EVERYDAY LIFE AND EMOTIONS OF OVERSEAS RETURNED STUDENTS IN SHANGHAI, CHINA

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Yunting Qi, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date: 29th September 2021

Acknowledgements

Looking back on the past four years, I experienced many difficult and challenged moments in either research progress or personal life. Fortunately, I have met a wonderful group of people, who helped me struggle through gloomy moments and have made my PhD experience unexpectedly colourful. I owe sincere appreciation to them.

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With seven years of overseas lived experiences, including three years in Singapore for Master's degree and four years in the UK for doctoral degree, transnational migration has been not only my research interest, but also a crucial chapter of my whole life. For me, the last seven-years remarked a transition to mature adulthood in many ways, during which I have become a qualified researcher and meanwhile I am ready to take care of my family, support friends and handle any difficulties in life. I will surely miss the journey, but now at the end of the journey, I am happy to say farewell to it and sincerely welcome the new chapter of my life course.

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谨以此文献给所有我爱的和爱我的人们，感谢你们一路伴我走来，也感谢坚持不放弃的自己。

念念不忘，必有回响。自勉之，共勉之。

Abstract

While return migration has become a recurring topic in geographical scholarship, very limited attention has been paid to the everyday material and/or emotional experiences of return migrants. The thesis addresses this gap through unpacking the post-study everyday lives and emotions of overseas returned students in Shanghai, China and further sheds light on the conceptualisation of return migration which has remained largely vague in existing scholarship.

Based on data collected from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Shanghai from August 2018 to August 2019, this thesis explores overseas returned students' everyday lives and emotions from the perspectives of everyday experiences of work, everyday life beyond the workplace and intimate relationships. In terms of the constitution of their everyday experiences, this thesis indicates the central role and structuring impact of work, which hints at that work is not only paid labour in office spaces, but exists in everyday life in many ways. Regarding the whole transnational/translocal journeys of participants, this thesis suggests that they continually made their present life through negotiating their previous lived experiences emplaced elsewhere and aspirations for future migration/settlement with everyday circumstances in Shanghai. The lens of everyday emotions reveals how migrants perceived their journey from overseas to China and how they employed their agency to improve daily well-being and create their own places in Shanghai.

In general, return migration is a complicated, ongoing process involving multiple (changing) places at various geographical scales which returnees experienced throughout a series of life stages and under specific macro socio-economic contexts. The thesis suggests a blurring boundary between return migration and various kinds of outward migration, because a complex of identities, multiple motivations, the temporal embeddedness and the various geographical scales, which have been indicated in this researched returnee group, prevail among almost all kinds of transnational migration, rather than being unique to return migration. The most significant difference between

return migration and outward migration is the attachment of a sense of home and belonging to the destination place.

The exploration of return migrants' everyday experiences not only contributes to a more comprehensive knowledge of return migration in an empirical sense; theoretically, the thesis reflects on the existing conceptualisation of return migration through unpacking the complex identities of returnees, the (trans)temporality of return migration and the sending/receiving places of return journeys. The blurring boundaries between return migration and other migrations indicated in this thesis urge researchers to think how the categorisation of transnational migration could help to advance related debates in future.

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Chapter I: Introduction

They are the key force in the rise of China, as well as staunch defenders and core advisors of Reform and Opening-up;

They are the founders of China's science and technologies, having made outstanding contributions to the reform of the Chinese educational system and personnel training;

They are envoys of cultural exchanges between the East and the West, building a bridge between China and the world;

They are the leaders of China's innovation and entrepreneurship, creating new business models and shaping a new entrepreneurial culture;

They are the "heads" of international organisations, promoting China's deep participation in global governance and enhancing China's international voice.[1]

(Centre for China and Globalisation & China Global Talent Society, December 2019)

The quotation is part of an award speech published on the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and paying tribute to 70 overseas returned students who had achieved ground-breaking results in their own professional fields and made outstanding contributions to China's national development. Although the People's Republic of China has always advertised these super elite returnees as representative of all returned students, can the 70 names really speak for more than three million overseas returned students[2]? Overseas returned students are usually called "*hai gui*" in the Chinese language[3]. For most Chinese nationals[4], *hai gui* is a familiar group, not because most Chinese people meet many *hai gui* in their everyday lives, but because of the

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[1] The quoted award speech in original Chinese is "他们是中国大国崛起的关键力量，是改革开放的坚定捍卫者与核心智囊团；他们是中国科教事业的奠基人，为我国科教体制改革、人才培养做出卓越贡献；他们是东西方文化交流的使者，搭建起中国与世界沟通的桥梁；他们是中国创新创业风向的引领者，开创了新的商业模式，塑造着新的创业文化；他们是国际组织'掌门人'，推动中国深度参与全球治理，提升国际话语权"，quoted from http://www.wrsa.net/content_41005915.htm, accessed on 16 April 2021.

[2] By 2016, there were 3.132 million overseas Chinese students who had returned to China after completing overseas education (*Blue Book of Overseas Returned Students' Employment in China*, 2018).

[3] *Hai* means overseas and *gui* refers to return. More explanation about the literal meaning of *hai gui* can be seen in C. Wang *et al.* (2006).

[4] In this thesis, I use "Chinese" primarily to refer to issues regarding the state of the People's Republic of China; otherwise, extra attributes will be added, such as ethnic Chinese and Singaporean Chinese.

great reputation of this group. In Chinese school education, pupils have learnt the honourable examples of overseas returned students in earlier generations, like Jeme Tien Yow[5] and Qian Xuesen[6]. These super-elites' experiences after returning to China is legendary. However, legends are always only a few, and being ordinary is the norm.

As I write this introductory chapter, I have already spent seven years overseas, including three years in Singapore for my Master's degree and four years in Britain for my doctoral degree. Given that I have decided to return to China after graduation, I often imagine my future everyday life in China. How will I make my everyday life in (un)familiar everyday circumstances? How will my many years of experiences abroad affect my future life in China? Can I integrate into a localised workplace? Can I find my favourite coffee beans and red wine in China (they are my good friends while writing my PhD thesis)? Does the city I was once familiar with (the hometown where I was born and grew up or Shanghai where I spent my university time) still remain the same as I remember? What kind of emotions will I feel towards places I have experienced previously and am experiencing now? What about relationships with my family, friends, and significant other? I will not know the answers to these questions until I actually return to China one day. These questions in my mind became the very initial motivation for choosing everyday life and emotions as the topic of this doctoral thesis.

Knowing myself, I do not think that I will become a super big name like the 70 most outstanding overseas returned students. It is much more likely that I will lead an ordinary life with the identity of an overseas returned student. Thus, I

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[5] Jeme Tien Yow, 詹天佑 in Chinese, was a pioneering Chinese railroad engineer. Educated at Yale University, he was the chief engineer responsible for the construction of the railway between Beijing and Zhangjiakou in the 1900s, the first railway constructed in China without foreign assistance. For his contributions to railroad engineering in China, he is known as the "founding father of China's Railroad". More information about Jeme can be accessed via https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhan_Tianyou.

[6] Qian Xuesen, 钱学森 in Chinese, was a Chinese mathematician, cyberneticist, aerospace engineer, and physicist who made significant contributions to the field of aerodynamics and established engineering cybernetics. He had been educated and worked in the US and returned to China in the 1950s. Qian made important contributions to China's missile and space program. More information about Qian can be accessed via https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qian_Xuesen.

am more interested in grasping the everyday experiences of the "ordinary" returned students, who constitute the majority of overseas returnees to China, rather than the hyper-elite ones. However, existing literature has paid very limited attention to the post-return everyday life and emotions of overseas returned students and fails to address the concerns I, like many Chinese students overseas, have about our near future. Through this PhD project, I will address relevant research gaps in existing empirical research on returned student migration; additionally, this thesis will interrogate return migration as an on-going process of complexity and diversity that makes important contributions to the wider scholarship on transnational migration.

In this introductory chapter, I introduce the status quo of overseas returned students in China, indicate research gaps regarding overseas returned students and explain how I researched the everyday life and emotions of overseas returned students through ethnographic fieldwork in Shanghai. Further, I incorporate this thesis within the wider scholarship on transnational migration, introduce the research aim and questions for this thesis to explore and outline its empirical and theoretical contributions. Finally, the structure of this thesis will be provided.

1.1 Overview of overseas returned students in China

Due to the historic contribution of overseas returned students in earlier generations and the contemporary demands to realise national development, the state of China has always valued overseas returned students as an important source of highly-skilled labour and considered attracting overseas students back to China as a critical approach to reverse brain drain (Pan, 2011; Zweig *et al.*, 2008; Zweig *et al.*, 2020). In official discourses, overseas students (*hai wai liu xue ren yuan*)[7] are defined as those 1) who studied overseas with various funding sources (Chinese Government Scholarship, self-funding and other funding sources), and have obtained Bachelor's degrees or above from foreign advanced educational institutions, or 2) who have worked as visiting fellows in

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[7] 海外留学人员 in Chinese

foreign universities or research institutes for at least one year after having obtained Bachelor's degrees or above from advanced educational institutions in China, or have obtained intermediate professional technical positions or above in China[8]. Those overseas Chinese students who have returned to China after their study or visiting are called overseas returned students (*hai wai liu xue gui guo ren yuan*)[9]. The official definition is crucial. From the perspective of individual students, the definition identifies who can enjoy various preferential treatments, including, but not restricted to, the "soft" statements like national recognition and the title of "talent" issued by the state, and the "hard" benefits, such as tax exemption for car purchase, fast access to *hukou*[10] (particularly in metropolises like Beijing and Shanghai) and access to various kinds of bonus/start-up funding (Xiang, 2011). For the purposes of this thesis, the official definition of overseas returned students helped me to clarify the eligibility of research participants. Based on the official definition, I provide specific selection criteria for potential research participants in the methodology chapter (see section 3.3.1).

The numbers of both outbound and returned Chinese students have rapidly increased in recent years, which have been in accordance with the rising phenomena of international students mobilities across the global[11]. The number of overseas returned students was 9,100 in 2000 and rose to 580,300 in 2019; and the return rate of overseas students reached 82.49% in 2019 (see Fig. 1.1).

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[8] The definition was cited from the website of Shanghai Municipal Human Resources and Social Security Bureau, http://www.12333sh.gov.cn/201712333/bmfw/bmwd/wgzjgz/01/201711/t20171101_1265602.shtml, accessed on 19 December 2019. The original Chinese definition is "留学人员是指公派或自费出国（境）学习，并获得（境）外大学本科学历、学士学位（含）以上的人员；在国内获得大学本科（含）以上学历或中级以上专业技术职务任职资格，并到国（境）外高等院校、科研机构进修一年（含）以上的访问学者或进修人员".

[9] 海外留学归国人员 in Chinese. It is also the longer version of *hai gui* mentioned earlier.

[10] *Hukou* is the household registration system in China. It can prove that an individual is a resident of an administrative area and can enjoy social security and other public resources provided by the local government. The *hukou* is controlled by the government and cannot migrate with people's migration i.e. the rights that people have in a city depends on their *hukou* registration.

[11] In the first two decades of the 21st century, the number of international student migrants have increased from 2 million in 2000 to 5.3 million in 2017 and has constituted 2.1% of international migrant stock by 2018 (*World Migration Report 2020*; UNESCO, 2019).

The large numbers of overseas returned students is primarily motivated by reasons such as the socio-economic development of China and associated bright career prospects in the homeland, social/familial ties with their homeland and relevant emotional attachment, and attractive talent policies of the Chinese government (*Report on Employment & Entrepreneurship of Chinese Returnees 2018*).
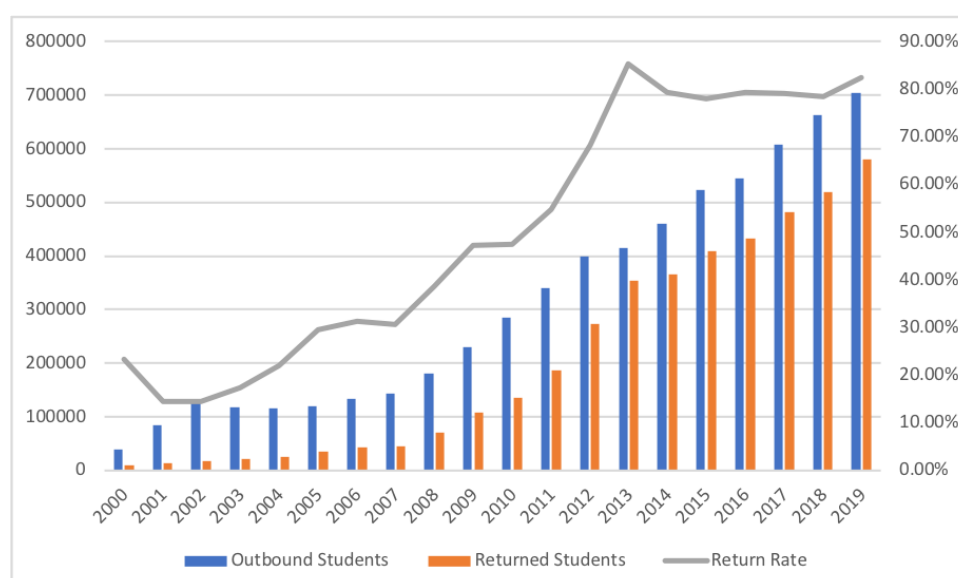
Fig. 1.1 The number of outbound and returned students 2000-2019
(Data source:
https://data.stats.gov.cn/easyquery.htm?cn=C01&zb=A0M0A&sj=2016, accessed on 20 April 2021; drawn by author)

In terms of highest degree upon return, in 2017 81.1% of returnees held a Master's degree, 12.5% a doctoral degree and 6.4% a Bachelor's degree. As for employment, among Master's degree holders, 60.4% worked in state-owned/foreign/private enterprises in terms of the types of company[12] and 10.9% in the financial industry in terms of industrial division[13]. From the perspective of age group, 71.34% overseas returned students were between 26 and 30 years old when they moved back to China, with 13.41% in the age group of 31-35.

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[12] In Chinese official statistics, companies are categorised into state-owned, foreign and private companies according to company investors. State-owned companies refers to those which are owned by the central or regional government(s) of China; foreign companies means that investors are from foreign countries, no matter whether the investors are foreign governments, organisations and individuals; and private companies are established/invested/owned by individual Chinese citizen(s).

[13] There are great differences in the employment patterns between doctorate holders, Master's degree holders and Bachelor's degree holders. For example, 40.10% of doctorate holders work in higher educational institutions, while this percentage is only 1.3% among Master's holders. As this thesis specifically focuses on returnees with a Master's degree as their highest degree, only employment data for Master's holders is presented here.

82.58% overseas returned students were unmarried when they graduated from overseas institutions and returned, and 16.94% were married[14] (*Blue Book of Overseas Returned Students' Employment in China*, 2018). Taking their marital status and age group into consideration, it could be deduced that many overseas returnees are likely to engage in love, marriage and parenting after return, which, similar to the identity change from dependent students to independent full-time employees, mark key transitions of life stages.

The rising phenomenon of international student mobilities between China and overseas, particularly western countries, is situated in the geographically uneven global market of higher education. Due to the perceived greater development level of western countries and the high global rankings of western universities, the wider Chinese society holds the belief that students can acquire more advanced professional knowledge and more comprehensive personnel training through attending overseas educational programmes (Zweig, 2006). In addition to formal credentials, students hopefully earn foreign language competence, transnational social networks and knowledge of a different society which are often seen as useful soft capitals in their career prospects in China (J. Hao & Welch, 2012; Pan, 2010). The potential value of overseas education in China has been significantly advocated by Chinese students and their families and has been recognised by the state and employers to some extent. In this respect, accumulating advantageous capital for personal and career development has been the primary motivation of outward as well as return migration of Chinese students.

The Chinese government's relaxation of regulations imposed on self-financed overseas education has also greatly promoted outbound and return student migration. Since the 1990s, the Chinese government has gradually lifted the restrictions on individuals applying for private passports and has allowed or even encouraged students to study abroad on a self-financed basis through their own social/referral networks instead of intergovernmental contracts (*Blue Book*

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[14] Due to the data source claimed in *Blue Book of Overseas Returned Students' Employment in China 2018*, these data listed above are for all overseas returned students by 2018.

of Overseas Returned Students' Employment in China, 2018). The shift of regulations on studying overseas allows families with sufficient financial resources to send their children abroad. Given that nowadays a considerable percentage of overseas Chinese students are financially supported by themselves or their family while most overseas students in the 1980s went overseas via scholarship programmes, the shift of regulations on overseas education has resulted in a changing demographic structure in the group of overseas students, which is dominated by members of the well-off middle or above social classes (W. Liu, 2016). From the perspective of capital transfer, the relaxing of regulations opens up the possibility of capital transfer that well-off Chinese families can transfer their local economic capital to overseas social, cultural and symbolic capital through investing in their children's overseas education (J. Hao *et al.*, 2016; Pan, 2010). Further, the welcome attitude of the state towards overseas returned students, expressed through various talent policies and political speeches, further adds symbolic value to overseas experience and implies a potential transfer from various forms of capital obtained overseas to local economic, social and symbolic capitals (Zweig & H. Wang, 2013). More discussion about capital transfer and employment of returned students and my research participants can be seen in Chapter II and Chapter IV respectively.

While both the global market of higher education and the Chinese official discourse allude to the values and popularity of overseas experience in Chinese labour markets or even the wider society, recent returned students are encountering challenges, difficulties and even stigmatisation after moving back to China (J. Hao *et al.*, 2016; Zweig & Han, 2011). An outstanding representation is the changing nicknames for overseas returned students. *Hai gui* means overseas returned students with an implication of talents, but an increasing number of returned students are called *hai dai*, who wait for a long time before securing a formal job, and even *hai shen*, who fail to get a job in China after graduating from an overseas degree. Due to their unsuccessful job-hunting, *hai dai* and *hai shen* are often thought of as family money-wasters and are criticised for being arrogant and having no precise understanding of their own abilities (*Report on the Attraction of Returned Chinese Talents from*

Overseas, 2018; C. Wang *et al.*, 2006). Despite pervading controversy over overseas returned students in wider society, the relevant talent policies have been revised according to the recent development of China. On the one hand, the state has implemented a range of talent programmes with rather generous treatment to recruit high-end overseas Chinese with substantial professional experience; on the other hand, the preferential treatment provided to fresh overseas graduates, who constitute the vast majority of the group of overseas returned students, has been greatly reduced (Zweig *et al.*, 2020). Due to the contemporary changes of talent policies, young returnees who have just received their overseas credentials are likely to suffer greater difficulties than senior returnees.

The increasing challenges in everyday experiences of job-hunting and work drive returned students to take actions to promote themselves in the local labour market, such as taking up local vocational training (Z. Du *et al.*, 2021). The increasingly challenging job-hunting also likely evokes a series of emotional results, like upset and worry when they encounter unexpected difficulties regarding post-return employability (J. Hao *et al.*, 2016; Q. Wu, 2014). The emotional perspective unravels how overseas returned students feel and reflect on their post-return experiences and how they negotiate with local labour markets and wider society. However, emotion remains an underexplored topic in existing literature which interrogates returned students' performance in the domestic labour market. Thus, the exploration of emotions deserves more academic attention.

Given that work is just one aspect of everyday life, there is a lack of a comprehensive exploration of overseas returned students' post-return everyday experiences. Overemphasising returnees' experiences of work and their potential contribution to national development may risk simplifying overseas returned students as a part of economic mechanisms. They are human beings with unique personal experiences, individualised everyday routines, strong or gentle emotions and their own aspirations for their future lives and careers. The examination of everyday life and emotions could provide a more comprehensive knowledge of overseas returned students. The introduction of

an everyday perspective into scholarship on overseas returned students also sheds light on the conceptualisation of return student migration and return migration more generally.

1.2 Experiencing Shanghai as an "overseas returned student"

Everyday life is greatly embedded in specific place(s). Place, including both tangible surroundings (like the natural environment and urban infrastructures) and socio-cultural contexts, has a shaping impact on everyday practices and embeds a series of extraordinary meanings in everyday life (Collins, 2012; Rigg, 2007). Further, people likely perceive a series of senses and emotions during everyday life, which are also rooted in the locales where they live every day and possibly further create places with personal meanings (McCormack, 2003; Thrift, 2004). In this thesis, I selected Shanghai as the field site to observe overseas returned students' on-going everyday life and emotions. This is for several reasons.

First, Shanghai is the most popular destination city for overseas returned students in China. The *Report on Attractions of Overseas Chinese Returnees 2018* written by LinkedIn suggested that Shanghai was the most popular destination city in 2017 with 63.1% of Chinese returnees having Shanghai as a targeted destination. The popularity is largely because of the developed economy, abundant job opportunities, internationalised and multi-cultural environment and relatively friendly *hukou* policies (more information about overseas return students in Shanghai can be seen in section 3.2.1). Due to the notable population of overseas returned students, Shanghai provides potential access to overseas returned students in great quantity and diversity. Second, as my first university degree was completed in Shanghai, I was more familiar with Shanghai than with other destination cities favoured by overseas returned students. The familiarity derived from past experiences helped me settle down in the field site and launch my ethnographic fieldwork without significant difficulties.

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Shanghai from August 2018 to August 2019. Key events, such as changes of talent policies, the Sino-American trade war and new municipal governance regulations, alongside the micro events which occurred in individual participants' lives in Shanghai over my fieldwork year, constituted the spatial-temporal context of my empirical discussion. These events and the spatial-temporal context will be further explained in Chapter III. During the one-year ethnographic fieldwork, I closely observed my participants' everyday lives and emotions both on-site and online (such as their everyday online posts on social media[15]), sometimes imitated their everyday practices (such as attending job fairs, submitting my résumé online, participating in public transport in the morning and evening peaks), frequently talked to them through interviews or casual chats, paid attention to their feelings and emotions, and even witnessed notable life events (such as attending their weddings). These observations and interviews enabled me to establish knowledge of their everyday experiences from both material and emotional perspectives. As the everyday life of transnational migrants usually links the local and the global (Ley, 2004), I also established knowledge of their past transnational journeys and future plans and interrogated how their present everyday life hints at the impacts of different life periods and different places. Through these observations and talks, I noted their success and struggles, happiness and sadness, as well as love and hatred. I also made field diaries to record my practices as well as reflections. After fieldwork, a range of themes emerged from data organisation and analysis and further formed the empirical discussion of this thesis.

1.3 Researching return migration from an everyday perspective

I have criticised the existing literature's overemphasis on employment and work of overseas returned students in China and the neglect of their emplaced everyday life and emotions. Beyond the Chinese context, the insufficient attention paid to post-return everyday life and emotions of returned students

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[15] In this thesis, online ethnography works as a supplement to on-site ethnography. Thus, I did not spend equal time and efforts on online and on-site ethnography. More demonstration about research methods in this thesis could be found in Chapter III.

prevails in existing scholarship on international student mobilities (hereafter ISM).

