trade networks. Demonstrating that e-trading is often a response to students' racialized exclusion from more desirable types of local employment, the chapter develops the concept of feminine network capital to name the form of value produced through e-trading as a "weak," tactical form of transnational networking, in distinction to network capital's well-documented "strong" and strategic (masculine) forms.

Chapter 5 marks a shift from a focus on the external realm of participants' sociospatial practices (chapters 2–4) toward a stronger emphasis on the internal world of their affective and subjective attachments (chapters 5–7). It focuses on overseas study as a liminal time during which, as a result of distancing from familial and social surveillance at home, young Chinese women may reconfigure the meanings of feminine gender, life course, and sexuality. In particular, the chapter draws on participants' stories to work through three potentials of this liminal time: the creation of new forms of intimate isolation, the opening up of queer possibilities, and the scrambling of patriarchal power coordinates within families. But the examples discussed suggest that, ultimately, the tensions of gendered life-course regulation tended to be reconfigured, rather than resolved, in the liminal "time out" that educational mobility afforded.

China is home to one of the world's fastest-growing Christian populations, and some Christian churches in Western nations, cognizant of this fact, actively

target international students for religious conversion. Chapter 6 explores participants' experiences of religion in Australia. It proposes that Christian churches' provision of acculturation and welfare services to Chinese international students is a function both of students' broader social exclusion and of the effective outsourcing of these services by universities and governments in the wider context of the sacralization of social services in the postwelfare state. The chapter pays special attention to the gendered vulnerabilities of female students abroad, which may heighten their need for social support and hence the potential for them to turn to evangelical churches in the absence of effective alternatives. This chapter also tries to illustrate the affective pull of spiritual practice, which tends to interrupt the secular rationality of scholarly analysis.

Chapter 7 explores national feeling as a third affective domain. The post-1990 generation has come of age in a time of contradictory influences in this regard. On the one hand, a transnational imaginary is increasingly available to them. On the other hand, since the early 1990s, the party-state has enforced a patriotic education curriculum that inculcates Chinese nationalism. In this context, this chapter asks how national feeling manifests in this generation's physical and digital mobilities beyond China's national territory. Seeking to complicate influential media caricatures of Chinese students' blind nationalism, I delineate two key logics that I argue are central to these students' national structure of feeling: a performative ethics of national representation and a developmentalist narrative of nationhood. I draw on fieldwork and interviews to analyze the gendered dimensions of this national structure of feeling, especially in the dominant metaphor of China as motherland. The chapter's final section explores changes in aspects of participants' orientations toward China during their years abroad.

Chapter 8 draws on material from the final years of the study to consider participants' postgraduation experiences seeking professional employment in Australia and China and the subjective (re)orientations that they felt several years of transnational education had engendered in them. After graduation, participants overwhelmingly remained geographically mobile, professionally oriented, and unmarried into their late twenties. This chapter explores how international education enabled the emergence of these shared attributes and shaped participants' understandings of themselves vis-à-vis mobility, work, and a gendered life course. In particular, returning to one of the book's central inquiries, I detail how overseas study appeared to strengthen participants' identification with the neoliberal ideal of enterprising selfhood while weakening their attachment to neotraditional femininity. Even those few participants who actively disidentified with the neoliberal-style self-advancement script, I show,

tended still to feel that study abroad had made them more critical of neotraditional femininity and more attached to a mobile imaginary.

The conclusion summarizes findings on how feminine gender and educational mobility shaped each other in the experiences of study participants and offers some ruminations on the study's conceptual and methodological implications by interrogating the interrelationships among some key operations. I consider how we might understand the relationship between subjective neoliberalization and gender detraditionalization, underlining the class-bound character of that relation. I elaborate on the study's ramifications for thinking through the relationship between gender and globalization and for understanding how emplaced experiences of mobility speak to theorizations of large-scale transnational processes. This opens out into a broader methodological reflection on the tense relation between the macroscale focus of social theory and ethnography's more microscale preoccupations. The chapter ends with a consideration of the study's implications for our understanding of "Chinese international students" as a category in Western higher education, and a closing note on the historical specificity of this study in light of the emergent viral challenge to a world order based on neoliberal globalization and mobilities.

Notes

1. Following standard ethical practice, all participant names are pseudonyms. Occasionally personal details have been slightly altered or omitted to protect participants' privacy. All participant quotes are translated from Mandarin by the author, unless noted otherwise. The names of participants' hometowns are not specified in cases where these are smaller towns and cities; in these cases only the province is specified, where relevant, the first time they are mentioned. Hometowns that are very large (population over twelve million) and send many students to Australia are sometimes named, given the far lower risk of participants being identifiable based on this information.

2. These apparently generational differences between parents and daughter may reflect relative life stage as much as or more than they do absolute generational distinctions in attitude. Both the parent generation and the daughter generation came of age in eras when posttraditional understandings of gender and the life course were circulating widely in public culture, and some parents voiced such understandings (F. Martin 2014).