Returned students, particularly those moving in order to obtain overseas formal degrees, are often conceptualised as a sub-group of highly-skilled migrants and a part of knowledge transfer between host countries and homelands (King & Sondhi, 2018). Existing examination of returned student migrants mainly focuses on how the return migration of students is motivated by bright career prospects in the homeland, place attachment and left-behind intimate relationships (*e.g.*, H. Du, 2017; Dustmann & Weiss, 2007; J. Hao *et al.*, 2016), whether and how returned students make a contribution to their homeland (*e.g.*, Findlay, 2011; Geddie, 2013; King *et al.*, 2010), how returned students conduct transnational capital transfers and further realise the reproduction of familial or personal social class through taking up a decent job in their homeland (*e.g.*, Leung, 2013; Waters, 2006, 2012) and also a few works on returned students' social integration in their homeland (*e.g.*, Gill, 2010; Xu, 2020). While scholars have insightfully examined international students' everyday lives in host countries (like Collins' (2008) research on life-making practices of Korean students in Australia), the research lens of the everyday has rarely been adopted in the studies on return student migration.

Scholars have noted the emotional aspect of ISM and highlighted that the exploration of emotions could help to understand the nature of educational mobilities (Kenway & Fahey, 2011; Kenway & Youdell, 2011), although emotions still remain a rare topic in ISM scholarship, particularly in studies on returned students. The attention that has been paid to the emotional aspects of ISM has focused on students' sense of identities (*e.g.*, Hammett, 2009; Prazeres, 2013) and their aspirations for overseas education and their future career (*e.g.*, Gomes, 2015; Prazeres, 2018), which, while important, are obviously far from sufficient to comprehensively illustrate the emotional world of transnational students. In addition to emotions derived from the macro-scale process of transnational migration and significant events, there are a range of fierce or gentle emotions evoked from ordinary, mundane practices (Conradson & McKay, 2007; Davidson & M. Smith, 2009), which strongly shape the general

everyday experiences of migrants. Emotions could act as an efficient analytical tool for unpacking the political economy of migration regimes as well as various lived experiences during migration journeys (Ho, 2009, 2014). Thus, scholars could achieve a more comprehensive knowledge of a specific migrant group through combining the exploration of material practices and emotions in their everyday life.

Given the everyday remains underexamined in existing scholarship on return student migration, the overarching research objective of this thesis is to shed light on the conceptualisation of return migration through unpacking the everyday life and emotions of overseas returned students in Shanghai and consider whether and how the categorisation of migration could help with future interrogation of transnational migration. Based on the overarching research aim and my empirical research, I propose the following research questions for this thesis:

1) What are the everyday experiences of overseas returned students after moving to Shanghai? Specifically, what material practices and emotions make up their everyday lives?

2) How do places along their migration journey shape their everyday life and emotions experienced in Shanghai? How are their everyday practices and emotions embedded in specific locations in Shanghai?

3) How do their present everyday lives and emotions interconnect with their past experiences and future plans?

Through achieving the research aim and addressing the research questions, this thesis will contribute to the wider transnational migration scholarship empirically and theoretically. From an empirical perspective, this thesis makes a more comprehensive knowledge of overseas returned students' everyday life after moving back to China. Particularly, the empirical discussion in my thesis discloses how transnational everyday life is embedded in multiple places and specific temporal contexts and further suggests return migration as an on-going process of diversity and complexity. Theoretically, through the lens of everyday life, this thesis helps researchers to think about a more precise conceptualisation

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of return migration and sheds light on how meaningful and useful the categorisation of transnational migration is.

1.4 Thesis structure

Following this introductory chapter, there are six further chapters in this thesis, including the literature review, the methodological chapter, three empirical chapters and the concluding chapter. In Chapter II, I draw on literature on returned student migration and everyday life, which are the two central themes in this thesis. In terms of returned student migration which is situated at the overlap of ISM and return migration, I criticise the conceptualisation of ISM and return migration in existing transnationalism scholarship taking the increasing diversity and complexity of transnational human mobilities into consideration and call for more attention to be paid to the post-study experiences of returned student migrants. As for the everyday studies, I suggest that the everyday acts as a bridge between individuals and wider places as well as a bridge between materiality and subjectivities. Based on existing literature, I propose a conceptual framework to illustrate how the research aim and research questions of this thesis will be handled.

Chapter III is the chapter focusing on methodology and research methods. I first contextualise my fieldwork through introducing the group of overseas returned students in Shanghai and key events which occurred during August 2018 to August 2019; then, I demonstrate how I selected and recruited participants, why I employed ethnography as the primary approach to collect data and how I conducted ethnography in the metropolis of Shanghai; also, I explain how I organised various forms of data, analysed data and extracted themes for later empirical discussion; finally I reflect on my positionality in this research and relevant ethical issues.

There are three empirical chapters in this thesis, respectively focusing on everyday experiences of work, everyday life beyond the workplace and everyday intimacy. The division of empirical discussion is due to the analysis of empirical data. As most of my participants has recently transferred their

identity from student to independent full-time workers, *work* took up a considerable percentage of their everyday time; moreover, my participants intended to shape their *everyday activities beyond the workplace and in leisure time* according to their work schedule; *intimate relationships*, including friendship, familial relationships and romantic relationships, were interspersed in various everyday experiences. The three themes emerged from nearly all participants' everyday experiences in Shanghai and involved a wide range of material practices and emotions. In this sense, the three empirical chapters do not have a one-to-one correspondence with the three research questions of the thesis; instead, each empirical chapter makes a contribution to all the questions and further achieves the research objective.

Chapter IV is the first empirical chapter with specific focus on my participants' everyday experiences of work in Shanghai. Primarily, this chapter interrogates how overseas experience influences my participants' present everyday work. I start my discussion with their experience of job-hunting and then examine a range of emotions evoked and performed during their everyday work, such as passion, enjoyment, indifference, struggles, anger and desperation. This chapter embeds overseas returned students' everyday experiences of work in personal transnational sojourns, narrowing educational and developmental gaps between China and Global North countries. My participants' everyday work illustrates the interconnectivity and tensions between the global and the local.

The second empirical chapter, Chapter V interrogates practices and emotions regarding everyday experiences outside the workplace, namely food, residence and transportation. Through these selected aspects, this chapter finds that overseas returned students' present everyday life is shaped by previous experiences in multiple places in transnational and/or translocal journeys, present encounters in Shanghai and future life/migration plans. Returnees have persisted in adapting themselves to local circumstances in everyday practices and in emotions since they decided to launch their return journey. From this perspective, return migration is an on-going process, which is hardly claimed to be completed.

In Chapter VI, the last empirical chapter, I examine how my participants established, maintained, performed, broke and expressed emotions in everyday intimate relationships. Given that friendship is discussed in the previous two empirical chapters and very few participants had parenting experience, this chapter primarily focuses on relationships with partners and parents and also takes everyday illness and death into the research scope. While everyday intimacy is greatly about love, my participants expressed a mix of emotions towards intimate ones through mundane practices. This chapter indicates the significant influence of intimate relationships on participants' migration decisions and even life plans. Further, given that the changes of intimate relationships often contributed to key transitions of life stages, this chapter helps to embed my participants' return migration in their whole life course.

Finally, Chapter VII concludes this thesis via intertwining the primary findings in each empirical chapter, linking these findings to research gaps indicated in the literature review and addressing research questions raised in this introductory chapter. In the concluding chapter, I explain how this thesis helps take a further step towards a more precise conceptualisation of return migration and further contributes to the wider transnationalism scholarship. I also indicate limits of this thesis and suggest potential scope for future research.

Chapter II: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

Through critically reviewing existing literature on returned student migration and everyday life, this chapter aims to obtain a comprehensive understanding of recent theoretical debates and empirical research, identify research gaps and propose an analytical framework for the empirical discussion in this thesis. In section 2.2, I first scrutinise the conceptualisation of international student mobilities and return migration; then, I critically reflect on empirical research on returned students' post-study experiences. Section 2.3 focuses on everyday geographies in mobility and provides an overview of theoretical debates and empirical examinations regarding transnational everyday experiences; particularly, not only material experiences, but also everyday subjectivities (e.g., emotions, feelings and senses) will be discussed in this section. Following that, I intertwine the above two threads of literature and establish an analytical framework to examine overseas returned students' everyday life and emotions through introducing materiality, relationality and temporality as research lenses.

2.2 Researching returned student migration

Returned student migration is situated in the overlap of international student mobilities (hereafter ISM) and return migration. From the perspective of ISM, scholars have widely discussed migrant motivations and overseas experiences; a series of empirical works further contribute to the theorisation of ISM and related typologies (e.g., Findlay et al., 2017; King & Sondhi, 2018). In terms of return migration, earlier literature usually took a return trip to homeland after the completion of overseas education for granted in cases of student migrants (Gmelch, 1980; McHugh & Morgan, 1984); but recent researchers have questioned such presumption (Ho, 2011a; Ley & Kobayashi, 2005) and indicated a complex intertwining of ISM and return migration (Bijwaard & Q. Wang, 2016; Beech, 2019; Brooks & Waters, 2011). This section will provide

a clear overview of returned student migration through exploring theoretical debates and empirical research regarding ISM and return migration; then, I place post-study movement to the homeland in the context of a wider life course and interrogate what scholars have suggested about returned students' experiences in their homeland after overseas education.

2.2.1 International student migration

ISM has been taken into a burgeoning body of academic work, which has greatly increased since the early 2000s (e.g., Baláž & Williams, 2004; Brooks & Waters, 2011; Findlay, 2011). Although ISM scholarship has included school children in the discussion and noted the rising trend of globalisation of school education, the majority of ISM scholarship focuses on higher education. As this thesis is interested in returned students who complete at least part of their tertiary education overseas, I refer to ISM mainly in relation to university students, who migrate for advanced knowledge, decent credentials, brighter career prospects, long-term overseas residence and even adventure experiences (e.g., J. Hao & Welch, 2012; Janta *et al.*, 2019; Prazeres, 2019).

A key question in the ISM literature is how to theorise international student mobilities. Some scholars argue that "mobility implies a shorter time-frame for the movement, and a high probability of return" (King *et al.*, 2010, p. 6) and "*mobility* highlights the movement involved in migration, rather than privileging the sending and receiving localities and their perspectives" (King & Raghuram, 2013, p. 129, italics in the original). While the claim about mobility indeed works in certain sub-groups of international student migrants, such as those who move through exchange programmes between universities, it risks assuming a taken-for-granted return of student migrants and overlooking the wider contexts within which ISM occurs. In this thesis, I understand "mobilities" in ISM in a more general sense, which could refer to various forms of students' movement across national borders, and I do not privilege either supply or demand sides of international higher education.

The theorisation of ISM could be made from the perspectives of higher education and its relation to the global labour market. In terms of global higher education, which has been increasingly commercialised in recent years, ISM is understood as "a product and an underlying mechanism of the globalisation of higher education" (King & Sondhi, 2018, p. 178). Such a theorisation implies that ISM is never a neutral process, which empowers some states/individuals/families while disempowering others, and the unevenness is geographically embedded (Beech, 2019; King & Sondhi, 2018). The quality gap of higher education between different countries deeply influences students' choice of destination country and motivates student mobility concentrating on economically more developed Anglophone countries (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Findlay, 2011). Consequently, from the perspective of states, receiving states could benefit from the tuition revenue and potential young skilled workers whilst sending countries of students likely encounter the loss of financial resources and human resources (Geddie, 2013). Considering that a considerable number of student migrants are from the middle class or above, the commercialised higher education enables student migrants to exchange domestic financial capital for overseas educational and other social capitals (Waters, 2006, 2012; Waters & Leung, 2012). Thus, the reproduction of social class and social (dis)advantages could be realised through ISM and further, a student's whole family could benefit.

Regarding (global) labour market, ISM has been theorised as highly-skilled migration (King & Sondhi, 2018), knowledge transfer (Madge *et al.*, 2014; Williams & Baláž, 2008) and a career-enhancing investment (Findlay *et al.*, 2017; Y. Huang & Kuah-Pearce, 2015). These theorisations are based on the presumption that student migrants will transfer to available educated workers after their graduation and potentially be mobile in the international labour market (Weinar & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020). The three theorisations emphasise different aspects of ISM: sub-group of highly-skilled migration highlights the educational background and skill level of student migrants situated in the broader labour market; knowledge migration addresses the transfer of knowledge between different countries, particularly when the countries are at different development levels (Gribble, 2008; Raghuram, 2012);

and career-enhancing investment emphasises the (positive) impact of overseas education and other related experiences on individual employability (Brooks *et al.*, 2012; Y. Cai, 2013; King *et al.*, 2010). The theorisations help researchers to empirically interrogate the consequences of overseas education in terms of personal career prospect, personal potential contribution to national development and brain drain/gain/circulation between nation-states (e.g., Baláž *et al.*, 2004; Gribble, 2008; Sun, 2013)

The theorisations, namely highly-skilled migration, knowledge transfer and career-enhancing investment, imply great similarity between international student migrants and highly-skilled labour. However, it is unwise to make an equivalence between ISM and highly-skilled labour migration. First, ISM and highly-skilled migrants have different foremost migration motivations. Students primarily move for enhancing their human capital through study (Baláž & Williams, 2004) while highly-skilled workers usually migrate for brighter career prospects and decent economic/social rewards (Weinar & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020). Second, different state regulations are respectively imposed on ISM and highly-skilled migrants. The most outstanding difference is that student migrants and highly-skilled migrants hold different resident permits in host countries. Moreover, student migrants, who are merely *potential* labour and whose human resource has not been proved valuable in labour market, are possibly restricted to obtain long-term post-study residence/work permits in some states while highly-skilled workers usually encountered less restrictions in terms of mobility (Janta *et al.*, 2019; Skeldon, 2018).

The similarities and distinctions between ISM and highly-skilled labour indicate the connection between ISM studies and labour geographical scholarship. Labour geographies "consider (for all economic sectors) the geographical structure of labour organising (union and non-union), the locally variable constitution of labour markets, the effects that journey-to-work options have on who gets what job where, and so on." (Castree, 2007, p.856). Studies in the sub-field of labour geographies have gone beyond the interrogation of how labour influences or is influenced by capitalist industrial (re)location, bringing into discussion worker agency, various geographical elements of local labour

markets, emplaced power relations, related state regulations and globalisation (Herod, 1997; Herod, Peck & Wills, 2001); more recently, labour geographers have increasingly adopted the insight of mobilities (for example, transnational migrant workers embedding in global production network) to further debates regarding labour geographies (Buckley *et al.*, 2017; Castree, 2007; Coe, 2012).

Research in labour geographies could inspire the examination of ISM in two ways. First, the movement of skilled labour is greatly structured by capital flows and embedded in local/global labour markets (Strauss, 2018). The changing industrial landscape and increasing uncertainty in global labour markets may alter international students' initial post-study plans and imply multiple options for their post-study movement. Thus, the relations between post-study migration of ISM and the wider economic landscape deserve careful examination. Second, labour geographies emphasise workers' agency and how workers navigate economic inequalities and power relations within the workplace on behalf of themselves or their social groups (Castree, 2007). Although the discussion regarding agency still largely remains from the perspective of material encounters and embodied practices, labour geographers have noted the emotional motivations behind these practices (Rogaly, 2009). In this respect, the interrogation of international students' agency in employment could benefit the discussion about how emotions have impacts on lived experiences in wider everyday circumstances.

ISM studies also help to expand the research scope of labour geographies beyond economic sectors and paid employment. Paid employment is neither the whole nor an independent part of people's everyday life, regardless of migration status, and production sectors cannot represent the whole society full of diversity and complexity (Castree, 2007; Yeoh & Huang, 2011). Labour geographers have called for more attention to "how individuals' non-waged, cultural, sexual, ethnonational, social reproductive nor non-capitalist lives have fundamentally shaped their working lives" (Buckley *et al.*, 2017, p.157). Existing ISM studies have shed lights on the "non-capitalist" lives and social reproduction of transnational student migrants, particularly those who have transferred to full-time employees after graduation (e.g., Brooks & Waters,

2011; B. Wang, 2019). This thesis hopefully further contributes to labour geographies scholarship through unpacking the work-centred everyday life of overseas returned students.

More recently, researchers have started conceptualising ISM beyond the higher education market and labour market and taken it as a reflection of global youth mobility cultures, in which young people aim to seek adventure experiences in an exotic sphere and/or comply with family traditions of global mobility (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Brooks *et al.*, 2012; King & Sondhi, 2018; Prazeres, 2013). This theorisation is usually employed in the examinations of student migrants in exchange programmes, work-holidays, overseas internships and other short-term programmes occurring during their formal schooling or higher education. Under this theorisation, student migrants seek to enhance their intercultural competence rather than formal qualifications and establish transnational relationships (particularly friendship) (*e.g.*, Prazeres, 2017, 2018; Robertson, 2014, 2018, 2020)

Based on existing discussions about the theorisation of ISM, one critical question for this thesis is whether these theorisations and typologies work for my targeted research group, overseas returned students. There is no doubt that overseas returned students are, or at least were when they went overseas to study, a part of ISM. As empirical research has suggested, the primary migration motivation of Chinese students is to acquire formal qualifications usually at Bachelor's degree or above level, which could act as persuasive evidence of the formal knowledge and various soft skills obtained overseas (Shen, 2005; Zweig & Yang, 2014). Considering that the global top-ranking universities are predominantly western universities (Brooks & Waters, 2011), the formal qualification conferred by overseas universities would hopefully improve their career prospects if they move back to China after completing their overseas education (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; J. Hao & Welch, 2012; J. Hao *et al.*, 2016). In most cases, overseas Chinese students can be theorised as a sub-group of highly-skilled migrants due to their tertiary degrees and a kind of career-enhanced investment given their migration motivations.

Moreover, the Chinese government eagerly expects the return of overseas Chinese students with the latest knowledge of a professional field and overseas society to serve the future development of China with the support of advanced knowledge and skills acquired overseas (Xiang, 2011; Zweig, 2006; Zweig & H. Wang, 2013). Thus, overseas Chinese students could be framed as a kind of knowledge transfer. On most occasions of knowledge transfer regarding ISM, students have returned to their homeland permanently or at least for the long term (for example, Baláž & Williams, 2004; Klagge & Klein-Hitpaß, 2010; Liao & Asis, 2020; Williams & Baláž, 2008). But as China's government now claims that return is only one of the options of contributing to China, (permanent) return has become no longer necessary for overseas Chinese students who are interested in transferring knowledge to their homeland (Xiang, 2011). Existing empirical research has theorised overseas Chinese students in relation to highly-skilled migration, career-enhanced investment and/or knowledge transfer through examining their migration motivation, individual career prospect, related brain circulation and national interests of sending and receiving countries.

The existing theorisations of overseas Chinese students have covered some critical aspects of their experiences, but do not perfectly suit this thesis. First, compared to outward student migrants, my targeted research group is situated in a transitional stage in their life course. They have just completed student life and have started or are waiting to start their career in their homeland. Although existing theorisations have noted the impacts of overseas education on local employment, limited attention has been paid to the transition of life stages experienced by returned overseas students. Resonating with recent wider migration scholarship (Collins, 2017; Findlay *et al.*, 2015; Ho, 2021), I argue that the theorisation of overseas returned students should consider life courses and temporality, particularly from the perspective of how students transfer to (full-time) skilled employers with the progress of international mobilities. Second, while existing theorisations have considered the perspective of post-study employment, other aspects of post-study everyday life have been largely overlooked (Collins *et al.*, 2017). Yeoh and S. Huang (2011) have suggested that it is unwise to take highly-skilled migrants merely as participants in the

labour market or brains in mobility and call for more attention to their everyday lived experiences and various subjectivities. Given the commonalities between ISM and highly-skilled migration, the claim also works for ISM, particularly for returned overseas students who have just completed their education and are seeking to establish their careers. Thus, overseas returned students in my thesis are those who have the features of highly-skilled migrants as well as student migrants and who lead their own everyday life full of various encounters in workplaces as well as other mundane spaces, embodied practices and emotions in a transitional life stage.

As discussed above, the different theorisations of ISM respectively emphasise certain aspects of ISM and there is no universal theorisation which could suit all types of ISM. Thus, the typologies of ISM also deserve interrogation. The most prominent types, which have the greatest relevance to this thesis, are credit mobility and degree mobility. The former refers to where credit for overseas study is a part of a student's programme in their home institution relying on inter-university exchange schemes or other academic networks; in degree mobility, students attend the entire programme of study in the host society with the aim of gaining a whole formal degree (King *et al.*, 2010; King & Raghuram, 2013).

Although this typology is simply based on the different nature of educational programmes, it still reflects a range of distinctions between the two groups of student migrants. First, credit mobility and degree mobility are stimulated by different motivations. Credit migrants focus more on adventure experiences and soft skills, such as language ability, intercultural competence and social skills, and are less concerned with the global ranking of overseas universities (Prazeres, 2013, 2017). In contrast, a formal qualification conferred by a world-class university becomes the primary motivation of degree migrants, who usually expect a positive relevance between their overseas degree and their (international) career prospects (King *et al.*, 2010; King & Sondhi, 2018; Zhao & Gao 2021).

Further, the distinct motivations and different length of overseas stay shape the different everyday lives led by credit migrants and degree migrants. From the perspectives of migration motivations and everyday lives, credit migrants share some commonalities with life-style migrants, who seek enjoyable adventure experiences and in-person knowledge of foreign places. Empirical works on exchange students have described how students challenge their comfort zones through attending institutions in a foreign country and actively interact with local people and environments and how the exchange programmes bring them a range of informal capital like overseas social networks and intercultural competence (Beech, 2015; Prazeres, 2017, 2018). However, the everyday lives of degree student migrants involve various plans and preparations for their future career and life, including but not limited to hard work to improve their academic performance, internships and even some preparation work for future re-migration and residence (Gill, 2010; Li & Stodolska, 2006).

Due to the different motivations and everyday life, it is unsurprising to see that credit mobility and degree mobility have different impacts on students' experiences after overseas education. Credit migrants return to the home institution after a short sojourn abroad and continue the rest of the educational programme once their overseas study is completed, while degree students usually face various options of post-study movements and mostly start engaging in the labour market shortly after obtaining their overseas degrees. Thus, degree mobility is more likely to coincide with a life stage change compared to credit migration. The life course perspective might provide some fresh insights into discussions of ISM and wider migration scholarship. Given the potential importance of changing life stages and the significant percentage of degree migrants in the whole group of overseas Chinese students, I primarily focus on degree mobility in this thesis.

The typology of ISM according to the development level of sending and receiving countries, which categorises student migration South-North, North-South and North-North migration, is also of interest to this thesis (King & Raghuram, 2013; King & Sondhi, 2018). This typology highlights the development gap and relative differences in the quality of higher education and

supposes that developed countries could provide more opportunities to learn advanced knowledge in highly-esteemed or world-class universities (Findlay, 2011; Williams & Baláž, 2005). Students from the Global South could gain cultural capital, like professional knowledge, skills and intercultural competence, and symbolic capital, such as formal qualifications conferred by a leading global university, which could greatly benefit their personal career and national development of the homeland if they return home after graduation. In this respect, most South-North student migration could be categorised as a kind of knowledge transfer and career-enhancing investment as discussed earlier (Brooks & Waters, 2011; King & Sondhi, 2018); student migrations between Global North countries occur when students comply with youth mobility culture and family traditions or when they need to find an overseas substitute for local top universities (for example, some British students attend Ivy League universities in the US because they are not admitted into Oxford or Cambridge (Brooks *et al.*, 2012)); student migrants from the Global North to the Global South are usually exchange students searching for adventure experiences or returning to their places of origins for culturally-specific education (Erdal *et al.*, 2016; Prazeres, 2017).

However, categorisation relying on the development gap between sending and receiving countries of student migrants may not match the changing market of global higher education and the recent development of countries in the Global South. Recent years have witnessed an increasing number of student migrants within the Global South, such as African students to China who move relying on either inter-governmental scholarship contracts or on a self-financed basis. The increasing degree mobilities between Asian countries challenges the argument that western countries have an absolute advantage over developing countries in the global higher education market (Collins, 2013; Collins *et al.*, 2017; Liu-Farrer, 2009). Meanwhile, the increasing number of Chinese students who participate in overseas exchange programmes or choose overseas universities only when they cannot receive the offer of local first-class universities display similarities with the movement of some British students to the US as recorded in Brooks *et al.* (2012) and also challenges the taken-for-granted gap between Chinese higher education and western universities (Brooks

& Waters, 2011; J. Hao *et al.*, 2016; X. Hao *et al.*, 2017). Thus, I am not situating returned Chinese students in a core-periphery framework which stereotypically categorises sending and receiving countries respectively as developing and developed countries; instead, I tend to highlight any social, cultural and economic specificities of places which they have experienced alongside migration journey and examine how different places impacts on returned overseas students' everyday life and emotions.

2.2.2 Conceptualising return

Conceptualising "return" is a critical step to establish a more comprehensive understanding of returned student migration. Compared to ISM scholarship which pays considerable attention to students' outward migration and experience overseas, return migration scholarship could inspire the discussion of students' post-study movements and related experiences. A classical argument in the 20th century defined return migration as "the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle" (Gmelch, 1980, p. 136). The simplicity of this definition can be seen as helpful to frame a concept, but the simplicity makes it difficult to understand return migration in recent decades, given that human mobilities across national or regional borders have become increasingly frequent and complicated under changing social, political, economic and cultural contexts (e.g., Ley & Kobayashi, 2005; Sage *et al.*, 2013). Recent researchers have questioned the over-simplified conceptualisation and unpacked the concept from the economic perspective and the socio-political one (Hagan & Wassink, 2020). In this thesis, I criticise and shed light on the conceptualisations of return migration through reviewing related literature.

Neoclassical economics (hereafter NE) and the new economics of labour migration (hereafter NELM) are the two main approaches from the economic perspective as well as the pioneer attempts to theorise return migration. NE is based on the income gaps between home and host countries and migrants' wishes for higher wages in host countries, and thus takes return migration as a failure to obtain the expected benefits after migration (Gmelch, 1980). Notably, there exists an inappropriate binary between home and host countries of

migrants, in which home countries are understood as low-income developing countries while host countries are high-income developed countries. In related empirical research, the binary is geographically embedded, in which the two sides refer to developing Asian/African/Latin American countries and developed western countries (de Haas & Fokkema, 2010; de Haas *et al.*, 2015). NELM takes migrants as individuals who aim to maximise personal or familial benefit through moving to host countries and supposes return migration as a logical outcome of the successful achievement of migration goals in host countries (Cassarino, 2004).

While the two approaches have well explained the economic motivations of return and potential economic impacts on individual returnees and their families, their limits are rather notable. First, return migration is hardly ever a pure success or failure; more likely, people's return may involve some achievement as well as some disappointments, which will vary between migrants (de Haas *et al.*, 2015). It is also possible for migrants to change their ideas about migration throughout their transnational journeys, like mainland Chinese migrants and Hong Kong migrants who have been naturalised in Canada but returned to the sending states later (e.g., Ho, 2011a, 2013a; Waters, 2006). In other words, migrant aspirations are rarely fixed and inflexible (Carling & Collins, 2017; Gomes, 2015; Liao & Asis, 2020). Second, both approaches overemphasise individual economic and financial factors and overlook social networks and the wider social, political and economic contexts returnees are embedded in (Kunuroglu *et al.*, 2016). Third, with the impact of economic theories, the two approaches tend to take people as absolutely rational and overlook the emotional motivations behind various migration decisions (Ho, 2009, 2014). However, there is always an emotional aspect of people's migration decisions and humans often fail to obtain absolutely sufficient required information to make a perfect migration plan. Thus, I argue that the "irrational" or subjective aspects and the agency of returnees deserve more academic attention while theorising return migration.

From the socio-political perspective, the theorisation of return migration is made mostly from the approaches of structure, social networks and

transnationalism. The structural approach has brought the contextual factors of sending countries into the discussion and considered how return migrants influence the development of homelands with the skills and knowledge acquired in host countries. This approach has been criticised by Murphy (2002, cited in Cassarino, 2004) as it overlooks the context of the host countries and making an inappropriate dichotomy which, similar to NE, assumes a developing traditional sending country and a developed modern receiving country. Transnationalist approaches and the social network approach seem to have a lot in common. Both approaches argue that returnees establish and maintain various links between homelands and host countries and transfer tangible and intangible resources through these links to help their return to and settlement in their homeland or further circular migration. Cassarino (2004) advocates the social network theory more than transnationalism, as he thinks that transnationalism overlooks the communal and associative basis of the links between homelands and host countries . I would query Cassarino's conclusions, because I feel that the two approaches just explain the international links from different perspectives. Transnationalism highlights the spatiality of links while social network theory emphasises the selective membership in these links.

Based on social network theory, Cassarino (2004) establishes an inspired analytical framework of return migration (see Fig. 2.1), which argues "The higher the level of preparedness [before return], the greater the ability of returnees to mobilise resources autonomously and the stronger their contribution to development." (p.275). Although this framework has taken return migrants, homelands and host countries into discussion, its understanding of return migration that "a preparation process can be optimally invested in development if it takes place autonomously and if the migration experience is long enough to foster resource mobilisation." (p.276) still has some limits. This framework still hints at a return journey from a developed host country to a developing homeland, which is expected even before emigration. Although the assumption works for some migrant groups, like unskilled workers to Singapore via fixed-term contracts (S. P. Low *et al.*, 2008), it obviously does not suit all kinds of migration and could easily cause problematic deductions. Moreover, it

overlooks how migration regulations of host and home countries influence the transnational resource transfer and the returnee's preparedness.
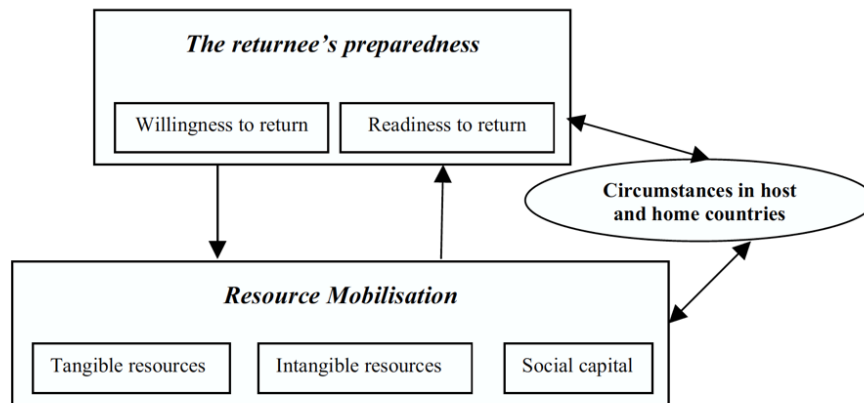
Fig. 2.1 Return Preparation (Cassarino, 2004, P.271)

Compared to the increasing frequency of return migration and a burgeoning body of empirical work, the theorised work regarding return migration remains insufficient (Cassarino, 2004; Xiang, 2014b). In an overarching respect, return migration is mostly theorised on the level of nation-states, particularly in works focusing on the rising phenomena of refugees and forced return migration since the late 2000s. Cassarino (2014) suggests understanding return migration through examining the (de)territorialisation of citizenship. Xiang (2014a, 2014b) challenges the long-standing Euro-centrism in scholarship of return migration through advocating "*Asia as method*" (K.-H. Chen, 2010). In other words, Xiang addresses the specific contexts of return migration occurring between Asian countries. However, given that Asia is not a homogenous region, it might be better to carefully examine the embeddedness of return migration and its specific contexts in empirical studies rather than simply address the region of Asia. In other words, return migration occurs not only between nation-states, but also between locales on various geographical scales. Translocality, which exposes mobilities between nations and embeddedness in locales in the process of return migration, calls for a theorisation of return migration from the perspective of the mobility between nations as well as the embeddedness in locales (Brickell & Datta, 2016).

More specifically, the theorisation of return migration is about answering who returns, why return, when to return and what are the impacts of return (Baas,

2015). While all the above approaches have been devoted to answering these questions, these answers need further consideration. As for who returns, current theorisation tends to understand return migrants in terms of their skill level and the voluntariness of mobility, which is useful but cannot fully disclose the heterogeneity of migrants involved in return migration (Cassarino, 2004, 2014). Returnees are not just some migrants with specific skill levels and maintaining a clear boundary with other (non-)migrant groups in one place. The complex set of socio-cultural characteristics of returnees (e.g., ethnicity, gender, cultural identities, age, social networks, and various subjectivities) likely leaves the question of "who are returnees" contested. Ho has presented research examples regarding the complexity of return migration in two research projects. Her investigation into the citizenship dilemmas of mainland Chinese returnees from Canada blurs the boundary between return and immigration (Ho, 2011a, 2013a, 2014); and her examination on farms which housed diasporic Chinese descendants expelled from Southeast Asia during 1949-1979 explores the interrelationship between forced migration, return migration and ethnically-privileged migration and indicates state power in defining return migrants (Ho, 2013b, 2015). While the definite boundary between returnee and other (im)migrant groups has been problematised through the lens of the spatiality and temporality of citizenship (Ho, 2011b, 2015), the lens of everydayness adopted in this thesis potentially provides fresh insights into the contested identity of returnees.

As for when, much recent literature on (outward) migration has called for more attention to temporality, which refers not only to the contemporary socio-political environment, but also the life cycle of migrants (Baas & Yeoh, 2019; Ho, 2021). Perhaps temporality could make a similar contribution to return migration. Moreover, the question of "when" is not merely about the point of commencing the return journey, but also the point of completing the journey. The former includes a series of decisions, preparation and boarding and the latter still remains vague. Return migration does not stop at the point of landing, but continues as an on-going process. Given the changes in the place of destination during returnees' absence, return migrants may find it difficult to integrate immediately into the destination place when they arrive; instead, they

have to re-learn the place and re-accumulate local social capital through a series of place-embedded practices. With the increasing residence time, returnees may change their everyday life-making practices, gradually integrating themselves into local circumstances and perceive more belonging, sense of familiarity and other emotions towards the destination place. Thus, examining the temporality of return migration could disclose how migrants become materially and emotionally embedded in the socio-cultural environment of the destination place.

Regarding impacts of return migration, existing theoretical and empirical work has contributed significant insights into return intentions and returnees' impacts on homelands (e.g., Dustmann *et al.*, 2011; Bijwaard & Q. Wang, 2016; Klagge, & Klein-Hitpaß, 2010). But the examination of impact purely from an economic and developmental perspective is rather limited. Some empirical work has suggested that the return of migrants may evoke tensions between returnees and local non-migrants. What about the social impact of such tensions? Moreover, Cassarino (2014) has called for attention to be paid to the impact of the return journey on migrants themselves, that is reintegration into the home society, "i.e., the process through which migrants take part in the social economic, cultural and political life of their countries of origin" (p.164). While admitting the post return condition of returnees indeed deserves more academic attention, I would argue that "reintegration" is too simple to conclude the post-return everyday life. Migrants' post-return experiences likely contain employment/work, family, friends, entertainment, residence and a range of social contacts and encounters, which are not only having an impact on their integration, but also influencing the realisation of their pre-return motivations, subjectivities and even the further future life courses. Thus, the impact of the return journey on migrants themselves does not merely refer to integration, but also a wider range of mundane and subjective factors.

In addition to who, when, why and impact, I argue the theorisation of return migration needs to take "where" into consideration. More specifically, where do return migrants leave from and where do they move to? Based on Upadhya's (2013) empirical research, Xiang (2014a) suggests "The word return itself has

now become a vocabulary of the nation: migrants seldom return to their place of birth, and what the word return actually means is the movement from overseas to any part of one's nation of origin." (p.7). While Xiang has noted the complexity of return destination, how places on different geographical scales bring various understanding of return migration is still largely overlooked, which is of particular importance in countries of large geographical area like China. Ho's research on Chinese returnees also noted that migrants may return to more than one site and that their naturalisation in other countries and the territorialisation of citizenship problematise the simple understanding of return destination as a place where they can automatically receive protections and claim rights (Ho, 2016). A related question is whether the place of birth and (any part of) one's nation of origin could be called home. Given that home mostly implies belonging and pleasant emotional ties with specific physical settings and family members, and that home could be at multiple geographical scales (*e.g.*, household, neighbourhoods, towns and even countries) (Blunt & Dowling, 2006), the equivalence between home and the place of origin simplifies the concept of home too much. Also, the simplified claim that return migrants are moving back home inappropriately takes the physical as well as emotional relations between returnees and the destination place as a natural existence, which might not be proved in empirical works (Lee, 2016). Thus, the examination of "where", and relatively the theorisation of "home", could help the interrogation of return migration.

In addition to theoretical debates, a wide range of empirical research also contributes to the existing knowledge of return migration. Migrants might return for the purpose of their personal career (Dustmann *et al.*, 2011; J. Hao *et al.*, 2016; X. Hao *et al.*, 2017), family concerns (Bijwaard & Q. Wang, 2016; Chiang & C.-Y. Huang, 2014; H. Du, 2017; Waters, 2005), emotional attachment to specific places and emotional regimes (de Bree *et al.*, 2010; Ho, 2014; Ralph, 2014; Vlase, 2013), everyday well-being (De Silva, 2017a; J. Hao & Welch, 2012; Sage *et al.*, 2013; C. Wang *et al.*, 2006), political factors and citizenship issues (Andrucki, 2017; Cohen, 2013; Ho, 2011a, 2013a; Xiang, 2011) and integration issues in their current dwelling places (de Bree *et al.*, 2010; de Haas & Fokkema, 2011; Hunter, 2011). Although these return motivations

widely exist in different migrant groups, the practices of motivations varies upon returnees' skill level, ethnicity and wider socio-cultural contexts. Taking political factors as example, skilled migrants often return because of the attraction of talent policies in home state; meanwhile, refugees and unskilled migrants often suffer repatriation and involuntary displacement imposed by the host state.

The research on return intentions also suggests that return is never a purely individual business, but greatly relational, as return always involves family, sending/receiving states and other social contacts in everyday life (including friends, ethnic fellows, local residents and other migrant groups in host country) (Ho, 2013b; Pan, 2010). Particularly focusing on skilled returned migrants, empirical research also further examines migrants' post-return experiences, primarily including their careers in their homeland (Christou, 2006; X. Hao *et al.*, 2017; Kureková & Žilinčíková, 2016), transnational relationships (Hui, 2015; T. Reynolds, 2010; Setrana & Tonah, 2016) and social integration into the return destination (Lados & Hegedűs, 2017; Ley & Kobayashi, 2005; Q. Wang *et al.*, 2015). Recent scholarship has greatly questioned the long-standing argument that skilled returnees from developed countries automatically experience upward career mobility after moving back to their homeland, but suggests that while their skills and other intercultural competence acquired overseas have been valued, it is not always the case that skilled returnees could achieve an expected career promotion due to unsuccessful integration into the local labour market and wider socio-cultural settings. As Ho (2013b) suggested, when returnees move back to their place of birth or an ancestral homeland, their co-ethnic identity often causes "a double-edged positionality as insiders and outsiders simultaneously" (p.601). Return does not represent the completion of a transnational journey; rather, the post-return everyday life likely influences their idea about future mobility (L. S. Liu, 2014; Tse & Waters, 2013).

The above theoretical debates and empirical discussions indicate significant commonalities between skilled returnees and student migrants, including return intentions, post-return/post-study movements and experiences, which is quite understandable given that ISM is often theorised as a sub-group of skilled

migrants. Despite these commonalities, return migration scholarship provides some fresh insights to the interrogation of returned student migration. First, the adulthood of returnees deserves more academic attention. While ISM scholarship has pointed out that there might exist transitions of life stages alongside migration, student migrants are usually still taken as dependent on their families. Once students complete their overseas education and launch their return journey as a potential worker, they cannot be theorised as purely student migrants but present some features of skilled migrants. Then, as many other skilled returnees, they need to support themselves as well as their families in turn. From this perspective, the transition of life stages refers not only to the increasing age, but also a range of responsibilities. Second, relevant to adulthood, returned students might experience various changes of everyday relationships embedded in transnational as well as local settings. Once students are seeking independence from family after graduation, a series of negotiations and even tensions can be expected in their relationship with parents, which likely influence their everyday routines and emotions. However, such changes have remained under-examined. To summarise, ISM scholarship and return migration literature respectively highlight two characteristics of return student migration, that are migrating to gain knowledge overseas and migrating to apply that knowledge in the local labour market.

2.2.3 Post-study movement to homelands

Following the previous two sections of theoretical debates around ISM and return migration, this section primarily provides a critical review of empirical research on international student migrants who have completed their overseas educational programmes and moved back to their homelands. As discussed in section 2.2.2, "homeland" in return migration scholarship remains a vague concept which could influence our interrogation of return migration and home. To avoid repeating related discussions and following the existing literature which mostly take homelands as the destination of students' backward movement, in this thesis I simply take homelands as students' countries of

origins/birth[16]. Geographers tend to embed all kinds of migration and mobilities in specific places and find that places powerfully shape the experiences of migrants due to different power topographies, social networks, cultural environments and the interactions between humans and places (Brown & Gilmartin, 2020). To concentrate on topics which are closely relevant to this thesis, I primarily review empirical research within the Asian, particularly Chinese, contexts.

Return motivation is a recurring theme in empirical works on returned students (Brown & Gilmartin, 2020). Asian countries mostly act as student-sending countries on the periphery of the global higher education market (Pan, 2010). Despite recent literature which suggests that increasing ISM within Asia has challenged the core-periphery framework and provides a flexible understanding of the higher education market (Igarashi & Saito, 2014; Pan, 2010, 2011; Yang, 2020), Asian students have mostly been in degree mobilities involving migration to western countries to accumulate necessary human capital for future careers (King & Sondhi, 2018). Their return motivations are in line with the motivations of returned skilled migrants to a large extent and are mostly career-directed (H. Du, 2017; R. Wang, 2012; Q. Wu, 2014). Specific motivations include better career opportunities in the homelands, the well-being of persons/families, (problematic) social integration in host countries, patriotism and related immigration regulations.

While return student migration is widely directed by pull and push forces from the perspectives of individuals, families and nations (Pan, 2010), some features of students' return motivations deserve highlighting within an Asian, particularly Chinese, context. First, family plays a significant role in planning and supporting students' outward migration and return for the sake of the whole family. Ong (1999) recorded that some upper-middle-class Hong Kong (HK) families sent their children to western countries for education in the early 1990s,

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[16] As many scholars have suggested, country of origins and country of birth are not always the same given that migrants may be born in one country but grow up in another (for example, see the informants in Chiang (2011)). In this section, I generally take either country of origins or country of birth as the destination of return migration and do not distinguish between the two concepts.

before the government of the People's Republic of China exercised sovereignty in HK in 1997, while at least one parent worked in HK to financially support the family. Such a plan aimed to maintain the family's current economic condition and achieve the future betterment of the family; in particular socio-economic contexts, in this case the return of HK from the UK to China, the plan may help the family to avoid potential political risks. Chiang and C.-Y. Huang (2014) and Chiang and Liao (2005) have similar findings in the group of outward Taiwanese students whose overseas education could remit extra overseas social networks and other transnational capitals to their families.

Second, the demographic policies and Chinese cultures simultaneously shape Chinese students' outward and inward migration. Since the 2000s, children born under the one-child policy have reached university age having unsurprisingly received enormous attention, care and love from their parents, grandparents and other senior family members (C. Wu & Wilkes, 2017). Within this social context and the impact of Chinese culture with a particular emphasis on education, many Chinese families have deployed "children-centred strategy" when sending their children overseas for education despite the huge investment of family money, social networks and time (Xiang & Shen, 2009). W. Liu (2016) argues that young family members' overseas education is not only the mission of the core family, but "a priority for the whole extended family […] with the commitment of resources from the whole family" (p.56). Chinese culture also emphasises children's responsibility for their aged parents, that is filial duty. Filial duty has acted as an important force encouraging students to return (Lin, 2012; Martin, 2014).

Third, the historical images of overseas returned students in the 20th century, who had significantly contributed to the independence and development of China and are supposed as elites, talents and even national heroes, stimulate optimistic expectations towards overseas education and post-study careers. Such positive imaginaries are deeply rooted in Chinese history and have become a specific factor to encourage students' outward and return migration (Pan, 2011; R. Wang, 2012; Xiang, 2011). This migration and return motivation also

suggest that Chinese student migration is embedded in the wider social, political and economic contexts of China in a specific period.

Successful transnational capital transfer is the primary approach to realise the personal career achievements and familial well-being which were expected before overseas study. An ideal process of transnational capital transfer regarding ISM should start with the family's investment of social (*e.g.*, potential networks with referees, overseas educational institutions and other useful contacts) and financial (*e.g.*, tuition fee and overseas living expenses) capital into children's overseas education; then the student acquired social (*e.g.*, overseas social networks), cultural (*e.g.*, foreign language competence, intercultural understanding, professional knowledge) and symbolic (*e.g.*, the identity as a graduate from a world-class university) capital through completing an overseas degrees; finally via taking up a decent job position in their homeland, students exchange their overseas capital for local social (*e.g.*, extended social networks compared to pre-migration), economic (*e.g.*, high salary) and symbolic (*e.g.*, talent) capital which benefit their families as well as themselves (Igarashi & Saito, 2014; Pan, 2010; Waters, 2006, 2012; Waters & Leung, 2012). The ideal process usually implies that student migrants mostly come from middle class families or above and the students' overseas education and post-study career serve the reproduction of the family's social class. However, the ideal process, no matter whether or not it is successful, may not be applicable for all Chinese student migrants, as there are a number of scholarship holders who receive financial support from state, educational institutions and other organisations, as well as an increasing number of students who move overseas relying on short-term exchange programmes. In other words, the process of capital transfer varies upon the specific experiences of student migrants.