3. There are 114–120 males to 100 females at birth for the main birth years of my participants, 1990–98 (World Bank 2006, 4).

4. The definition, significance, and even existence of the middle class in China are hotly contested. First, some point out that the entrepreneurs, managers, professionals, and government officials to whom the term is usually understood to refer represent not the middle-income section of the population but more elite strata (Goodman 2008b, 36; Osburg 2013, 12). Others underline that there is not a single middle class but multiple, fragmented strata that lack the unitary class interest that the term *middle class* may imply (Cheng Li 2010; Chunling Li 2010; J. Wang and Davis 2010; M. Chen and Goodman 2013). Third, the intimate symbiosis between the emerging wealthy classes and the party-state, and relatedly the fact that these classes seem unlikely to act as a politically liberalizing force, makes the Chinese case distinct from that of Europe in the nineteenth century, on which normative ideals of the middle class are based (Goodman 2008b; M. Chen and Goodman 2013).

5. Three additional points are worth noting about Goodman's studies of the entrepreneurial classes. First, Goodman only ambivalently characterizes these as part of a middle class, preferring to frame them as the elite or new rich (Goodman 2008a). Second, Goodman emphasizes the symbiotic rather than oppositional relationship between these entrepreneurs and the party-state (M. Chen and Goodman 2013). His definition of *entrepreneur* is in fact very broad, including owners of collective, private, and foreign-owned enterprises and managers of enterprises, including state-owned enterprises (Goodman

2008b, 31). Third, Goodman emphasizes that 1979 was not year zero for China's modernization and that a type of professional and managerial middle class had existed within the state bureaucracy since the 1950s (2008b, 26–27); the skills, knowledge, experience, and social capital of these government-affiliated managers and professionals were then drawn on in entrepreneurial activities postreform.

6. Based on Jianying Wang and Deborah Davis's (2010) schema, participants' fathers (usually the higher earners within couples) clustered in the upper-professional, self-employed, and cadre subclasses, but significant numbers also belonged to the lower-professional and upper-management subclasses, as well as a handful in lower management.

7. The foreign-study movement in modern China began with the Qing government's sponsorship of overseas educational missions to Western nations, including the United States, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the aim of drawing on Western knowledge to contribute to social reform and nation-building efforts. In the early decades of the twentieth century, many Chinese youth also studied in Japan, which served in some ways as a translator and mediator of Western intellectual culture (Liu-Farrer 2011). Supported by private funds or scholarships, thousands of others studied in European countries including France, England, Germany, and Belgium. Those who studied abroad in the early decades of the twentieth century went on to become some of China's foremost modernizing intellectuals (Ye 2001, 8–11; C. Wang 2013, 5–9). Following the 1949 revolution, the focus of foreign study shifted to the Soviet Union and allied eastern European nations, with the first group of Chinese students sent to the Soviet Union as early as 1951 and exchanges continuing through the 1960s (L. You, n.d.). Following the 1978 political and social reforms, Chinese student migration to Western nations, including the United States and Australia, commenced afresh, proceeding in several waves, first with relatively small numbers of government-funded scholarship students and later, after the gradual relaxation of bureaucratic and financial constraints, with much larger numbers of privately funded students (L. Liu 2016b, 15–40). The brutal military response to the Tiananmen Square student movement in 1989 served as an impetus for tens of thousands of then-overseas students to remain abroad, including some twenty thousand in Australia.

8. The academic and socioeconomic background of participants in this study to some extent marks the particularity of Australia as a study destination. In China even the most prestigious Australian universities are generally considered inferior both to China's top-ranked institutions and to America's Ivy League colleges. Thus, in contrast with the situation in the United States, it is relatively unlikely that the top level of China's academic elite will come to Australia for undergraduate or master's study. The mid-middle-class to elite socioeconomic background of Chinese students in Australia, meanwhile, although broadly similar to that of the cohorts who study in the United States and Europe, may differ from that of those who choose Japan as a study destination. There, as detailed studies by Gracia Liu-Farrer (2011) and Jamie Coates (2015) have shown, a combination of geographic proximity, lower tuition fees, and a flexible student-visa system that not only allows but encourages students to work while studying tends to attract students from a more diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds, including a larger proportion

from the lower strata of China's middle classes. The gender balance in these student cohorts, however, appears roughly similar, although robust statistical comparisons among multiple destination countries are difficult (Liu-Farrer 2011, 13). For further discussion of factors affecting participants' choice of Australia as a study destination, see chapter 1.

9. I characterize this discursive framework as a structure of feeling in Raymond Williams's (1977, 128–35) sense rather than, say, as an ideology in order to keep in view the fact that this way of understanding the human, while historically conditioned and widely represented in public culture, is also always subjectively lived and affectively "alive" and hence is not fully reducible to a predictably fixed formal symbolic or disciplinary system.