A key issue lying at the centre of transnational capital transfer is how overseas experience is valued by different stakeholders in the homeland, including the government, employers and other social groups in wider society. In the context of China, with the influence of history regarding overseas returned students, the government generally regards overseas returned students as valuable human

resources in national development, reflected in a series of talent policies, official discourses and even some political rites. Overseas returned students have indeed played an important role in terms of attracting foreign investment and promoting the local development of science and technology (Sun, 2013; R. Wang, 2012; Xiang, 2011). While the Chinese government has always held a positive opinion towards overseas returned students, the specific terms of talent policies have been edited to meet the demands of national development in different periods. In recent years, the state values more highly-skilled returnees with adequate work experience, rather than middling returnees including fresh graduates from overseas universities (Ho & Ley, 2014); also, the state has granted different preferential treatments to returned students according to their educational background and age group (Zweig, 2006; Zweig & H. Wang, 2013). In other words, the government has started to value overseas returned students in a more specific way, and differentiated between returned students. Thus, the symbolic value granted by the state to fresh graduates from overseas universities has been diminished. More analysis of the latest Chinese talent policies, on which there has not been much published academic work, will be made in the methodology chapter, as it is a critical part of the research context.

In the local labour market, the employability of overseas returned students is usually assessed from institutional as well as non-institutional perspectives. From the institutional perspective, returned students would be valued if their degree is conferred by a reputed university with high global rankings in an English-speaking developed country which takes an advantageous position in the global higher education market (J. Hao & Welch, 2012; J. Hao *et al.*, 2016; X. Hao *et al.*, 2017). A decent educational background not only implies that students have acquired professional knowledge, technology and skills at the cutting edge, which still remain scarce in students' homeland, but also hints at that students possess social networks with overseas elites, such as alumni networks and academic networks (Brooks & Waters, 2011). From the non-institutional perspective, decent qualifications, language competence, intercultural knowledge and other soft competences obtained during overseas study constitute an important part of returned students' competition in the local labour market (Baláž & Williams, 2004; Holton & Riley, 2014).

As mentioned above, in China overseas returned students have long been seen in a positive light. An increasing body of literature has questioned the purely positive image and even suggested a stigmatisation of overseas returned students in wider society (Y. Huang & Kuah-Pearce, 2015). The stigmatisation is mostly due to unsuccessful capital transfer after they move back to China, in which returned students are viewed as wasters of familial wealth and unrealistic job applicants without accurate acknowledgement of personal competences. The general opinions towards overseas returned students in wider society, although possibly not directly influencing their post-study career, likely influences their further adaptation into local society. It also resonates with the argument that post-study capital transfer does not occur automatically and naturally, but is an effort-consuming process embedded in specific socio-cultural and geographical contexts (Collins *et al.*, 2017; Pan, 2010).

As Collins *et al.* (2017) argue, the discussion about post-study experiences of returned student migrants remains limited in terms of quantity as well as research scope. First, existing literature has paid most attention to topics related to post-study employment, which obviously is not all of the post-study experiences. In addition to work, there are multiple mundane and emotional components of everyday lived experiences. The insights into everydayness of returned students could shed light on future exploration of the embeddedness of returned student migration.

Second, the examination of (ethnic) Chinese student migrants should take the social, cultural and temporal context of China into consideration. Ong (1999), Chiang and Liao (2005) have set brilliant examples of combining the viewpoint of Chinese culture and transnationalism theories, but their empirical data in those studies were collected over fifteen years ago. More recent literature usually adopts a westernised analysis framework while overlooking the important influence of Chinese culture. For example, many scholars have noted how overseas education and related capital transfer are planned by and eventually benefit students' families, but cease to consider the cultural value of family/parents/children in Chinese people's mind. Without the interrogation of

Chinese culture, it might lead to a biased understanding of various migration decisions made by Chinese families. Regarding broader debates around return, the attention to specific cultural contexts could help researchers to understand the distinct practices and subjectivities between migrant groups and further benefit the exploration of the embeddedness and relationality of return migration.

Third, even within the context of mainland China, there is an increasing diversity of (returned) student migrants in recent years in terms of their social strata, age group, education background and other lived experiences, which is likely to have an impact on their post-study journey. Existing research generally supposes students as dependent children from well-off families, which, although it is true in most cases of overseas Chinese students, overlooks the existence of scholarship holders who possibly come from families without significant wealth, as well as MBA students who have accumulated social and financial capital through years of employment to independently support their own overseas education.

2.3 Everyday geographies in mobility

The question which should come first and foremost in the section is how the "everyday" should be understood. The "everyday" has been adopted as either a research lens or research topic in a wide range of geographical work. With the nature of being ordinary, the everyday involves a wide range of repetitive, banal, mundane and seemingly unremarkable people, (inter)actions, events and objects as well as a diversity of personal sensory feelings, perceptions and other subjectivities (Ho & Hatfield, 2011; Rigg, 2007). To be noted, the scope of everydayness goes beyond a representational analytical framework and takes both materialities and immaterialities (like affects and emotions) into examination (Horton & Kraftl, 2013). Highmore (2010) remarks on the everyday, "everything can become everyday, everything can become ordinary: it is our greatest blessing, our most human accomplishment, our greatest handicap, our most despicable complacency" (p.1).

Everyday life " reveals the extraordinary in the ordinary" (Lefebvre, 1987, p. 9) and is deeply rooted in and shaped by wider socio-political settings of a specific place (Highmore, 2002, 2010; Horton & Kraftl, 2013). People's everyday life could hint at the social inclusion, exclusion and integration of certain individuals or groups in one place and further indicate some stronger, fiercer emotions and perceptions towards the place where their everyday life unfolds (Ahmed, 2004; Bell, 2016).

In this section, I first review how everyday life has been taken as an effective research lens in transnationalism scholarship; following that, I start the review of empirical work from studies on everyday material experiences; then I interrogate how emotions, senses and other subjectivities in everyday circumstances are examined and how various subjectivities, particularly emotion, have been theorised; last but not least, I interrogate how the perspective of everyday life could benefit the discussion of return migration.

2.3.1 Transnational everyday life

The embeddedness of everyday life is not restricted in a single place; instead, everyday life could be grounded in a rather macroscopic social, political and economic circumstance across places or even globally (Lefebvre, 1987; Appadurai, 2000). Everyday life, which seems to be local and embedded in a specific place, could offer a micro explanation of global mechanisms like transnational migration.

Transnational migrants' everyday experiences are grounded in the place where they are currently living and, meanwhile, have been inevitably influenced by the features of different places where they have lived or even just imagined under the increasing impact of public media (Burkitt, 2004; Ley, 2004). In other words, transnational everyday experiences are manifest in multiple places in different nations. The insights into everyday lived experiences of migrants enable researchers to break the global-local dichotomy in earlier literature and bridge transnational spaces and local spaces (Ley, 2004). It is unsurprising to see that the everyday has been increasingly employed as a useful research lens

to shed light on debates around transnationalism (Conradson & Latham, 2005). Everyday life exposes a bottom-up, actor-centred perspective of transnationalism, which could provide a detailed understanding of individual encounters as well as the more general, diverse transnational processes (Boccagni, 2012). As Ho and Hatfield (2011) argue, "claiming that analysing the everyday valorises local contexts inadvertently suggests the privileging of the global when in fact the 'local' may be situated elsewhere." (p.708)

There are a series of seeming paradoxes, like *local* and *global* discussed in the last section, which exist in transnational everyday life. Transnational everyday life involves many *governmental* and *non-governmental* issues (Staeheli *et al.*, 2012). To complete their movements across national borders and (temporary) settlement in host places, migrants frequently and repeatedly deal with a range of governmental departments regarding border controls and immigration regulations, including but not limited within issues of passports and visas, in everyday life (King, 2012). For particular groups of migrants such as refugees, the host state imposes further regulations on their everyday activities, such as limiting their rights of work, restricting their everyday activities within a specific district and denying the possibility of long-term settlement (Conlon, 2011; Dudley, 2011). From this perspective, within a transnational context, ordinary experiences can witness notable governmental influences. The paradoxes in everyday life indicate transnational migration as a process of complexity.

Moreover, the everyday reminds scholars that migrants' transnational experiences include not only the frequent fluid movements between places but also temporary or permanent stable settlement in one place (Ley, 2004; Erdal & Ezzati, 2015). Stable periods between migration trips are as important as movement itself. First, it is everyday life in one place that illustrates how transnational migration is emplaced and embedded in specific locales. As Rigg (2007) argues,

> "The importance of the everyday and of grounded, micro-level perspectives is that it is only in these ways that we can shed light on many of the critically important 'why' questions. […] [T]he social,

environmental, political and economic micro-processes and micro-dynamics – the micro-geographies – often provide not just a more finely detailed understanding of [global] change, but *a different view.*" (p.8, italics in the original).

From the grounded perspective, everyday life indicates the local-local connections existing in transnational movements and the emplacement of migrant experiences. In other words, everyday life provides translocal insights into unpacking the meaning of transnationalism (Conradson & McKay, 2007; Datta & Katherine, 2016; Robertson, 2018).

Second, the temporary stable periods provide opportunities for migrants to examine their pre-migration imaginaries, gain in-person knowledge of the host place and further reflect on their migration and self-identities. As a result, migrants may change their initial aspiration for migration, (re-)perceive their emotions and senses of belonging/identity and further determine the next plan of migration (Boccagni, 2012; Walsh, 2007). In this light, the everyday becomes a toolkit of researchers to unpack various dynamic processes of decisions, perceptions and actions during transnational migration.

The everyday presents transnational migration as a dynamic process full of complexity and diversity. Transnational everyday life, on the one hand, still maintains the emplaced mundanity in its nature; on the other hand, its embeddedness in multiple places across the global instead of one single place provides a grounded understanding of various transnational process (Kalekin-Fishman & Low, 2010). In addition to theoretical debates, scholars have conducted empirical studies on migrants' everyday life from the perspective of materialities and subjectivities, which will be reviewed in the next two sections.

2.3.2 Everyday materiality

Everyday life is constituted by a range of materialities. Two phrases, material and embodiment, could help to illustrate the concept of materiality. Material refers to "tangible, sensate matter with distinct physical form, shape and size at any one temporal moment" (Tay, 2009, p. 505). Some researchers would

employ "object" and "material" interchangeably, both of which acknowledge that matter has a solid, specific physical appearance. Through employing the concept of embodiment, researchers interrogate how objects, matters and other material processes are situated in particular spatial and temporal contexts and how bodily practices are affected by and further cultivate various meanings, imaginaries and other immaterialities (Anderson & Wylie, 2009). Generally speaking, materiality refers to a range of regularly repeated, ordinary, emplaced objects and practices; meanwhile, materiality emphasises the engagement with a variety of sensory and embodied relationships, such as the power relations and affects (Ho & Hatfield, 2011; Jackson, 2000; Law & Mol, 1995).

The studies on meaningful objects constitute a notable cluster in research on migrant materialities (Ho & Hatfield, 2011). Through interviews and participant observation, researchers pay attention to objects identified as meaningful, why they are meaningful and how migrants use(d) or employ(ed) the objects in their past/present everyday life (Anderson & Tolia-Kelly, 2004; Haldrup, 2017; Walsh, 2018). A considerable amount of literature has discussed objects as decorations in domestic or other personal spaces which help to make migrants' own place in a host location (e.g., Boccagni, 2014; Walsh, 2011; B. Wang & J. Chen, 2020). Migrants, particularly ethnic minority ones with risks of disempowerment, employ decorations from their hometown or homeland to claim their cultural identities, which sometimes accompany resistance to social exclusion (Garvey, 2005; Peled, 2017). In this respect, the decorative as material culture becomes a representation of the displacement process experienced by migrants. The ethnically-coded domestic objects also display a process of re-emplacement in host society. Tolia-Kelly (2004) examines how South Asian women incorporate the materials of visual cultures as a representation of their pre-migration lived experiences to make their home space in Britain and argues that the visual cultures regarding the past lived landscapes help to configure their new identity and belonging in post-migration experiences.

While preparing their migration journey, migrants intend to take with them objects which are necessary to maintain their existing everyday habits in the

destination, like tennis racquets brought by Hong Kong migrants to Canada in Hui's (2015) record and the Kindle in Doody's (2020) research on New Zealand migrants' daily commute in London. However, the successful insistence of everyday habits does not rely purely on the accessibility of specific objects, but the wider social circumstances and urban infrastructures. In both Hui's and Doody's research, migrants have to change their everyday habits and adapt themselves to new rhythms in new places. To be noted, both the presence and absence of everyday objects become meaningful. In Conlon's (2011) interviews with refugee women in Ireland, she finds that the loss of possessions during movement keeps reminding these refugee women of the social differences between Ireland and their homeland and forces them to emplace themselves in local society, which was a rather sorrowful process for many interviewees in this research.

While many meaningful objects are in a solid stable physical form and have accompanied migrants alongside their migration, researchers have included some consumables into discussion, particularly food, which cannot be kept for long but related consumption practices are repeated in their everyday life. The consumables have been not only objects, but also a part of embodied practices as everyday habits (Barnett *et al.*, 2005; Bhandari & F. J. Smith, 2000; Collins, 2008). In studies of everyday food/dietary practices, researchers have taken not only food itself into discussion, but also practices like purchasing ingredients in local markets, the cooking process and even the planting of crops, which are deeply rooted in the social, economic and even physical environment in host places. For example, Karenni migrants who moved to the Thai-Burma border area are forced to change daily eating practices due to the greater availability of local food and limited access to home tastes; but given the suitable natural environment, they started to change the farm landscape and produce their own food (Dudley, 2011).

In terms of embodied practices, home-making practices have received the most academic attention in studies on migrant materialities, which is partially due to the physical, cultural as well as sensory nature of home (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Kochan, 2016). Through home-visit observation, interviews and other research

methods, researchers aim to figure out how migration experiences and transnational identities are reflected in the physical space of home and how migrants create their own place in the domestic sphere to show their resistance, belonging or other emotions to the lived places (Bilecen, 2017; Boccagni, 2014; Walsh, 2011). Some researchers suggest home-making practices as a series of embodied practices to create a homely atmosphere in their current residence, instead of simply domestic decoration practices. Thus, the selection of residence type/buildings, dietary practices and familial events have been regarded as a part of everyday life (Bilecen, 2017; Dudley, 2011; Walsh, 2018). It is obvious that migrants would employ a range of everyday objects, such as decorative objects and food, to complete their home-making practices. In this regard, home-making discloses the great pertinence between everyday objects and embodied practices. Recent scholarship suggests that everyday home-making is not restricted to domestic spaces, but can also be found in local neighbourhoods or shopping in ethnic corner shops (Everts, 2010) and engaging in the usage and maintenance of public green spaces (Neal et al,, 2015). These home-making practices beyond households indicate that home-making is not simply to "replicate" their past home, but involve attempts to integrate into local society and create a "new" home with aspects of both past and current living places.

In addition to home-making practices, migrants might take some regular, ordinary actions to gain better knowledge of their host places, establish local networks and promote local integration. These actions include frequent and friendly communication with local residents and other migrants and some compulsory practices (like attending class and participating campus events for student migrants) (Holton, 2017; Holton & Riley, 2014; Prazeres, 2017, 2018). Some migrants who are placed at a disadvantaged position in a host society have engaged in everyday activism to claim their rights, identities and make demands for their everyday well-being (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010; Goldstein, 2017).

There are three points to highlight regarding everyday materialities. First, the meaning of everyday materialities is individual-specific and varies upon different inter-personal/human-place relationships. The affective aspects of materialities depend on personal social networks and other individualised

variables in everyday life. While migrants make their everyday home or work spaces in places of destination, they not only employ objects as a representation of their cultural identities, but also use objects which reflect their past memories involving family, friends and places (T. Liu & Lin, 2017; Prazeres, 2018; Walsh, 2018). For people who are outside these familial or social networks, these objects could be see purely as stuff or clutter.

Second, the meaning of materiality is embedded in specific socio-cultural contexts; consequently, once materialities are emplaced or displaced alongside people's movements, the affective and immaterial meaning likely changes as well. An outstanding example is objects as material culture, which represent migrants' cultural and other lived contexts and related identities. Such material culture may be rather usual and less affective in its (and also migrants') home place, but once it has been displaced to an unfamiliar host place alongside the movement of migrants, migrants would employ them to recall past memories, claim their social/ethnic/cultural identities and their resistance or belonging to host places (*e.g.*, Bilecen, 2017; Boccagni, 2014; Brightwell, 2012; Walsh, 2011).

Third, everyday materialities should also be situated in a specific time, which could be particular years, periods in migration journeys and stages in one's life course (Baas & Yeoh, 2019; C. Wang, 2016). The relations between materialities and temporality has not attracted much academic attention until the most recent five years, although it has always existed in migration history. Researchers have examined how materialities create different affects in different stages of people's migration (X. Cai & Su, 2020; Doody, 2020; Pascucci, 2016; B. Wang & Collins, 2020) and how the age group impacts people's usage and attitudes towards specific materialities (King *et al.*, 2020; Walsh, 2018). As the relation between materialities and temporality is always examined under specific socio-cultural contexts, there are no unanimous concluding remarks. The only consensus is that the temporal context could be as critical as other social, cultural and spatial contexts.

2.3.3 Everyday subjectivities

Existing theoretical debates and empirical research on the everyday have recognised the importance of subjectivities (Appadurai, 2000; Rigg, 2007). While handling various everyday material issues, people cultivate a series of subjective responses to their material encounters relying on their existing lived experiences and knowledge; moreover, these subjective responses possibly motivate further actions and embodied practices in the material world (Svašek, 2010). In transnationalism scholarship, as Walsh (2012) suggests, "attention to the emotions framing such interactions [between migrant and non-migrant groups], in both geographical and temporal terms, can help us to better understand migrant encounters." (p.43) In this section, I first scrutinise how existing geographical scholarship understands subjectivities and key emotional concepts (namely affect and emotion); then, I review how everyday geographies has examined subjectivities and interrogate potential research gaps.

The concept of "subjectivities" emphasises being personal and being spiritual and sometimes it is simply understood as selfhood or sense of self situated in places with specific socio-cultural circumstances and social relationships (Conradson & McKay, 2007). In empirical works, the word of "subjectivities" is often used as an umbrella term containing a wide range of emotional concepts, such as feelings, affects, senses and emotions, rather than a specific emotional concept (for example, Mueller, 2015; B. Wang & J. Chen, 2020). Admittedly, all these emotional terms display people's inner experiences regarding material encounters and circumstances and are presented through a series of embodied practices (Christou, 2011; Conradson & McKay, 2007; Thrift, 2004). Researchers have suggested notable differences between these emotional terms, particularly between affect and emotion which are the two most crucial concepts in emotional geographies.

Affect indicates "those more immediate embodied engagements with the world beyond language" (Smith *et al.*, p.12). In other words, the term "affect" emphasises the influencing process of materialities on people's inner world, which may not be fully indicated in a representational way (Anderson & Harrison, 2006; Pile, 2010; Thrift, 2004). Although emotions and feelings are

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often discussed through the same set of nouns or adjectives (*e.g.,* happiness/happy, sadness/sad), emotions are involved with more cognitions and have greater relevance with specific cultures, socio-economy, social relations and politics (Ahmed, 2004; Bondi, 2005; Sharp, 2009; J. M. Smith, 2009). While affect and emotion are often interchangeably used in geographical scholarship (*e.g.,* Bondi, 2005; Glaveanu & Womersley, 2021), the difference between the two concepts is notable. Affect is pre-cognitive while emotion is produced from the cognition and greatly intertwines with social relations (Ho, 2009, 2014). In Pile's (2010) words, "affect is temporally prior to the representational translation of an affect into a knowable emotion and spatially located below cognition and consciousness and beyond reflectivity and humanness" (p.8).

Despite the conceptualisation of different emotional terms, existing scholarship on the everyday has not fully recognised these theoretical distinctions and what researchers have actually discussed could be any of the emotional terms. Thus, in the following review of empirical works, I still employ subjectivities as an umbrella term. But notably, in the whole thesis, I focus on emotion and conceptualise it as a cognitive derivative of feelings, which "are produced in and circulated between others and ourselves as actions and practices" (Zembylas, 2012, p.167). In other words, compared to affects, studying emotions could more efficiently interrogate how various social relations are circulated and further mediate transnational movement in this research. Although emotions are mostly performed and expressed on the individual level, the relationality of emotions helps to embed individual migration experiences into the wider migration regimes (Ho, 2014).

Migrants' everyday subjectivities suggest their self-identities and emotional attachments towards places in their transnational journey. Ethnic minority migrants often employ ethnicity-specific decorations in their personal spaces to claim their sense of cultural identity and belonging to their places of origins; on some occasions, the expression of belonging accompanies anger and resistance towards unpleasant encounters in a host society (Garvey, 2005; Peled, 2017). Embodied practices like celebrating festivals, shopping for culturally-specific

groceries and everyday activist actions also deliver migrants' subjectivities towards places of origins and destinations in the similar way as ethnically-coded objects do (Bilecen, 2017; Boccagni, 2014; Walsh, 2011). To be noted, the employment of meaningful objects and embodied practices sometimes indicates migrants' cosmopolitan identities and emotional embrace of host societies and cultures (Collins, 2008; B. Wang & Collins, 2016).

Beyond subjectivities regarding the politics of identity, migrants' subjectivities, which are expressed through a range of emotionally-meaningful objects and embodied practices, actively engage into the place-making process during their transnational journeys (T. Liu & Lin, 2017; Walsh, 2018). Migrants' emotions towards transnational experiences, such as anxiety, excitement and curiosity in a strange place and growing feelings of belonging due to increasing participation in local issues, help to create a familiar, pleasant atmosphere derived from past sweet memories, present lived experiences and future aspiration which are embedded in places of origins, currently lived place as well as other places where they have lived (Prazeres, 2018).

The examination of migrants' subjectivities offers an emotional approach to unpack transnational experiences, particularly transnational relationships (Hall, 2019; Ho, 2014). In terms of the employment of everyday objects, migrants often take their family photos throughout their migration journey, to express their love for family members and create a homely atmosphere in host places (Baldassar, 2008; X. Cai & Su, 2020; Klingorová & Gökarıksel, 2019). Migrants also undertake a diversity of material practices to fulfil their responsibilities and obligations and meanwhile express their care, love and perhaps guilt towards their left-behind family members (Vermot, 2015). But these practices vary between migrant groups of distinct social backgrounds. Well-off migrants, who could be highly-skilled migrants, investment migrants and life-style migrants, likely use daily phones, emails, frequent return visits and the long-distanced employment of professional care workers for left-behind parents and children (De Silva, 2017b; T. Reynolds, 2011); while unskilled workers and refugees have to reduce the frequency of calling left-behind family and the number of return trips due to the concerns of expensive communication

costs and express their love and guilt through more remittances (Baldassar, 2015). Given that transnational migration potentially brings changes and uncertainty to everyday lives, the changes in material life may lead migrants to alter their emotions and feelings regarding intimate relationships (Walsh, 2007, 2009). However, it is hard to summarise the shift of migrants' subjectivities as it relies on often individualised experiences with great diversity.

Beyond intimate relationships, the relations with local residents in host places also evoke migrants' subjectivities, which are relevant to but not fully determined by their emotions towards places where social relations are rooted. Researchers have found that even if migrants feel a rather weak belonging to a host place, they might establish a friendly relationship with individual local residents and hold a range of positive opinions towards these local contacts, which could be expressed by embodied practices like frequently close, friendly communications and pleasant sharing of public spaces (Neal *et al.*, 2015; Prazeres, 2018).

Given the wide acknowledgement of the immaterial aspect of materialities and the subjectivities derived from everyday life, geographical scholarship has suggested the insight of subjectivities/emotions as an efficient approach to promote transnationalism research. Specifically, migrants' emotional experiences suggested how they perceive and practise (everyday) lived encounters and transnational relationships and how they construct their own places in transnational journeys. However, the discussion regarding subjectivities deserves further academic exploration. First, although there has been a substantive body of empirical research on everyday material experiences and social relationships in the scholarship of transnational migrants, knowledge of the migrants' everyday emotional worlds has remained less carefully explored. Researchers usually focus on limited aspects of everyday subjectivities or even specific emotions derived from particular material encounters. This approach risks causing fragmented understanding of inner worlds which are unified and entail entanglements of various emotions. Specific subjectivity is likely evoked by a series of material experiences. For example, migrants are likely to develop their sense of place on the basis of their material

encounters in work, shopping, dietary practices and daily communication with local residents and other migrants. Similarly, specific encounters, like everyday experiences of work, may stimulate a mix of emotions. Emotions and emotional circulations in everyday lived experiences deserve a more holistic understanding.

Second, while existing scholarship has examined how subjectivities are evoked from lived experiences, there is less investigation into how established subjectivities have an impact on migrants' everyday embodied practices. For example, how do specific emotions which migrants perceived from everyday work places influence their work performance and relevant long-term career decisions? The wider transnationalism scholarship has suggested the notable influence of subjectivities on the migration journey, such as migration decisions encouraged by patriotism and aspiration for brighter personal development (Collins, 2017; Kenway & Fahey, 2011). The everyday context might witness a similar mutual interaction between materiality and subjectivities.

2.3.4 Bringing return migration into the everyday

The review of both return migration scholarship and literature on the everyday suggests that post-return everyday experience has received limited academic attention and also indicates the potential importance of everyday life to further research on return migration. Return migration involves the shifts of living places (spatially) as well as a link between the past and the present (temporally). Through incorporating the two bodies of scholarship, I further unpack how the everyday lens could contribute to a more comprehensive knowledge of return migration, particularly return student migration which is the primary focus in this thesis, from both the spatial and temporal perspectives.

From a spatial perspective, as the link between the local and the global, the lens of everyday life could unfold how post-return everyday life is shaped by a series of places involved in the process of their migration journey. The general scholarship of transnationalism has suggested that migrants' everyday life would be influenced by a range of places experienced or even imagined during

their transnational journey. Such influence is performed and embodied in various everyday practices like food consumption and home-making (*e.g.*, X. Cai & Su, 2020; Duruz, 2006). While outward migrants could transplant their homeland practices in the host places, it is possible that returnees maintain some mundane habits established overseas after moving back to their homeland. Thus, everyday life could reveal how returnees incorporate their transnational experience into localised socio-cultural circumstances and highlight the links between places in return migration. In a theoretical sense, the everyday could inspire the conceptualisation of return migration via taking both transnationality and translocality into consideration.

From a temporal perspective, given that I have indicated the insufficient attention to the life course of returnees as a gap in return migration scholarship, the everyday could help in examining the transition of life stages experienced by returnees. While student migrants' post-return everyday life has not been widely discussed, the examination of retired returnees' everyday life has suggested how the shift of life stages is embodied in everyday practices including home-making, regular trips between host places and homeland and embodied practices during seasonal lifestyle migration (*e.g.*, J. Chen & Bao, 2020; Hunter, 2011; King *et al.*, 2020; Walsh, 2018). In the cases of retired returnees, everyday life relates the transition of life stages to different daily routines (such as leaving formal employment and increasing leisure activities), shifting social networks, changes of responsibilities and obligations to family and relevant changes of emotions. Given that returned student migrants also experience significant transition of life stages, the research on retired returnees' everyday life sets an inspired example for further interrogation on returned student migrants, in which the lens of the everyday provides a detailed understanding of specific life stages and the whole life course of returnees.

In addition to the inspiration from spatial and temporal perspectives, the lens of everyday life may help researchers to rethink the conceptualisation of return migration. On the one hand, everyday life could highlight specificities of a certain group of returnees, like retired return migration in Walsh (2018) and overseas returned students to China in this thesis. On the other hand, as most

scholarship on return migration tends to highlight return migration as a typical form of migration, the ordinary, mundane life embedded in a specific place may suggest more commonalities than differences between migrants, non-migrants and returnees. Simply put, different social groups living in the same place likely share public spaces to relax, shop, eat, commute and work. Although it is admitted that borders between social groups widely exist, these social borders may not be that firm and clear, but often flexible and blurring on many occasions of everyday life (Chang & Kim, 2016; Robertson, 2014). Thus, the lens of everyday life not only helps researchers to develop a deeper understanding of what is return migration, but also motivates researchers to further reflect on how necessary and useful the sub-categorisations of transnational migration are.

2.4 Conceptual framework

In the previous sections, I have reviewed the literature on return migration and everyday life and criticised the insufficient engagement of everyday studies in the scholarship of return migration. This thesis seeks to address the research gap regarding the insufficient engagement between return migration and everyday experiences through focusing on overseas returned students to China and the empirical discussion eventually aims to contribute to the wider literature on transnational migration. As I proposed in the introductory chapter, the research aim of this thesis is to provide fresh insight into the conceptualisation of return migration and further think about the usefulness of various sub-categorisation of transnational migration in theoretical debates and empirical research. Following this, I ask research questions about the experiences, including material practices and emotions, constituting overseas returned students' everyday life after moving to Shanghai and how their everyday life is embedded in specific spatial-temporal contexts and life stages. In this section, I develop a conceptual framework to illustrate how the research aim and research questions will be handled.

The conceptual framework contains an empirical section and a theoretical section. Notably, there is not an explicit split, but a logical sequence between

the two sections, as the theoretical section will be based on the empirical section. The empirical section helps directly process empirical data collected from fieldwork, unpacking my participants' everyday lives to address the three research questions I proposed in the previous section; while the theoretical section aims to take a further step beyond the empirical findings towards theoretical contributions and interrogates how the overarching research objective could be achieved.

In the empirical section, I am adopting three research lenses of materiality, relationality and temporality to unpack the everyday lives and emotions of overseas returned students in China. Given its ordinary, mundane nature, everyday life involves a range of materialities as I have discussed in section 2.3.2. Thus, it is impossible and unwise to exclude materialities from empirical discussion in this thesis. Inspired by existing literature, I use materialities to encompass objects, embodied practices, tangible migration infrastructures, urban infrastructures and other material settings in Shanghai. Through employing materialities as a lens, I explore what actually happened in my participants' everyday life during their participation in the research and how their everyday life is rooted in the physical space(s) of Shanghai. Moreover, the affects of materialities offer me an opportunity to observe the evocation and performance of emotions in overseas returned students' daily life.

The lens of relationality is necessary for this thesis because of the prevalence of social relations in everyday life and the relational aspect of emotion. As suggested by literature I reviewed above, social relationships in post-return everyday life include but are not limited to friendship, familial relationships, romantic partnerships, relationships with senior/peer/junior colleagues in/beyond workplaces, relationships with other returnees/migrants/local residents, and relationships between (non)governmental organisations. Adopting relationality as one research lens enables me to identify how my participants' material and emotional experiences are shaped by personal social relationships, familial social networks and interactions with various social contacts. Also, people may project the emotions they perceive in a relationship onto the place where the relationship takes place. If migrants have positive

relationships in one place, they more easily develop pleasant emotions towards the place. In general, the observation of my participants' everyday relationships could help me to understand how they feel about Shanghai and even the wider transnational experience.

The importance of temporality has been increasingly emphasised in recent transnationalism scholarship. Considering arguments in existing transnationalism literature regarding temporality and the specificity of the researched group in this thesis, temporality has two layers of meaning - the temporal context in which my empirical data is situated and the life stage(s) which my participants were experiencing during participation. Specifically speaking, the former refers to the social, cultural, political circumstances in Shanghai during my fieldwork period, which could shape my participants' everyday life as migrants as well as the lives of local residents in Shanghai; the latter place my participants at specific points/periods in their whole life course, which imply different responsibilities, obligations and life objectives. I am not treating temporality as a kind of background information of my analysis or a subordinate position to the spatial; instead, temporality actively engages into shaping my participants' everyday lived experiences and emotions (Robertson & Ho, 2016).

The combination of materiality, relationality and temporality provides a more comprehensive knowledge of everyday life and emotions than any single lens. Some meaningful objects and embodied practices act as representations of social relationships and further imply how everyday experiences are constructed by various relationships. Relationality connects individual migrants to social contacts, groups and specific places, which helps me to better understand how my participants embed their everyday life in a place with specific social networks. Given that a specific life stage likely involves a specific combination of social relationships and materialities, the shifting roles in various social relationships (such as from partners to spouses) and certain practices marks the change of life stages, which is an important aspect of temporality. As materiality includes tangible urban/migration infrastructure and wider physical settings and temporality could refer to specific temporal contexts, the incorporation of both

materiality and temporality into this thesis places my participants' everyday life into a particular spatial-temporal context. Hence, the combined lenses will be able to handle the research questions via noting various elements in my participants' everyday lives and their connection with present places, past transnational journeys and future life/migration plans.

The theoretical section of the conceptual framework seeks to make a theoretical contribution to the wider migration literature based on findings derived from the empirical section of the conceptual framework. In section 2.2.2, I have suggested that the conceptualisation of return migration could be made through the perspectives of who, when, why, where and impact. From the perspective of "who", while most existing literature treats returnees as a distinct group in the researched society, I consider whether and how the everyday life of my participants hints at a blurring border between returnees and other residents. In terms of when, I am concerned with whether my participants' everyday life indicates an end of their return journey if we do not take the point of landing in China as the completion of return migration. In other words, the issue of "when" in this thesis not only asks when return migration occurs, but also interrogates the whole process of return migration involving a series of temporal changes in places and individual everyday experiences. As for why, my interrogation goes beyond return motivations, but also pays attention to various practices and decisions migrants make after moving back to China, which possibly discloses how migrants make their present everyday life and plans for future well-being. In the aspects of "where", I will question "home" as a presumed destination of return migration and query the definition of "home" if both a wide range of geographical scales and migrants' personal experiences are taken into discussion. Regarding "impact", I may not focus on the impacts of returned students on macro-economic development and other aspects of national development, as conducted in many quantitative works; rather, I pay attention to the results of return migration in terms of personal life through investigating my participants' reflections on their present everyday life. Based on interrogation on the five aspects above, I may challenge the conceptualisation of return migration in existing literature and contribute to the debates in migration literature.

I organise my empirical findings and related theoretical discussion into three empirical chapters according to themes arising from data analysis. In each chapter, I make theoretical discussion closely following empirical findings, rather than separating empirical findings and theoretical discussion into different chapters. Given this, each empirical chapter, or even single sections, will process the whole flow of the conceptual framework. In the conclusion chapter, I will intertwine the findings from the three empirical chapters and summarise the primary arguments and theoretical contributions of this thesis. The next chapter will introduce research methods of this thesis; then, the thesis will process to the empirical chapters.

Chapter III: Research Context and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of return migration through focusing on post-return everyday lived experiences and emotional dynamics of overseas returned students in Shanghai. Given the research objective, the empirical discussion requires not only data about participants' material lives, but also participants' emotional perception of their everyday routines. Existing empirical research in everyday geographies and related methodological discussions, highlighted the effectiveness of ethnography in understanding the process, context and particularities of everyday. As an ethnographic approach greatly matched the objective and data requirement of this thesis, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Shanghai from August 2018 to August 2019.

This chapter explains the methodological approaches I employed in my PhD research. I begin with an introduction to the fieldwork setting, including Shanghai as a popular destination of overseas returned students in China as well as the temporal context in 2018 and 2019. Then, I discuss how I selected and recruited participants during fieldwork and how I approached and established rapport with my participants. The details of the sample are provided as well. In the section on data-collection methods, I first outline why ethnography is the most suitable choice for my fieldwork and then describe how I combined different methods to collect data during the ethnographic fieldwork. In section 3.5, I explain the organisation and thematic analysis of data after fieldwork. The impact of my positionality on my PhD research and other ethical concerns, such as the obtaining of informed consent and the anonymisation of participants, are discussed in the following section. At the end of chapter, I reflect on the successes and limitations of ethnography in my fieldwork.

3.2 Contextualising fieldwork

3.2.1 Overseas returned students in Shanghai

With the increasing number of overseas returned students to China in the last decade, the amount of overseas returned students in Shanghai has kept growing. The Shanghai Municipal Human Resource and Social Security Bureau indicated that more than 160,000 overseas returned students had worked or started their own businesses in Shanghai over the period between 1978 and August 2019[17]. The average age of overseas returned students in Shanghai was 27 years old. More specifically, 87% of returnees were in their 20s and 12% in their 30s. As for the highest education upon their return, 66.67% of returned students held Master's degrees while 11.11% Doctorates and 21.3% Bachelor's. Ninety-two percent of returned students in Shanghai worked in the sectors of leasing and business services, academia, manufacturing, wholesale and retail, information technology and finance[18].

Various social surveys conducted by different research organisations[19] suggest that Shanghai has become one of the most popular destination cities among overseas returned students in China. According to the *Report on Development of Overseas Study 2016*, published by the Centre of China and Globalisation (hereafter CCG), most overseas returned students chose to work in big cities and the top three cities in 2016 were Beijing (29.1%), Shanghai (11.5%) and Guangzhou (6.1%). In CCG's more recent report, the *Report on Employment and Entrepreneurship of Chinese Returnees 2018*, although fewer overseas returned students chose to work in big cities and more students went to second- or even third-tier cities, Shanghai still remained the second most popular destination city which attracted 8% of overseas returned students in 2017. The percentage of overseas returned students to Shanghai was significantly higher in other reports. For example, the *Report on Attractions of Overseas Chinese*

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[17] Data source: https://m.chinanews.com/wap/detail/zw/cj/2019/08-14/8926774.shtml. Accessed on 20 December 2019.

[18] Data source: Shanghai Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs, http://files.shafea.gov.cn/html/f98875fb-4e3d-46c9-b095-a5c3724f5062.htm, accessed on 23 December 2019.

[19] These research organisations include think tanks which provide consultation services to government, such as the Centre of China and Globalisation, and research centres under commercial enterprises whose business is related to overseas study and job-hunting.

Returnees 2018 written by LinkedIn suggested that Shanghai was the most popular destination city in 2017 and 63.1% of Chinese returnees in that year took Shanghai as a targeted destination; the *Report on Employment and Entrepreneurship of Returned Talents 2017* published by the Big-Data Centre of BossZhipin, a famous head-hunting company in China, pointed out that Shanghai attracted 24.9% of overseas returned students in 2017 just behind the figure for Beijing (28.8%).[20]

The primary reason why overseas returned students had a preference for Shanghai as a work destination was its developed economy. Since the establishment of People's Republic of China, Shanghai has been the economic and financial centre of China with a variety of industries, which implies that more job opportunities, higher salaries and greater career promotion can be expected in Shanghai (Y. Huang & Kuah-Pearce, 2015; Tseng, 2011; R. Wang, 2012). Taking wages as an example, national wage income per capita was ¥15,829 in 2018 while the figure in Shanghai was ¥37,137[21]. Existing literature and relevant social surveys also found better personal development opportunities and a developed macro-economy as strong attractions to overseas returnees (C. Chen, 2016; R. Wang, 2012). Thanks to its present developed economy and long-standing multicultural history, Shanghai might be the most internationalised city in China. In comparison to other big cities, like Beijing, Shanghai has been strongly influenced by western cultures and is more open-minded towards various foreign cultures (Farrer, 2010; Shen, 2010). Given that most overseas returned students studied in western countries rather than oriental countries, the multicultural environment in Shanghai provides a friendly setting within which returnees can adapt themselves to local society. Social surveys suggest that comprehensive urban infrastructures in Shanghai, such as efficient government systems, convenient public transport and adequate urban green

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[20] In the above-mentioned reports, although "Chinese returnees", "returned talents" or other similar phrases were used in report titles, these reports are specifically based on the study of people who returned to China after completing overseas education, which has been clearly explained in the main text of reports. As a result, the data provided by these reports is applicable for this thesis.

[21] One British Pound is about nine Chinese Yuan. ¥15,829 $\approx$ £1,727. ¥37,137 $\approx$ £4,052.

spaces, also attract overseas returnees to live and work (*Report on Employment & Entrepreneurship of Chinese Returnees 2018*).

In addition to the advantages of Shanghai, the personal experiences of returnees may influence their selection of city. Shanghai is one of the main source cities of overseas Chinese students, who might be local Shanghainese or used to study in Shanghai before going overseas (*Report on Chinese Students' Overseas Study 2018*; *Report on Employment & Entrepreneurship of Chinese Returnees 2018*). The past lived experiences bring better knowledge of the city as well as stronger social networks here. Those returnees who previously lived in Shanghai are more likely to choose Shanghai as their destination after return (C. Chen, 2016).

The Shanghai government has carried out a series of talent policies to attract global talents to improve Shanghai's capacity for research and development, such as "*Talents 30*" in 2016 and "*Talent Summit Project*" in 2018. Although the Shanghai government declares overseas returned students as the crucial component of global talents, most talent policies of Shanghai are specifically designed for high-end global talents, who have established great reputations and have abundant experience in their field, rather than for young returned students who have just completed their degree overseas. For the researched group in this thesis, the talent policy which benefits them at the most is the *hukou* policy of Shanghai. *The Guidelines for Overseas Returned Students Applying for Shanghai Hukou*[22] requires overseas returned students to meet the following criteria: 1) Applicant obtained highest degree, which must be Bachelor's degree or above, in an overseas university and overseas study should be no less than one year; 2) the university must be among top 500 universities in the world; 3) Applicant returned to China within two years upon graduation; 4) The first job of the applicant after return must be in Shanghai and the unemployment period before the first job should be no more than two years; 5) the monthly salary

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[22] The document was in force until 31 December 2020 and a new guideline regarding overseas returnees' applications for Shanghai *hukou* has taken effect since 1 January 2021. As all fieldwork activities were completed before 2021, the new guideline did not influence my fieldwork and related analysis in this thesis.

should be no less than social average salary in the previous year, which was ¥8,211 in 2018[23]. Compared to Beijing, which has very restrictive requirements on applicants' employers and have assigned a limited quota of successful applications to each employer, the Shanghai *hukou* is much easier for overseas returned students to get. The accessible *hukou* in Shanghai and the favourable social security attached to a Shanghai *hukou* have encouraged many overseas returned students to arrive in Shanghai and seek better personal development.

Living in Shanghai also entails many challenges for overseas students. Along with its developed economy, young people may suffer from high living expenses and expensive housing prices. Taking average selling price of residential property in 2019 as example, the national average price was 9,287 Chinese Yuan (about 1,032 British Pounds) per square meter and the price in Shanghai was 32,926 Chinese Yuan (about 3,658 British Pounds) per square meter[24]. In terms of career, overseas returned students in Shanghai have to compete with other global talents as well as with top talents from other places in China. Some social surveys also suggest that many returnees worry about their relationships and future marriage, because intense work schedules may occupy their social time and result in less time to meet potential partners, establish and maintain relationships (*Report on Chinese Students' Overseas Study 2018*; *Report on Employment & Entrepreneurship of Chinese Returnees 2018*).

3.2.2 The years of 2018 and 2019

While geographers have long addressed the importance of place, time has gained increasing academic attention in studies on transnational migration (*e.g.*, Baas & Yeoh, 2019; Collins & Shubin, 2015; Carling & Collins, 2017; Ho, 2021). The nature of the field site is shaped by space as well as time. For this research, overseas returned students are not living in an enclosed space and a

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[23] More details can be accessed via http://rsj.sh.gov.cn/201712333/xxgk/flfg/gfxwj/rsrc/06/201711/t20171103_1271445.shtml, accessed on 23 December 2019.

[24] Data source: National Bureau of Statistics, China, https://data.stats.gov.cn/search.htm?s=住宅房平均销售价格, accessed on 17 July 2021.

static period. The wider social, political and economic environment is likely to make a great impact on their everyday life in Shanghai and may invoke various emotions. This section is going to highlight two key events in 2018 and 2019, the changes of national immigration regulation in China and the Sino-American trade war.

The first event is the change of talent policies of China[25]. This cannot really be described as a singular event, as it is not only the update of national talent policies, but also a number of new municipal talent policies. Since 2018 the Chinese government has launched a new series of talent policies to attract more global talents for the purpose of future national development. At the national level, China has relaxed the access to Chinese permanent residence, granted more social rights to foreign talents, and offered preferential treatment to overseas Chinese talents. In January 2018, China established the National Immigration Administration to manage immigration issues. With the encouragement of the central government, municipal governments, particularly those second- or third-tier cities, have carried out a series of talent policies to attract overseas returned students. Different from the talent policies of Beijing and Shanghai which pay most attention to high-end global talents, smaller cities have a special interest in young overseas returnees who have just completed their degrees overseas. The bonuses provided by the governments of smaller cities usually include local *hukou*, a property subsidy (for renting a flat or buying property), living subsidy and start-up funding for young entrepreneurs and academics. Some cities, like Jinan, the capital city of Shandong Province, even provide free public transport to overseas returnees. In most cases, the bonuses just require overseas returned students to live in the city and do not have any restrictions on their age, occupation, salary, university ranking and highest degree. Many overseas returned students consider moving to smaller cities which provide the preferential treatment instead of big cities which

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[25] Some Asian countries, like China and Singapore, tend to use "talent" to describe skilled people who are the target immigrants of the government for the purpose of local development. In addition to general immigration regulation, governments provide many aspects of preferential treatment to "talents". Thus, I particularly focus on talent policies instead of immigration regulations.

possess a more competitive work environment and heavier living stress[26]. For overseas returned students in Shanghai, the talent policies of other cities may make them rethink their future plans.