10. Few understand this as simply an instance of a universal neoliberal logic radiating out to China via cultural diffusion from the centers of global capitalism. Rather, China's ideal neoliberal subject is often seen as a split or doubled one: to some extent individualistic and self-authoring but simultaneously also loyal to the authoritarian party-state and its collectivist values (F. Liu 2008; A. Ong and Zhang 2008; Hoffman 2010; Li Zhang 2010; Y. Yan 2013; F. Martin and Lewis 2016).

11. While the striving individual is "industrious, self-disciplined, calculating and pragmatic" (Y. Yan 2013, 282), Yan distinguishes this personage from Nikolas Rose's "enterprising individual" in the western European context based on the impossibility of political or civic engagement in the Chinese context given the absence of classic liberalism, individual rights and freedoms, and a democratic state (Rose 1998).

12. This suggests an interesting potential resonance with the neoliberal rationality discerned by Catherine Rottenberg (2017, 336–37) as guiding the life planning of middle-class undergraduate women in elite universities in the United States, who increasingly see their twenties as a time of striving and self-investment unencumbered by serious romantic relationships.

13. This echoes the experience of some other postsocialist societies in central, eastern, and southeastern Europe; see Daskalova et al. 2012.

14. The reduction of state care services has seen the care burden increasingly shift onto families in the postreforms era (Connelly et al. 2018). Within families, a strong social expectation that wives will perform a greater proportion of care work than husbands remains in place notwithstanding some young women's stated hopes that when the time comes, the work could be divided evenly, and also notwithstanding notable shifts toward conceptualizing marriage as centered on conjugal affection rather than duty and role performance (Jankowiak and Li 2017).

15. Stevan Harrell and Gonçalo Santos (2017) note that transgenerational relationships are growing less hierarchical vis-à-vis material power; however, the hierarchical structure remains in place in terms of symbolic prestige.

16. In his study of female entrepreneurs, Osburg (2013, 26) found that owing to their exclusion from the masculine *guanxi* networks on which businessmen rely, such women tended to be more invested in an individualized meritocratic discourse than their male counterparts, taking pride in the idea that they relied on pure ability and hard work rather than *guanxi* to succeed. Some female students gave voice to a related discourse, hoping that the experience of seeking work overseas would allow them to shine based on personal merits rather than social connections. However, since female graduates entering

the workforce are far more likely to take a first job as an employee rather than attempting to become an entrepreneur without prior professional experience, for those who sought work in China, the *guanxi* route was still open (often via their fathers), unlike the situation of the established female entrepreneurs studied by Osburg.

17. As Maria Elena Indelicato (2018) demonstrates, the rise in international student numbers in Australia over recent decades has occasioned the production of a series of affectively saturated representational strategies in media and public culture. Such strategies, argues Indelicato, press international students into service to express a variety of national anxieties including those surrounding the nation's relationship with the Asia-Pacific region.

18. All dollar amounts quoted in this book are in Australian dollars.

19. I intend *assemblage* in a broadly Deleuzian sense, as developed by Manuel DeLanda (2006); that is, it refers to a system defined by relations of exteriority (detachability and replaceability) and contingency among its component parts, and whose existence affects (enables and/or limits) its component parts.

20. My average number of interactions with the fifty core participants over the life of the project was twelve (lowest number five, highest number twenty-five).

1. BEFORE STUDY

Some material from chapter 1 appeared in an earlier version in Fran Martin, "Mobile Self-Fashioning and Gendered Risk: Rethinking Chinese Students' Motivations for Overseas Education," *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 15, no. 5 (2017): 706–20.

1. Recognizing the social centrality of the awareness and management of such risks, some scholars have put forward the view that postsocialist China, and especially its middle classes, might be seen as transitioning toward risk society: that period in modernization processes when, material need having been objectively reduced, managing the risks generated by modernization itself becomes a central project (Giddens 1991, 1999; Beck 1992; Kohrman 2004; A. Ong and Zhang 2008; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2010; M. Hansen and Pang 2010; Hoffman 2010; Y. Yan 2010; Ren 2013; T. Lewis, Martin, and Sun 2016; K.-S. Chang 2017). I have engaged with these arguments from a gender perspective elsewhere (F. Martin 2017a). Here, rather than dwell on the generalizing claims of this macrosociological theory, I focus instead on more specific risks connected with the participants' overseas study projects, especially gendered risks.

2. All translations from Chinese-language written sources are my own unless otherwise noted.

3. While the regulation of gender by means of such a sociotemporal template is by no means exclusive to China (see, for example, Kinneret Lahad's [2017] study of related patterns in Israel and beyond), the precise forms that this regulation takes are, to a degree, historically and culturally specific. See also Lahad's excellent critique of the normative force of the concept of "life course" itself (26–39).

4. Here and throughout, italicized words in translated quotes indicate words spoken in English; underlined words in translated quotes indicate the speaker's emphasis.

5. The *fudaoyuan* performs a student-support role for which there is no real equivalent in Western universities. *Fudaoyuan*s—often junior members of staff, sometimes