The other crucial event is the trade war between China and the United States. As the financial and economic centre of China, Shanghai is very sensitive to changes in the wider economic environment. Although the official economic statistics of 2018-2019 do not suggest much difference compared to previous years, the unstable stock market during 2018 and 2019, the rising exchange rate of the Chinese Yuan to the American Dollar and lay-offs from companies suggest that the economic development of China faced challenges (*Analysis and Prediction of China's Main Macroeconomic Indicators 2018-2019*; Y. Liu *et al.*, 2019). The macro political economic structures are possibly indicated by migrants' lived experiences (Ho, 2017). A considerable proportion of overseas returned students in Shanghai are working in the financial sector and they inevitably encounter greater stress in their work. With the deterioration of the trade war, employers in corporations involved in international business gradually perceived greater challenges in their everyday work, which will be discussed in more details in following empirical chapters.

3.3 Participants

3.3.1 Eligibility of participants

Given the huge number and great diversity of overseas returned students in China, I set several criteria to narrow down the group of participants in the interest of successful fieldwork and a clear theoretical discussion in the later thesis. I primarily focus on those who completed Bachelor's degrees in China, studied overseas and returned to China shortly after their study. To be more specific, they should meet following criteria:

1) The highest degree should be Master's degrees conferred by overseas educational institutions.

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[26] See the article titled "Survey about returnees' job-hunting: Tired of hard work in first-tier cities, hoping for the prospects of second-tier cities (海归求职调查：一线城市打拼疲惫，寄望二线城市)", published in *People's Daily* on 11 November 2016.

2) Overseas study was not less than one year.

3) Participants are doing or hunting for professional jobs in Shanghai while research is being conducted.

4) No specific requirement for age, gender, marital status and birth place.

I particularly focus on Master's degrees, because although more than 80% of overseas returned students to China hold Master's degrees as their highest degree (*Blue Book of Overseas Returned Students' Employment in China, 2018*), most existing scholarships have focused on those with doctoral degrees. The particular interests on returned PhDs may be a result of the preference of Shanghai talent policies on high-end returnees. I set one year as the lower limit of overseas study because of the official definition of overseas returned students and the usual duration of overseas Master's programmes (*e.g.*, the shortest postgraduate programme outside China, like Master's programmes in the UK, should last for at least one year). The requirement about professional jobs was because returned entrepreneurs and employers are leading distinct everyday lives and enjoying different talent policies in Shanghai (R. Wang, 2012). But notably, I did not require potential participants to have secured a professional position when they participated in my research. So it was possible that participants would be unsuccessful to obtain a job in their later participation and, in fact, several participants indeed experienced failure in their job-hunting which will be discussed further in Chapter IV. I did not set specific requirements on age, gender, marital status, their birth place and overseas study location in the interest of the diversity of samples.

3.3.2 Snowball sampling

Once the targeted population has been identified, a key consideration was how to select the sample from this target population. Given the nature of ethnography and the features of the targeted population, I employed snowball sampling to recruit participants. Snowballing has been widely used in research on transnational migration, which heavily relies on social networks of researchers and initial participants (Chiang, 2011; Yang, 2017). Researchers usually select initial participants from their personal network or with the help of gatekeepers and then ask initial participants to refer more potential participants through their

networks (Bryman, 2016). It is particularly useful when researchers do not know the total size of the targeted population and have limited access to recognise and contact potential participants in the overall population (Morgan, 2008). As a kind of purposive sampling, snowballing works well to find participants with high relevance to research questions (Bryman, 2016). Among studies employing snowballing, the approach to gatekeepers of the researched group is supposed to be of importance (e.g., Walsh, 2006, 2009). I attempted to contact some gatekeepers (such as the alumni associations of overseas universities in Shanghai) when I was launching my fieldwork, but did not receive any meaningful replies. Fortunately, given my identity as an overseas Chinese student, social networks between overseas returned students enabled me to approach potential participants. I selected several initial participants from my personal network and then gradually recruited more participants. By the end of fieldwork, I had recruited 33 participants, including 24 females and 9 males. Ten participants were selected from my personal network, like my fellow alumni and friends; 22 participants were introduced by other participants and my friends who were not involved directly in this project; and one participant was met at an event I was attending for the research. Table 3.1 displays the overview of participants in this thesis. More details of participants can be found in Appendix I.

Table 3.1 Summary of participants[1]

		Female (n=24)	Male (n=9)
Age	20-25	3	1
	26-30	18	5
	31-35	2	2
	36-40	1	1
Marital Status[2]	Single	13	4
	In a relationship	6	2
	Married	5	3
Hometown	Shanghainese	7	4
	Non-Shanghainese	17	5
Hukou[3]	Shanghai	17	6
	Other cities	6	2
	pending	1	1
Social strata[4]	Professional or managerial	22	8
	Manual worker	2	1
Lived in Shanghai before going overseas	Yes (no less than 1 year)	16	6
	No	8	3

Current Occupation	Bank & financial industry	7	2
	Business	8	1
	Education & research	4	2
	Urban design	2	1
	IT	0	2
	Law	1	1
	Hotel	1	0
	Embassy	1	0
Location of Country of Study	USA	9	2
	UK	5	2
	Singapore	3	2
	Germany	2	2
	Japan	0	1
	Canada	1	0
	Denmark	1	0
	France	2	0
	Hong Kong	1	0
Overseas work experience	Full-time work	3	1
	Part-time work or internship	10	2
	No work experience	11	6
Overseas time length (years)	1-2	9	2
	3-4	13	4
	> 4	2	3
Returned to China (years)	≦2	7	2
	2-5	16	5
	≧5	1	2
Lived in Shanghai after return (years)	≦2	8	3
	2-5	15	4
	≧5	1	2

Note: 1. All the data refer to the situation in August 2019 or when they left my research, whichever was earlier.

2. Some participants changed their marital status while participating in this project, such as breaking up and getting married. The changes of marital status will be discussed in qualitative analysis later.

3. Pending means that a participant has submitted an application for a Shanghai *hukou*, but had not received it when they finished their participation in my research. Some participants received their Shanghai *hukou* while participating in this project.

4. The Chinese official discourse system adopts social strata and rejects social class in social analysis, as social class is seen as an ideologically capitalist term and implies social suppression and unequal power relations between social groups. To meet the socio-political context of China, I adopt the Chinese discourse system and use social strata to describe my participants' social status. The socialist market economy has changed the social strata structure dramatically since 1978. The social structure constituted by cadres, workers and farmers in the Maoist era is no longer suitable for present-day China. A number of researchers have analysed the social stratification in China from the perspective of income, power, occupation and education (Anagnost, 2008). In this thesis, considering the social, economic characteristics of my participants and their families, I adopt the approach to stratification used by Bian *et al.* (2005) for the society of urban China, which divides urban residents into manual workers, state bureaucratic elites, professional and managerial strata according to their economic income and occupations.

The heavy reliance on social networks in snowball sampling may mean that participants are clustered in a limited number of social networks, so narrowing the following empirical discussion. Thus, I wished to include participants from other social networks. I sought help from my social contacts who are not eligible for this research and, finally, managed to find participants with various personal characteristics. As can be seen from Table 3.1, my sample is unbalanced in terms of gender structure. The number of female participants was nearly twice that of male participants. I expected gender unbalance before fieldwork. I need to observe participants' everyday life at a close distance and spend much time with them. Considering that I am a young female researcher, it was understandable and expected if men, particularly those who had partners, were reluctant to participate in my project. But, as the gender issue is not the primary focus of my thesis and the nine male participants provided abundant information of their everyday life and emotions, the gender imbalance is unlikely to greatly impact my following analysis.

Snowballing generally worked well in this research. It not only reduced the difficulties in recruiting enough participants, it also helped to establish rapport between participants and me. If an introducer connected me to a participant, he or she would provide a brief introduction of the participant before we formally met, so I saved some time finding out about the participant's personal profile. Moreover, having a mutual friend perhaps means that my participants and I have some similar experiences and these similar experiences would be good starting points for our interviews or casual talks in ethnographic activities. During fieldwork, my participant(s), introducer and I sometimes hung out together (for example, we dined out, went to cinemas, pubs and other leisure activities together during weekends and similar methods could be seen in Walsh's (2007, 2009) research on British expatriates in Dubai); the communications between participant(s) and introducer, who is the participant's friend, always brought me inspired findings, which may be overlooked in the communication between participants and myself. For example, one participant, who is called Xia in the thesis, the introducer and I went for lunch together on a Sunday. Xia and the introducer are friends and colleagues. Through their talk over the lunch, I learnt a lot about Xia's friendship with others, her worries about career and various

social relations in her workplace, which I hardly observed from previous fieldwork activities[27].

3.4 Employing ethnography to collect data

3.4.1 Rationales for ethnography

Everyday life is an embodied and dynamic process rather than a static phenomenon occurring at a lone time point, which is very difficult to understand through one-off interviews or observation, but needs to be examined in the approach of longitudinal research (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). Quantitative methods deploying mathematical models may not work well for investigating the nitty-gritty of everyday life (Ho & Hatfield, 2011). A qualitative longitudinal research approach "may be particularly useful when attempting to understand the interaction between temporal and geographic movement and between individual/collective agency and structural determinants"(Holland *et al.*, 2006, p.19). Among various longitudinal methods, many geographers have advocated ethnography as an efficient methodological strategy to understand processes and meanings of socio-spatial life (Herbert, 2000; Tse, 2011). Ethnography has the ability to "produce precise descriptions and nuanced analyses from multiple perspectives" and "integrate the materiality and meaning of actions and practices at local, translocal and global scales" (S. M. Low, 2017, p. 2). In this section, I explain the rationales for employing ethnography as the primary data-collection method.

The thesis aims to contribute to debates about return migration through considering everyday life and related emotions of overseas returned students in Shanghai, which requires me to observe returned students' everyday life at a close distance. In particular, these everyday details need to be embedded in a specific place, that is Shanghai in this research, and attached to a certain period, that is between 2018 and 2019. Ethnography has special advantages to explore the everydayness of place-bound action (Herbert, 2000) and has been an outstanding method to research everyday life (Vanderstoep & Johnson, 2008)

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[27] The introducer was not eligible to be my participant, but she generously allowed me to use the observation data related to her in any published work.

as well as a useful way to ground transnationalism (Walsh, 2009). Through immersing themselves in one place over a period, ethnographers observe how people experience socio-cultural environments, forge local and transnational social networks, create their own places and represent their spatial imaginaries through repeated mundane practices and everyday interactions (Watson & Till, 2010). For my research, overseas returned students experienced a reverse migration from overseas to China, their homeland where they were born and grew up, but they might not be familiar with the city of Shanghai. It was important to observe how they adapted themselves to a new living environment and how they negotiated with local society, local cultures and other social groups in everyday life. Moreover, special emphasis is attached to processes and cultural meanings of everyday practice in ethnographic research (Herbert, 2000). Through ethnographic fieldwork focusing on how my participants represented their multiple identities, such as gender, hometown and overseas returnees, in everyday life, a more comprehensive understanding of the researched group could be expected.

As mentioned in section 2.4, temporality is crucial to understanding the everyday life of overseas returned students in this thesis. Through immersion in a study setting over a sustained period, ethnographers may be able to observe the temporalities of people's everyday life (J. Reynolds & Lewis, 2019). In this thesis, ethnographic fieldwork not only helped to understand how (inter)national events occurring in a specific period could influence ordinary people's daily lives, but also enabled me to interrogate movement, (temporary) settlement and limbos returnees experienced during their everyday life in Shanghai.

In addition to mundane routines, ethnography, as a subjective and sensory method, has a starting point that is the "multi-sensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice" (Pink, 2015, p. xi) and can help researcher gain deep understanding of various subjects involved in research (M. Crang & Cook, 2007). Ethnographic research can also help explore the embodiment of emotions in the material world (Till, 2009). For the sake of the thesis,

ethnography can help to understand emotions and other subjectivities of overseas returned students derived from their everyday life.

To sum up, an ethnographic method could help to grasp everyday details while respecting spatiality and temporality; meanwhile, it can enable the collection of data about material life and cultures as well as subjectivities. Thus, ethnography matches the research objective and questions of my thesis well. It was therefore reasonable to employ ethnography to collect data for this thesis.

3.4.2 Ethnography as an umbrella term

Ethnography "entails a variety of research designs, methods, analytical tools, theoretical perspectives, and representational forms" (Till, 2009, p. 626). Researchers tend to employ a range of methods and techniques to study everyday geographies and the specific design of an ethnographic project largely depends on the research questions, the researched group and the fieldwork setting (Watson & Till, 2010). In this section, I will explain how I employed and organised different research methods in my ethnographic fieldwork and how I collected and recorded data from a range of sources.

1) Participant Observations

Participant observation is often considered as the core method of ethnography (Allsop *et al.*, 2010), which "involves spending time being, living or working with people or communities in order to understand them" (Laurier, 2010, p. 116). In participant observation, researchers themselves become the research tool to witness, record and analyse what they see, hear, smell and feel. To some extent, participant observation is a multisensory method (Pink, 2015). Situating themselves in the field, researchers observe a variety of subjects as well as interactions between humans and non-humans.

The primary task of my fieldwork was to investigate the everyday life of my participants. In many existing ethnographic works, participants lived or worked together in a confined space/place and researchers are able to observe a group of participants at the same time. But in my research, overseas returned students

tend to live in dispersed locations in Shanghai and work in a range of industries/companies, which brought some challenges to my observations. It was impossible for me to observe multiple participants at the same time so I usually observed one participant's everyday life in a single observation. With their permission, I visited the workplaces of several participants after office time and occasionally observed interactions with colleagues. I also visited the homes of several participants, most of which were rented rooms in a shared flat or a rented single flat. Some participants did not give me access to their homes, but generously took me for walks around their neighbourhood and let me observe the surrounding environment of their everyday life. Most observations occurred at weekends or other spare time. Through these observations, I was able to perceive and interpret their everyday leisure life in person, but their everyday work had to be understood primarily through interviews. During observations, I often hung out with my participants to watch movies, go shopping, enjoy food, do morning jogging, have a short-distance trip or just have fun. Sometimes, I attended and observed some special events, such as their weddings. My participants also invited me to group activities, such as Sunday church services and the New Year party of an alumni association. Notably, not all participants gave me equal access to the above activities. Some participants allowed me to attend and observe most occasions of their everyday life while some participants preferred to maintain higher levels of privacy.

In addition to observed events which directly involved one or more participants, I also observed spaces which perhaps attract overseas returned students. For example, I made several observations in the Lujiazui Financial District. Given that there are multiple banks, governmental sectors and financial companies in Lujiazui and that a considerable proportion of overseas returned students work in financial sectors, it is common to witness overseas returned students in this district. Thus, observing Lujiazui helped to perceive overseas returned students' everyday work. I sat and made observations in lobbies of office buildings, café, canteens and other public spaces; I observed urban elite life with a fast pace and perceived stronger nervousness and seriousness than in other places I observed in Shanghai. Other observed places included the former French concession, the Bund area and Xujiahui, which are popular leisure places in Shanghai.

Admittedly, I could not tell who were returned students here when I conducted observations, but considering many of my participants frequently visited these areas for work or for fun, observations in these locations helped me sense the atmosphere of these places and find more topics for following interviews and observations when accompanying my participants.

I always worked as an observer-as-participant or even a complete observer (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I tried my best to avoid interrupting the process of events. I did not take field notes while I observed events directly involved with my participants, as making notes might interrupt conversations with my participants and the process of observed events (particularly on occasions like weddings and Sunday services). Also I worried that if I always made notes, my participants would feel upset and uneasy. So I made memos in notebooks or on my mobile phone to record my thoughts and reflections towards observed events as soon as possible after each observation; sometimes I just voice recorded my reflections on my mobile phone. Photos were taken when I participated in these events but are used in this thesis only with permission of my participants and event organisers. When I conducted observations without the involvement of my participants, I made notes in my notebook to record what I saw and what I perceived. I also took photos to display the physical setting of these spaces, but only photos which have concealed facial images will be used in this thesis.

2) Interviews

Interviewing is one of the most popular methods in human geography, which is "useful for investigating complex behaviours, opinions, emotions and affect, and for collecting a diversity of experiences" (Longhurst, 2016, p. 153). Moreover, given interviews are a "performative method", researchers can gain data not only from the interview content, but also from studying interviewees' performance *in situ* (Longhurst, 2016). Through asking participants questions, interviews enable researchers to listen to participants' life stories and self-consciousness in a more systematic way (Longhurst, 2010). In ethnographic research, interview data usually plays a supplementary role to the observation data and may remind researchers of something which was ignored in

observation. In my fieldwork, interviews provided the self-reflection of my participants towards their everyday life and emotions, which were less easily gained through my observations. But due to the nature of my field setting, I was unable to observe my participants' lives every day and everywhere, so interviews were necessary to collect more data related to individual participants' everyday life, subjectivities and emotions.

Semi-structured interviews are the most common format in human geography, involving pre-determined questions but still allowing informants to highlight issues and for interviewers to follow up on answers (Dunn, 2000). In my ethnographic fieldwork, I conducted semi-structured interviews in the first and last meetings with participants. I named them respectively as "initial talk" and "closing talk". In initial talks, I asked my participants about their return experience, return motivation and general situation of their current life, as well as gathering basic demographic data. The purpose of the initial talks was to gain a better knowledge of new participants, get ready for the future ethnographic activities and more importantly, establish rapport with my participants. The closing talk occurred when I was finishing my fieldwork. In the closing talk, I asked about their response and reflections on what I had observed in the last few months and asked them to summarise their last year. The purpose of the closing talk was to make concluding remarks on my research for each participant and to say farewell to my participants. All participants agreed to meet for the initial talks and the closing talks.

Walk-along interviews or go-along interviews are a relatively new and useful method to explore the interaction between people and their living environment through inviting interviewees to walk with interviewers and conducting interviews during the walk (Degen *et al.*, 2010). Neal *et al.* (2015) employed walk-along interviews, in which researchers invited ethnically diverse participants in three English cities to walk around public parks in their neighbourhood and explain how they use parks in everyday life, to explore the relationship between residents and parks and further deliberate the materiality of multiculturism. I arranged walk-along interviews with several participants. For example, some participants led me on walks around their neighbourhoods

and workplaces and gave brief introductions about the place and how they used the place. Interview questions varied depending on the trip and the participant.

All interviews were in Mandarin. The time and venues were selected by my participants. Usually semi-structured interviews were in a café or similar public spaces; walk-along interviews were alongside roads or their office building. All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of my participants. As McDowell (2010) suggested, the interview is never a simple exchange of words. "So language, bodies, clothes, gender, clearly matter in the sorts of exchanges that take place in interviews" (McDowell, 2010, p. 156). So the record of interview data should be more than a simple audio recording during interviewing. During semi-structured interviews, I also made field notes in notebooks to record key words and participants' reaction which might be of interest in later analysis.

3) Online ethnography

The use of online ethnography has risen in recent years with the development of virtual spaces and Internet technology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While there are ongoing debates about ethics and application, the online approach has inevitably become an important tool in the geographical methodological toolkit. The combination of online methods and face-to-face methods may "produce a more nuanced analysis and suggest that a mixed (online/onsite) methodology might be the most fruitful approach for geography researchers" (Madge, 2010, p.174). To some extent, online ethnography can be seen as an extension of the field of onsite ethnographic study (Hine, 2015; Madge, 2010). Under the context of a rapid development of the Internet economy and mobile technology in China, my participants widely employed mobile Internet technology in their everyday life, which pragmatically encouraged me to include an online approach in my research.

Most participants granted me the permission to access their online posts on Weibo[28] and WeChat[29], which are the two most popular mobile applications in China. With the support of mobile Internet, many participants were keen to share their everyday life and interesting links with friends. As people usually log into Weibo and WeChat on mobile phones, they can upload their photos and posts anytime and anywhere. In other words, these online posts appeared online perhaps just one second after the posted event. Most posts on Weibo and WeChat were text-based with illustrations of pictures and photos. I used screenshots to record their online posts. Each screenshotted picture was titled by "date_pseudonym of participant's_topic" for the sake of data organisation and coding later. Notably, not all participants were equally active online. Although some participants allowed me to access their online posts, in reality they rarely posted.

Generally, online data greatly supplemented data I collected from on-site ethnography. Through observing, recording and analysing participants' online posts, I acquired a more comprehensive knowledge of their everyday life, particularly in terms of how they performed and emotionally reflected on their own everyday experiences.

4) Visual methods

Visual methods are not new to ethnographic study. Photographs and other visual materials have been widely used to grasp everyday life and subjectivities under certain conditions. It is believed that cultural meanings are encoded in photos of people's everyday lives and could be unpacked through interpreting photos (Bartram, 2010). In some work, photos work as a trigger of conversations between researcher and participant, which can be thought of as object interviews (*e.g.*, Haldrup, 2017). Visual methods may also involve the participation of informants. In existing works, researchers may also ask participants to provide photos, paintings or other visual material to present their everyday life or their

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[28] Weibo is a Chinese microblogging website, whose function is very similar to Twitter.
[29] WeChat is a Chinese multi-purpose messaging and social media mobile application, whose function is similar to WhatsApp. It is very popular among Chinese and it has become the primary way to contact people in China. I always employed WeChat to message my participants during fieldwork.

relationship with certain objects/spaces/etc. (Haldrup, 2017; Johnsen *et al.*, 2008); researchers sometimes ask participants to discuss certain issues in focus groups and ask participants to use various diagrams, including tables and flow diagrams to present their discussion results (Hopkins, 2006; Kesby, 2000). I employed two visual methods in fieldwork, namely photo-diaries and emotional diagrams.

Diaries can display a clear flow of participants' social activities in one day and thus "produce more detailed, more reliable and often more focused accounts than can other comparable qualitative methodologies" (Latham, 2010, p. 191). Participants were mostly reluctant to record their life in written accounts, but happy to provide photos, I decided to use photo-diaries in my fieldwork. To respect different writing habits of participants and their privacy, I did not set very fixed requirements on the format of photo-diaries. The only guideline was to make a record of everyday life on one day and to illustrate the record with some photos. I usually asked my participants to make two photo-diaries covering a weekday and a weekend day. All participants who accepted to do photo-diaries sent their photos to me via WeChat. Thus, I was able to immediately ask some questions about their day and more details about their photo-diaries. All following-up interviews were conducted on WeChat.

In addition to my observation on participants' emotion from a standpoint of researcher, I employed emotional diagramming to prompt participants to reflect directly on their emotions around everyday life to complement my previous observations. The fundamental idea of the emotional diagram was to display participants' self-perceived emotional dynamics[30]. Fig. 3.1 is the emotional diagram I provided to my participants as an example. The horizontal axis represents time change and is equally divided into twelve months from August

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[30] The idea of emotional diagram was initially inspired by Dr. Jiexiu Chen's presentation in the International Academy for Intercultural Research (IAIR) and the Chinese Association for Intercultural Communication (CAFIC) Conference in Shanghai, July 2019. Notably, I designed emotional diagrams in the thesis by myself, which were different from the ones in Dr. Chen's work. By the point of thesis writing, Dr. Chen's work employing emotional diagrams has not been published. So no reference could be provided here.

2018 to August 2019[31]. The vertical axis represents emotional changes. The upward direction means positive emotions and the downward direction is negative emotions[32]. The positivity and negativity were based on participants' own perception. I usually asked my participants to draw their emotional diagram during the closing talk. So, I was able to ask them questions face to face after they completed and explained their emotional diagram to me, but in some cases this indicated some extra findings. For example, when I asked them why they were upset during certain periods, the reason might be the illness of family members or other sad issues, which they did not tell me in previous fieldwork activities. To take care of their feelings and privacy, I reminded participants that they could refuse to answer any questions and I would stop the interview at any time if they wanted me to[33]. In this way, emotional diagrams acted as a prompt to further discussion with participants and helped to elaborate on data collected through other research methods in this research. As I started employing emotional diagram closing to the end of my fieldwork, only a small number of participants (seven in total, see Appendix II) had drawn their emotional diagrams. Thus, the use of participants' emotional diagrams as empirical evidence is less frequent compared with other formats of data used in this thesis.

[31] As I did not need every detail of participants' emotional dynamics over a year, month was an appropriate time unit. On the one hand, it reminded participants what happened in a specific year and how they emotionally reflected on their experience; on the other hand, I as researcher could grasp the general trend of their emotional changes and the connection between material experience and emotional dynamics.

[32] Although it is very simplistic to categorise emotions into positive and negative ones considering the diversity of emotions, I present emotions in such a binary way when designing emotional diagram because I focus on the general trend of participants' emotional dynamics rather than specific details of participants' emotions. Thus I give greater priority to the simple, clear display of diagram over the precise description of emotions.

[33] During my fieldwork, few participants had refused to answer specific questions and none participants quitted interview halfway.
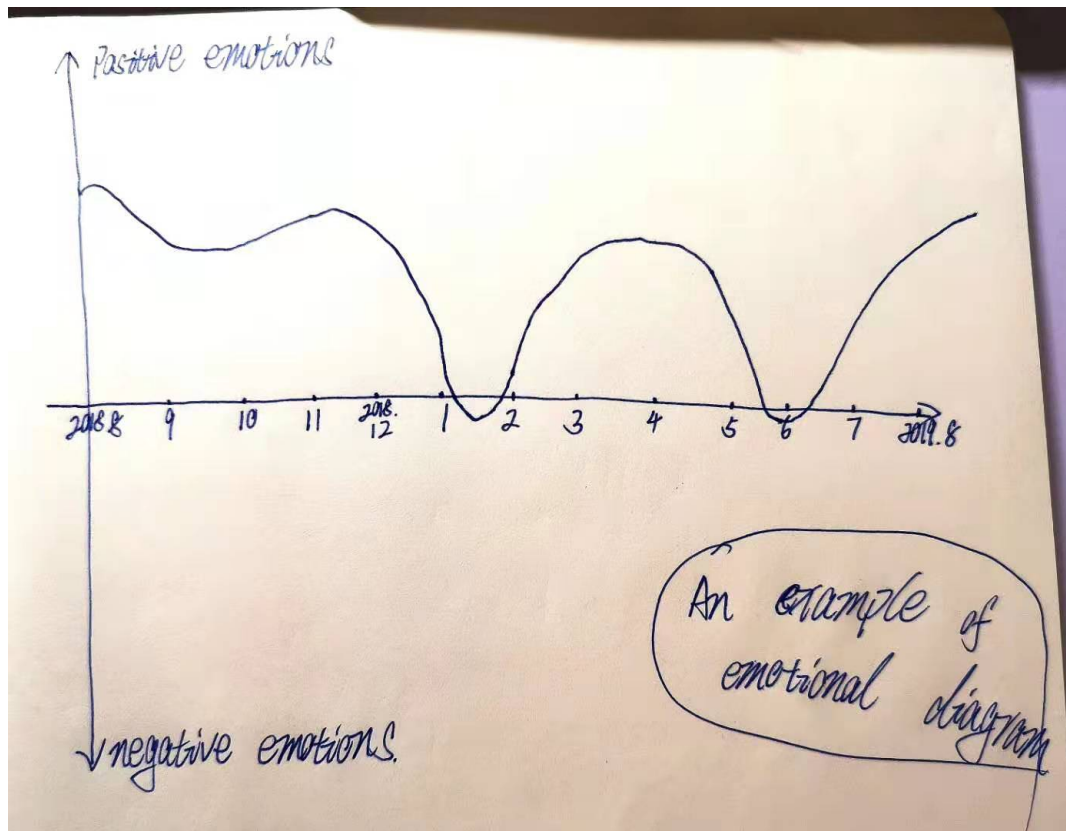
Fig. 3.1 An example of an emotional diagram

5) Field diary

As I mentioned above, I made brief field notes/memos in written or audio form as quickly as possible after each observation; also I made notes while I was conducting interviews. At the end of each day during fieldwork, I made a full field diary about that day. The field diary is an essential part of ethnographic research. A comprehensive field diary should include as many details of observed events, people, conversations and places as possible; more importantly, different from brief field notes instantly after observation, a full field diary should carefully record the flow of field activities and process of each activity on that day (Bryman, 2016). These details can remind researchers of their research experience on site. In my fieldwork, the record of the observed events primarily constituted my field diary. I used to describe the time, weather, participants and venue at first; then I recorded the observed event and various conversations in chronological order.

While researchers are creating a comprehensive account of socio-spatial life in the field diary, he or she is also deciding how to represent the cultural meanings

and social relations observed during research (Emerson, 2011). Also, a field diary can help to maintain the immediacy and emotional impact of the fieldwork through indicating researchers' personal struggles and emotions (Punch, 2012). Thus, I divided one day's field diary into two sections. In the first section, I selected neutral words to record the process of events; in the second section, I wrote my expectations before the event, my difficulties and struggles related to this event and my post-event personal reflections/feelings/emotions towards the event. For the convenience of later analysis, I titled each field diary with the date and participants' names on that day.

6) Organisation of various methods

I have explained each method employed in my ethnographic research. The two primary data sources were participant observations and interviews. Usually, once I recruited a new participant, I first arranged an initial talk (semi-structured interview) with him or her. Then, if the participant agreed to continue participating in my research, I would arrange follow-up ethnographic activities depending upon their schedule, like walk-along interviews, or hanging out during weekends. Once I gained some initial knowledge of their everyday life and perhaps in-depth observations on specific moments in their life, I asked them to make photo-diaries of one weekday and one weekend day. Meanwhile, I sought their permission to access their online posts and usually I accessed their online posts in the previous two months. At the end of fieldwork, I would arrange a closing talk with each participant. There were eight participants who conducted closing talks before the end of my fieldwork. Five were because I had collected enough data about them; two participants quit my project because they changed jobs and moved outside Shanghai; and one participant stopped her participation due to her forthcoming childbirth. Notably, not all participants participated in all the methods above. Several participants only accepted interviews while some participants generously answered all my requirements. Appendix II shows the different methods that each participant was involved in.

3.5 Data analysis

3.5.1 Organising data

I collected a large volume of data over one year of fieldwork. As I employed multiple data-collection methods, my data were in various forms. The text-based data included my field notes on site and full field diary; the audio-based data was primarily audio recordings of interviews; the visual materials comprised photo-diaries, emotional diagrams, screenshots of online posts and photos taken during participant observations. Given the quantity and variety of data, organising data became a mission after data collection.

I established a search index of data. First, in addition to field notes in a notebook, all single files of field data were given a name containing fieldwork date, participant's pseudonym, methods and event/topic. For the convenience of data organisation and analysis, all recorded interview audios were manually transcribed to texts in Word documents during and after fieldwork. While my fieldwork was in Chinese and my thesis is in English, translation has been a critical issue in my data analysis and writing. In qualitative research, many researchers employ more than one language and need to translate between languages. The process of translation is to interpret informants' expression in another language, in which there is a risk of misunderstanding and meaning lost (Nicholson, 1995; Temple & Young, 2004). To ensure the accurate meaning of interviewees and also to save time, I did not translate Chinese interviews into English during transcription. When I needed to quote interview clips in empirical chapters, I translated them then. The contents of visual materials were presented through file names. Then I created one file folder for each participant on my laptop and categorised files relevant to the participant into his or her folder. Finally, I made an Excel table as the search index of data. The first row of the table showed the source method of data, namely participant observation, interviews, online ethnography, visual methods and field diary; the first column displayed the names of participants; the rest of the cells showed files under certain methods and under certain names. The search index helped me to have an overview of my database and quickly locate single files.

3.5.2 Coding data and deriving themes

Coding is a useful way to identify themes and patterns of text-based materials (Cope, 2009, 2010). In this research, I coded my field diary and interview transcripts, the two primary data sources. Textbooks of research methods often suggest researchers to do open coding before analytical coding (Bryman, 2016), but I feel that this suggested coding route suits grounded theory research better. Given that I had clear research questions for my thesis, I decided to revise the coding process. Doing opening coding later helped me to focus on my research questions and reflect on them. Moreover, due to the considerable quantity of data, there would be hundreds of codes appearing in data analysis. To efficiently manage data and codes, I employed NVivo 12 to code text-based materials (Bryman, 2016).

First, I initially coded data through two sets of codes, everyday events and emotions. The two sets of codes were pre-determined because of the research objectives of my thesis. Sub-codes under everyday events included morning commute from home, evening commute from work, dining out, cooking and so on. All codes about everyday events were in English. Sub-codes under emotions were various emotional status. Given that all my data were in Chinese, I sometimes coded emotions in Chinese if I was not sure which English word was accurate to describe such emotion. Later, I translated the Chinese codes to English codes with the help of friends who are either bilingual speakers or professional translators.

Second, after the initial coding, I read through the material again, putting aside the initial codes about everyday events and emotions for a while and coded the material in an open way. The purpose of opening code is to find themes, topics or patterns which are relevant to thesis topic but were ignored in initial coding. In this stage, I just gave basic codes rather than analytical codes to materials. Lastly, I organised and merged codes derived from initial coding and opening coding. Codes derived from the analysis of text-based material were used to analyse visual materials later. There are three main themes of data identified from data analysis, namely everyday experiences of work, everyday life beyond

the workplace and everyday intimacy. The three themes will be topics of three empirical chapters in this thesis.

3.6 Positionality and ethics

3.6.1 My positionality

Ethnography seeks a holistic understanding of cultures in a specific community, and particularly, it seeks an insider's viewpoint (Cook, 2005). To gain an in-depth understanding of cultures, ethnographers also need to establish rapport and pleasant communications with participants while immersing themselves in a field setting for a long term (M. B. Smith & Jenkins, 2012; Laliberté & Schurr, 2015). Thus, it is not surprising that the positionality and power relations between researcher and participants have been greatly emphasised in existing literature.

In a factual way, my positionality could be summarised as a young female overseas Chinese PhD student in the UK who plans to return to China after completing this PhD. As I am an overseas student, potential participants tended to take me as a potential returnee who may experience a similar return journey as them. In other words, I was viewed as an "insider" by overseas returned students. Being an "insider" not only brought me easy access to potential participants, but also meant that participants were more willing to share their opinions towards foreign countries, China and the transnational experience with me. As most participants had returned to China within the last five years, participants and I were in a similar age group and shared many common interests, which made it easier to establish rapport between participants and myself. Although I was the researcher who was going to investigate their everyday life, participants were experts in their life and emotions (Hopkins, 2007). The power of the researcher and the knowledge of participants made it possible to maintain a balanced power relationship between us (McDowell, 2001).

Comparatively, my gender identity caused some troubles. As I mentioned in the section on sampling, most potential male participants were reluctant to

participate in my ethnographic research, because they felt uneasy to let me, a single young female, observe their everyday life and if they had partners, they needed to consider the opinions of their partners. Two married male participants accepted my invitation to this project because their wives were participating in my project as well and another married male participant participated in my project as the introducer had persuaded his wife beforehand.

While my gender identity, age, nationality and other personal characteristics influenced the research process, I doubt whether the personal features which look like tick-box options could fully represent me as an emotional human being. In a more emotional way, I am also a PhD researcher who wanted to investigate participants' everyday lives and a friend of some of the participants. I needed to balance the two identities which, to some extent, were opposite to each other. As a researcher, I grasped details in participants' everyday life which reflected their emotional dynamics, which possibly engaged in participants' personal life excessively and might hurt their feelings. As a friend, I cared about my participants' physical and emotional situations, shared their happiness and comforted them at their low times, which forced me to discard some useful but sensitive data. Inspired by Walsh (2005), I reminded my participants when I needed to transform from a friend to a researcher. For example, I asked them whether I could take notes about what they were talking about when I thought that the chat was interesting and related to my project. The balance process between a researcher and a friend was also a process to balance the remoteness and rapport with my participants (Pile, 2010).

3.6.2 Informed consent of participation

Gaining informed consent of participation is a necessary step before carrying out fieldwork. For the reference of potential participants, I introduced this project and sent information sheets to them outlining the project, what I would do, what they would do and their rights. The participant information sheet and consent form can be found as Appendix III and Appendix IV respectively. However, I did not reveal at the start of the fieldwork that one of the aims was to investigate everyday emotions. Instead, I told my informants that I was

studying their everyday material lives. As the participant information sheet and consent form show, the project name in my participants' knowledge is "Understanding the Everyday life of Overseas Returned Students to Shanghai, China" rather than my thesis title. While some researchers argue that being honest would help to establish rapports between researcher and the observed participants (Herbert, 2001), the holding back of information benefited the validity of data through avoiding participants performing their mundane routines and emotions too intentionally in this research. In participant observation at a career fair, I totally concealed my true purpose from the employers, but I explained the true research objective to other applicants there if they were willing to have a short chat with me. I hid my identity as a researcher in front of employers, because if I had exposed my research purpose to them, it would be impossible for me to experience how job-hunting actually operates and employers may refuse my approach. The concealment in participant observation did not bring any risks or loss to employers. The only negative outcome was that they spent approximately 10 minutes talking to me. I am not naming the employers that I approached. Although concealment could be sometimes employed by ethnographers, it possibly evokes ethical and practical concerns (P. Crang, 1994). I have tried to override any potential problems through careful and rigorous research practices. In general, the concealment in the ethnographic fieldwork did not bring any extra risks and workload to my participants.

In addition to the concealment of the research objective about emotions, I informed participants of the overarching design of my PhD project, what I would do, what they needed to do, their rights to pause or even stop their participation at any points of participation and the benefits and potential risks for them if they participated in this project. I also informed them that they would not receive any direct benefit from their participation. In other words, sufficient information was provided before potential participants finally agreed to help me. Moreover, as easy access to online ethnography likely invokes ethical problems (Madge, 2010), I gained permission for online ethnography through extra requests. Information sheets and consent forms can be found in appendices.

3.6.3 Protecting the privacy of participants

Over the one year of ethnographic research, I had numerous opportunities to gain personal information of participants. Particularly after I became true friends with some participants, we even discussed many personal issues. In this sense, protecting the privacy of participants became an urgent issue in this thesis.

As many participants were recruited through snowball sampling, some participants knew each other. During fieldwork, I was careful to avoid sharing one participant's story with another participant. I anonymised all participants in this thesis. With the permission of participants, I usually use their surnames, if their surnames are common in China, as their pseudonyms[34]. Otherwise, I randomly selected a Chinese character from their names to refer to them. All personal information, such as the names of their employers, is concealed. If a couple participated in my project at the same time, I only quote interviews which both the couple attended. All facial images are pixelated in this thesis. Photos which do not directly involve a person but still possibly leak privacy, like photos of home, will be used only with permission of the participant.

3.7 Summary: self-reflection

Researchers play an active role in ethnography and engage with the targeted place and the targeted population in depth (M. Crang & Cook, 2007). The reflection of ethnographers may help to find out hidden bias in research and, sometimes, become a source of data, for example in autoethnography (Emerson, 2011). In this summary, I am going to consider the success and limitation of methods and emotionally reflect on my research experience.

Generally, ethnography worked well during data-collection. As existing literature has argued, ethnographic methods helped me to observe participants' everyday life at a close distance and experience their life as returnees.

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[34] A common surname in China implies that millions of people share the same surname. For example, according to the Population Management Office of Shanghai, there were almost 1 million people whose surname is Zhang in Shanghai in 2018. Thus, even if I used participants' surnames in the thesis while concealing other personal information, it is hard for people who knew they participated in this project to recognise them.

Participant observation was a process where I interpreted their life while interviews allowed them to narrate their life and emotions with self-reflection and self-consciousness. Admittedly, there were some aspects of everyday life, such as their family life and their interactions with other friends who were not my contacts, which I did not really access in observation. I tried to get some information about these aspects through interviews and other methods. Online posts were more about how they presented and performed their life to a particular public and the photo-diary was what kinds of life they wanted to display in front of me. Combining data from various methods enabled me to interpret participants' everyday life from different perspectives.

However, ethnography has obvious limitations in metropolitan environments. While existing urban ethnography provides many useful guidelines (e.g., Black, 2014; Smith & Hall, 2016), such as paying attention to how knowledge is situated in local places, I still faced other challenges in fieldwork. My participants were not geographically close to each other and dispersed throughout Shanghai. I had to change the typical ethnographic fieldwork which takes participant observation as a primary data source to a more adaptive ethnography, in which both participant observation and interviews provide primary data, to fit into the nature of Shanghai. Moreover, people working in big cities often suffer stressful workloads. The intense schedule of some participants prevented them from participating in my research in greater depth even if they were willing to. The challenges to access participants in the metropolis was an important reason why I combined so many methods in fieldwork, as I attempted to find a way which was possible for both my participants and myself.

Fieldwork is always an emotional journey for researchers. While I was researching the life and emotions of my participants, my emotions were actually impacted by and engaged into my fieldwork (Punch, 2012). I worried about my research progress, felt anxious about contacting strangers, was sad when I was rejected and became nervous when I was observing participants. Meanwhile, I was happy to have fun with my participants-as-friends and felt warm-hearted when they encouraged and comforted me. I was particularly touched when I

found that some participants prepared a secret farewell party for me before I left Shanghai to return to the UK.

My own emotions had two-sided impacts on my research. Being emotional was sometimes helpful in my fieldwork. Emotions helped to establish rapport with my participants. I found that exchanging feelings and opinions was an effective way to make friends with my participants. But as a researcher, being too emotional may harm the rigour of my interpretation and analysis. Also, it would be a problem if I became too emotional and overlooked my participants' feelings and stories. So I controlled my emotions, particularly the intense ones, in front of my participants. After fieldwork activities, I wrote all my feelings and emotional interactions with participants in my field diary; several days/weeks later, I would re-read through it and rethink whether and how my emotions then engaged with my fieldwork. In other words, evaluating the potential impact of my own emotions is an important part of data analysis.

In this chapter, I demonstrated the context of my fieldwork, reviewed how I recruited participants and collected data through ethnographic research in Shanghai, deliberated how I organised and analysed data and thought through the ethical issues in this research. I also evaluated the success and limitations of ethnography in my research and emotionally reflected on my fieldwork. Based on the data collected from fieldwork, empirical issues will be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter IV: Everyday Experiences of work

4.1 Introduction

While international students and their families are deciding to study overseas, they usually have looked forward to a bright career development after overseas education (Beech, 2019). For overseas Chinese students, being employed not only means successful transnational capital transfer, but also implies a full adulthood[35] . While they have multiple options of post-education migration, the restricted regulations on work permits or other long-term residence permits, cultural gaps and social disintegration easily cause students' unemployment in foreign countries and motivate them to seek better career opportunities in homeland (Bijwaard & Q. Wang, 2016). In this research, work had been positioned at the centre of my participants' everyday life since they had arrived in Shanghai. A work-centred everyday life meant that people arranged their everyday life, such as entertainment, exercise and dietary practices, according to the nature of their work and related issues, like salary. Because of this, I take everyday work as the starting point of the empirical discussion in this thesis.

The work of skilled return migrants has attracted increasing academic attention. Some researchers illustrate advantages and disadvantages of returned skilled workers in the labour market through quantitatively analysing survey data and data derived from related databases (Kureková & Žilinčíková, 2016). More scholarship uses in-depth interviews to investigate cultural tensions/adaption (Christou & King, 2006), transnational identities (Ralph, 2014; Tsuda, 2000), transnational networks (Christou, 2006; Setrana & Tonah, 2016), transnational capital transfer (L. K. Wang, 2016; Waters, 2005) and socio-economic, political impacts of return migrants on source countries (X. Hao *et al.*, 2017; Sun, 2013; Q. Wang *et al.*, 2015). Existing scholarship has attached much importance to returnees' experiences of work, because it not only discloses the identity and

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[35] Here I mean full adulthood in the sense of Chinese culture rather than in legal terms. There is a word in Chinese, *cheng jia li ye*, as a criteria of full adulthood, which means getting married and establishing one's own career. In this vein, finding a job and starting one's career become essential for Chinese youth to gain full adulthood.

belonging of returned migrants, but also contributes to the discussion of global talent circulation (so-called "brain drain" and "brain return" are frequently seen in studies on skilled returnees to developing countries). However, work should not be simply understood as a process merely involving the politics of identity, capital transfer and socio-economic contribution; rather, a range of everyday embodied practices, material encounters, social relations and emotional perception consist of overseas returnees' experiences of work. All these everyday details deserve further academic investigations. In this chapter, I primarily examine participants' everyday experiences in the workplace and/or wider labour market.

4.2 Job-hunting

Job-hunting is an essential step for overseas returned students to obtain a job, gain financial independence and achieve career development. Among my participants, there were very few who had secured a job before they moved back to China. Given my fieldwork period, August 2018 to August 2019, job-hunting was an everyday practice for most participants who returned to China after early 2018; for other participants who returned in earlier years, job-hunting was a past memory or future plan. The ethnographic nature of my fieldwork situates my discussion in a specific social, spatial and temporal context and reveals the emotional aspects of job-hunting which benefit an overall comprehension of overseas returned students' experiences of job-hunting.

4.2.1 Valuable/devalued overseas qualifications

> *After checking all work opportunities, I found something interesting, that none of the placements announced a preference for an overseas degree. Most requirements about qualification were Bachelor's/Master's degree or above even without requirement of 985/211 universities[36]. […] I pretended to be a job applicant and talked to an HR manager of a famous sports brand who was looking for some*

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[36] Project 985 and Project 211 were two university development projects launched by the Ministry of Education, China. Project 985 was similar to the Russell Group in the UK, which contained 39 universities in China. Project 211 was similar but with lower university ranking. There were 112 universities in Project 211. Both the projects have been replaced by the Double First Class University Plan since 2017, but employers and students are still used to use 985/211 as a judgement of education background.

sales staff. I asked him whether I would have an advantage because of an overseas degree in this job application. He slightly shook his head and told me that they did not care about university and major very much. They just wanted the most suitable person for the company as well as this position. For example, working as a member of sales staff in a sports company, one should have a passion about sport, be active, outgoing and aggressive. Personal competence and personality were more important than educational qualifications. (Field diary, April 2019)

This quotation was derived from my observations at a career fair. After checking the eligibility of positions, I felt a strong anxiety and sense of uncertainty, as I realised overseas qualification hardly brought me any outstanding advantages in a current Chinese career fair. Earlier literature relating to Chinese contexts suggests that Chinese employers favour foreign graduates while recruiting (Zweig *et al.*, 2004). Such a preference was rarely witnessed in my research. As suggested by the career fair described above and other career fairs I observed, employers were not concerned about the overseas diploma itself, but whether the personal competence and personality of job applicants met the demand of positions. One important reason why overseas qualifications had been valued in earlier years was that overseas returned students were thought to have fluent foreign language, transnational networks, appreciated knowledge of the world and some key social skills (Zweig *et al.*, 2004). However, more recent research notes that Chinese employers had gradually lost their interest in overseas returned students and doubted the quality of overseas qualifications which were conferred by second- or third-tier educational institutions overseas (Y. Huang & Kuah-Pearce, 2015). The doubt towards second- and third-tier overseas qualifications seemed to expand to all overseas qualifications, as participants who graduated from world-leading universities also encountered the devaluation of their overseas qualification.

Many job applicants in the observed job fairs sensed negative emotions, like anxiety and uncertainty as I did. Several observations at job fairs, including those opened to all applicants and ones specifically for overseas returned students[37], indicated that the devaluation of overseas qualification influenced

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[37] Some job fairs for overseas returned students are organised by governmental departments as a part of talent recruitment policies; some are organised by overseas universities to increase the

the emotional condition of job applicants. More anxiety and uncertainty were observed in career fairs for overseas returned students. The following three excerpts were derived from my observation at a career fair in September 2018:

> *After waiting for nearly half an hour, I finally entered the fair. The room was full of people. Even no space for standing. Nearly impossible to get through the crowd. Many people stretched their necks and eagerly wanted to read the recruitment instructions at each booth. I guess it was actually in vain. From my standpoint, what I saw were merely the names of companies and heads of other people. I was unable to see what positions were available. Not to mention the detailed requirements. I tried to join a queue, but I found I totally had no idea which company would be the destination of the line. It seemed like many people just picked up a line randomly. Anyway, companies in the same industry were next to each other and perhaps the job opportunities were similar. (Field diary, September 2018)*

On stepping into the career fair, I immediately perceived an atmosphere full of anxiety, eagerness and uncertainty. The rush for job applicants, vain attempts to acquire job information, blind job application and a range of body language (such as stretching their necks) clearly suggested the nervousness of overseas returned students. The crowded surroundings and ubiquitous discussions about job-hunting further enhanced the negative emotions in the space of the career fair.

> *[…] I found an empty booth in an inconspicuous corner. There were several chairs inside. I took one chair and wanted to rest for a while. Something interesting happened during my 10-minute rest. Two job applicants approached and handed their CV to me and asked what job opportunity I was providing. I was surprised, because it was a completely unoccupied booth without any company logo and recruitment poster, just a table and a few chairs. (Field diary, September 2018)*

Overseas returned students might perceive the devaluation of overseas qualifications through the publicity and their actual experiences of job-hunting, which caused greater worry about unemployment. The worry drove job

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employment rate of Chinese graduates and further expand their Chinese market; and a few are organised by commercial companies to make profits in the context of increasing overseas returned students in recent years.

applicants to be so eager to grasp any opportunity of job application, as the misunderstanding in this quotation suggested.

> *[…] When I was leaving, I found a company had started reviewing résumés of applicants. Human resource staff ranked each résumé with various numbers of stars. I guess more stars meant more satisfaction. All the ranked résumés were scattered on the table without concealing names. What if someone saw his or her own résumé was ranked with only one star? Full of failure maybe. It was ridiculous but helpless to see one or two pages of résumé fully representing a human. (Field diary, September 2018)*

While HR staff were doing their regular jobs of selecting job interviewees, the selection was supposed to be done in an office rather than in public spaces like the career fair. Such a scene brought extra nervousness and helplessness to the atmosphere of the career fair. Previous research on job-hunting of overseas returned students rarely suggested that returnees suffered so much negative emotion. Rather, although earlier returnees admitted the challenges involved in getting a satisfying job, they usually expressed self-confidence and appreciation of overseas education (J. Hao & Welch, 2012). Neither this confidence nor appreciation was witnessed in my participants.

To be noted, overseas qualifications were still valued if related experience could match demands of local employers (Sun, 2013). Si (Female/21-25/Canada/ Shanghainese/higher education)[38] was one of the few participants who had secured a satisfactory job before actually returning to Shanghai. She aimed for administrative positions in higher education institutes which were in charge of international issues.

> *I applied for only two universities. When I submitted the application, I knew I met every requirement of the position and I definitely would be the most suitable one among all applicants. As expected, I got both offers! The two jobs are quite similar as the two universities are recently established as China-foreign joint universities. They need someone with perfect English skills to work as residence assistants and help them manage international students. You know, Chinese universities do not have such positions. So they hardly found one with related work experience. I studied English literature in university and then*

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[38] The descriptors are respectively gender, age group, country/district of overseas education, whether they are Shanghainese and the industry they were working in.

researched international education from a sociological perspective in Canada. And in the last three years in Canada, I worked as a part-time residence assistant or other similar jobs in the Canadian university. In terms of English, professional knowledge and work experience, no local graduates could be more competitive than me; there were very few overseas Chinese students who had worked in such positions. All my colleagues in Canada were Canadians. (interview with Si, August 2019)

I was deeply impressed by Si's pride, confidence and happiness when I conducted this interview. Her language skills, professional knowledge of international education and work experience in student management, which were acquired in Canada, perfectly matched the demands of domestic universities and eventually made her successful in job-hunting. Qi (Female/26-30/Hong Kong/non-Shanghainese/higher education) had some similar experiences. She successfully got a job in a top university in Shanghai because of her knowledge and work experience in international project management. The two successful cases suggested that valuable overseas experiences in local employers' viewpoints imply not only decent qualifications and satisfactory soft skills, but also a great match to local labour markets. This finding highlights the translocality of the labour market and the importance to embed transnational capital into the local labour market (Beaverstock, 2002, 2005).

Even after job-hunting, the judgement over overseas qualification would consistently exist in all participants' everyday experiences of work. Zhu (Female/26-30/Singapore/non-Shanghainese/bank) gained her master's degree majoring in financial engineering from Singapore and returned in 2017 when Internet finance was to develop rapidly in China. It was not hard for her to get a job in a state-owned bank. In that year, her boss decided to increase the percentage of overseas returnees in the team, as her boss thought that overseas returned students with world-wide vision and good knowledge of the global financial market could contribute to the development of Internet finance business in the bank. In other words, Zhu's success in job-hunting was also due to the match to local employer's demand. I asked her whether her boss or the bank still valued overseas qualifications as before. She laughed out loud,

Zhu: Hahaha, it is really funny. My boss really regrets recruiting us [overseas returnees] into his team. He told me this in person. We did a

good job when the project just started. Not bad now actually. But my boss found that compared to local graduates, we do not work hard. Never work overtime. Go home immediately after working hours. So we finish tasks relatively slower than local graduates.
Me: Will you be worried about being fired?
Zhu: Fired? No no. It is totally out of the question. Although my boss truly regrets it, we are friends now and that is why he told me so frankly. He was quite helpless, haha. We also indeed help our team. But it is true that he recruits fewer overseas returnees and more local graduates. (Interview with Zhu, April 2019)

In her everyday work, Zhu and other overseas returnees did not fully comply with practice norms in local workplaces (such as "*Never work overtime.*"), while her boss hoped employees to work as hard as possible in order to maximise market performance. That was a mismatch between the supply and demand side of the labour market. Thus, he downgraded his valuation of overseas students. The changing attitude of employers indicated that overseas qualifications had been a tag of overseas returned students in the career market. No matter whether they were hunting for a job, the judgement over overseas qualifications was likely to be involved in their everyday experiences of work. The judgement may bring extra stress and negative emotions to overseas returned students.

However, Zhu's narrative did not express much worry about the long-term judgement. She talked in a happy, relaxed tone, because she believed that her friendship, or *guanxi*, with her boss could release her from the risk of unemployment, despite the possibility that her future promotion might be influenced. The refusal to work overtime and the trust in *guanxi* suggested that Zhu actively negotiated between overseas and Chinese cultural habits in her everyday work rather than chose any single side.

4.2.2 Challenging job-hunting since 2018

Job-hunting as an important economic activity takes place within specific social, economic and temporal contexts. The prospect of recent macroeconomic development, contemporary economic policies, international trade and even key industrial events can have an impact on recruitment and job-hunting. From early

2018 onwards, which exactly covered my fieldwork period, the Sino-American trade war, which I have deliberated in section 3.2.2 regarding temporal context of the thesis, had brought great challenges to the economic development of China, particularly service industries which concentrate many overseas returnees, and further impacted the business activity and employment needs of companies. However, existing literature on return migrants' experiences of work has largely overlooked the influence of temporal contexts. In this project, there were nine participants returning to China after early 2018, most of whom had experienced really stressful job-hunting for months and perceived fiercely negative emotions while participating in my research. Meanwhile, two participants who returned in earlier years quit their previous job in 2018 and joined the group of job applicants. Focusing on the job-hunting experiences of the eleven participants, I am interrogating how temporal context impacts their everyday job-hunting and related emotions.

Xia (Female/21-25/UK/non-Shanghainese/bank) graduated from her Master's degree in finance from Britain in August 2018. She expressed great desperation, disappointment, anger, regret and other negative emotions towards her job-hunting. In our interview in October 2018, she said agitatedly,

> *Job-hunting is surprisingly hard! You must mention it in your thesis! My friend, who was one year above me in British university, said it was hard last year. He came back to Shanghai as well and spent three months getting a job. When I just returned (in August), I thought, "Well, just carried on for three months". But, now! I have returned for three months! No offer! And even very few formal job interviews! I just got an internship job a couple of weeks ago. It is so hard. When can I finish these difficult days? There are so many times when I feel I am going to explode the next second. (interview with Xia, October 2018)*

She nearly cried when she told me her job-hunting experiences. The emotions towards job-hunting even impacted her emotions towards overseas study. She did not regret having her one-year overseas experience, which made her independent and socially mature; but she did regret getting an overseas degree, because "*employers prefer master's degrees from 985 universities rather than almost worthless one-year British Master's degree*". Given Xia's fierce anxiety

and sadness, I had to leave my tentative interview questions for a while and took time to comfort her.

The devaluation of overseas qualifications has become worse since 2018. Ma (Male/26-30/Singapore/Shanghainese/IT) wanted to move to Shenzhen, where his girlfriend lived and where many leading Internet technology companies are located, and planned to quit his job in Shanghai in late 2018. He graduated from a top computing science department, which was quite popular among these Internet companies in Shenzhen. At the beginning, he was quite confident about the job-hunting given his educational background and work experience. However, he noted very soon that Internet companies had cut down their work vacancies enormously and that some companies nearly shut down recruitment, which was observed by other participants working in Internet companies as well, like Wang (Male/21-25/UK/non-Shanghainese/IT). After failing several times in job interviews, Ma joked with helplessness, "*maybe because interviewers think I am a hopeless fool*" and further explained:

> *Actually I can do this job. Definitely qualified. But if there were other applicants who were more suitable and more experienced than me, my failure was not totally out of expectation. In previous years, many people who graduated from my program entered into these companies and did similar jobs as I applied for. But these companies just chopped down job placements this year. Fewer jobs, similar number of job applicants. And so more competition. Employers also raise their criteria of recruitment. Thus I am not good enough in their current opinion. (interview with Ma, January 2019)*

Given his calm personality, Ma did not feel much sense of failure, because he knew it was not his fault but an inevitable consequence of increasing returned students and decreasing human resource demand of employers. But he was still disappointed and sad about several rejections.

Although local graduates also encountered shrinking work opportunities, overseas returnees faced more challenges (Z. Du *et al.*, 2021; Zhai & Gao, 2021). I learnt from some applicants at career fairs that employers might prefer local graduates at this moment, because their pay was comparatively lower than overseas returnees. Moreover, due to the negative trend of international trade,

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some companies aimed to replace the international market with the internal market. Thus, they needed someone who was more familiar with local society rather than with international experience. In other words, the contemporary changes of local labour demands caused an inferior devaluation of overseas experiences.

However, overseas education sometimes allowed overseas returned students to have more career path options even in difficult times. Zi (Male/21-25/non-Shanghainese/academia) returned from Germany in March 2018. Initially he attempted to find a job in the vehicle industry, but the macro-economic contexts and previous key industrial events[39] heavily affected the operation of German vehicle enterprises in China. The industrial situation exposed Zi to a dilemma – most Chinese vehicle companies preferred a local or American education background while Chinese branches of German vehicle companies nearly shut down their recruitment. He spent seven months hunting for a job and was offered very few job interviews, in all of which he was unsuccessful. He perceived a strong sense of failure and self-doubt at that time, which had changed his everyday life. He stopped meeting friends and locked himself at home.

> *What can I talk about with my friends? When they talk about how good or terrible their work is, should I say "I have not got a job"? The more times I speak it out loud, the more mental burden I perceive. Other people cannot help me to get a job. (Interview with Zi, March 2019)*

Although it was possible to receive emotional support and even useful job information from friends, Zi was too embarrassed to mention his unemployment, which was understandable given his decent education background and perfect academic performance in the past. Finally, he decided to apply for a PhD in China in October 2018. While employers in industries attach less value to overseas degrees, Chinese academia still thought highly of overseas education experience. He received a PhD offer from a top university in November 2018.

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[39] For example, the Volkswagen emissions scandal. Volkswagen was issued a notice by the US government because of the intentional use of problematic emissions software problems, which could enable its vehicles to falsely meet US regulatory standards of vehicles' emission. Later, Volkswagen vehicles were recalled on a large scale in the US, the EU, China, India and other countries.

When I congratulated him, he appeared rather indifferent, saying "*well, just an end of everything*". For Zi, the PhD offer was far from the ideal result of job-hunting, but he had to resign himself to the reality that job-hunting had become extraordinarily hard in 2018.

All eleven participants who were searching for a job in 2018 had been situated in a limbo status full of uncertainty and precariousness, which possibly created significant embodied tensions and emotional burdens in their daily lives (Brun & Fábos, 2015; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2013). The limbo status was resulted from the increasingly competitive Chinese labour market, the devaluation of overseas qualifications as well as recent macro socio-economic contexts. Meanwhile, the unexpectedly extended time waiting for a job further imposed a negative impact on labour value represented by overseas qualifications (Ho, 2021). From this perspective, the limbo status seemed like a vicious circle trapping overseas returned students, which involved a set of embodied struggles and negative emotions (e.g., disappointment, sadness, anxiety and resignation). Participants had displayed their agency and carried out a series of actions to break the hard limbo period, like study and the employment of *guanxi* which will be respectively discussed in next two sections.

4.2.3 Study

While existing literature has discussed the learning activities of student migrants, post-diploma study has rarely been included in the discussion, which is partially because once migrants graduated and started full-time employment, study becomes less outstanding in their everyday life. However, in my fieldwork, studying had constituted an important part of overseas returned students' everyday experiences particularly when they sought for jobs and attempted to improve career prospects.

As job-hunting usually involved a variety of written/oral examinations, participants who were looking for a job had to review or learn professional knowledge, background information of a specific industry or company and

necessary examination skills. In the initial talk with Xia, I learnt her experiences of studying for job-hunting.

> *Xia attended a written examination in Pudong this afternoon. We decided to meet in a shopping mall close to her residence after the written examination. We had dinner together and then I interviewed her in a café. During the dinner, I asked her how to prepare for these examinations and interviews. She told me that the preparation is mainly to review the professional knowledge learned before, gain industrial background knowledge, and also to see the experience shared by other applicants on the Internet. The preparation process is not only a review or learning of knowledge, but also a process of gaining familiarity with the Chinese market. However, it is not easy for Xia. She was also worried about the arrangement of her everyday schedule. Her internship work, examination and interviews have occupied most of her time and she only had very limited time to prepare for these exams/interviews. I can feel that she was under strong pressure. (October 2018, field diary)*

During this initial talk, I clearly observed that Xia suffered from anxiety, worry, upset and slight sadness as I mentioned in the section 4.2.2. All these negative emotions were not caused merely by the general process of job-hunting, but also the preparations for examinations and related intensive schedules. For Xia, the greatest challenge during examination preparation was not reviewing/learning professional knowledge, which she just learnt a short while ago in university, but the acquisition of Chinese industrial information. Xia's previous experiences in China and her overseas experiences did not offer her many opportunities to learn about the Chinese market. She felt extra upset when she found that she had to study the Chinese market in a couple of months. Xia assigned it to the weakness of overseas returned students, as domestic graduates would have had plenty of time to prepare job-hunting and know the local market, which echoes her interview excerpt quoted in last section, "*employers prefer master's degrees from 985 universities rather than almost worthless one-year British Master's degree*" (interview with Xia, October 2018) and my observation on several career fair.

While Xia studied particularly for on-going job-hunting, many other participants who had worked as full-time employees attended examinations of professional certificates for the interest of long-term career prospects. Over the year of my fieldwork, Song had registered for examinations for several professional certificates, including Chartered Financial Analyst, English-Chinese Interpreter (Intermediate level) and the Securities Qualification Certificate. Song did not need these certificates in her job as an administrator in a hotel, but she sought career opportunities in other industries (her motivation of changing jobs will be explained in the section 4.3.3). She attended different examinations every four or five months; thus, study had become one important activity in her daily leisure time. Sometimes, Song and I studied together in a quiet café, in which she went through examination materials and I worked for my PhD research. If an examination was approaching, she would spend more time on study, even on the way to work (see Fig. 4.1)[40].

29 March 2019 7.51am
Song: I am on the way to work. Because I will attend an examination tomorrow, I am practising now.
Song: [Fig. 4.2]
Song: [Fig. 4.3]

Fig. 4.1 Screenshot-1 of Song's Photo-diary (Picture by author)

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[40] Song's photo-diary was not in the format of a document. Instead, she chose to update me with her status every two or three hours on the recorded day through WeChat. I saved the screenshot of her regular update on that day as her photo-diary. In Fig. 4.1 and other screenshots of Song's photo-diary quoted in this thesis, the left-hand person with the mosaic profile photo and white balloon was Song and the right-hand one with the green balloon was me.

Fig. 4.2 Song's metro trip to work (Photo by Song) Fig. 4.3 The screenshot of Song's practise (Picture by Song)

Different from Xia who felt strong upset and nervousness from study, Song displayed a rather relaxed state of mind when she prepared for various examinations. Xia's examinations directly determined the results of her job-hunting; however, even if Song failed some examinations, the result would not affect her current work and she could register for the examinations again. The limited impact of examinations on the present had made Song felt less stressful while studying.

The obtainment of professional certificates were encouraged by the competitive career fair in Shanghai. More professional certificates usually meant more advantages in labour market. As Bao reflected, "*[…]Other job applicants have various professional certificates, but you don't have any, that means you lost some advantages." (August 2019, interview with Bao)*. Especially for overseas returned students, domestic professional certificates could be employed as a powerful supplement to the devalued overseas qualification in their job-hunting. In this vein, obtaining professional certificates might be a reluctant choice and evoked negative emotions:

> *When I was in university, many of my classmates had started obtaining professional certificates. But I loathed these examinations at the time. It's useless, right? Can't really learn anything. So I refused to sit for any examinations for professional certificates. Now although I also dislike it very much, I start to take the exams. It is still useless, time-consuming*

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and annoying in my mind. But there is no other choice. (August 2019, interview with Bao)

Bao was very proud of her overseas diploma, which she described as "*true learning*". When she noted the devaluation of overseas diplomas and had to obtain professional certificates which she thought as useless, it was no surprise to witness her strong disappointment and helplessness towards related study and examinations. Although Song and Bao took professional certificates for a similar purpose of career development, they expressed rather distinct emotions towards such examinations.

The prevalence of professional certificates is rather unique in the Chinese labour market and was seldom experienced during their overseas study. Thus attending professional certificate examinations was a rather fresh and perhaps culturally shocking experience for many overseas returned students, if they did not attend similar examinations before going overseas. Studying for a local professional certificate was also a process to acquire knowledge of the Chinese labour market and wider economic landscape. To some extent, these studies and examinations could be supposed to be a process of social adaptation, which could last for a long time after they move back. The distinct emotions between Song and Bao represented two different mindsets during everyday life after backward movement. Song appeared more open-minded and more willing to follow the game rules of the Chinese market while Bao was struggling between her personal preference and the trend of the market.

After overseas returned students moved back and started full-time work in China, they had to adapt themselves to the value system of the Chinese labour market. Study has become a necessary process to secure a job as well as an important step to improve their long-term career prospects. In this process, hunting for a job and improving career prospects were not merely economic actions, but also a socio-cultural adaptation process after moving back. The stress of securing job positions and the mixed emotions regarding social adaptation overlapped during job-hunting.

4.2.4 *Guanxi*

Social relations play an important role in job-hunting for return migrants, which helped returned students to acquire knowledge of the local labour market and make capital transfers across national boundaries (Hui, 2015; Setrana & Tonah, 2016). As suggested by many studies in the Chinese context (Cao, 2008; Y.-C. Chen, 2008), I am going to use *guanxi* (social relationship in Chinese) instead of social relationship. *Guanxi* in Chinese emphasises the interest exchanges and friendship more than the English phrase. Sometimes, *guanxi* involves actions which break usual procedures, regulations or even laws. Earlier literature suggested that *guanxi* represents a set of Chinese cultural practices and behaviour codes which returnees have been less familiar with (Cao, 2008; Sun, 2013). Dealing with *guanxi* is to re-adapt returnees to local Chinese society, which has been a great challenge for skilled Chinese returnees (X. Hao *et al.*, 2017). Given that overseas returnees, who have stayed overseas for longer, are described as victims of the culture of *guanxi* in previous literature (*e.g.*, Y.-C. Chen, 2008; Zweig *et al.*, 2020), my research suggests a different finding, that many participants benefited from *guanxi*, at least in job-hunting.

The most common kind of *guanxi* I observed was alumni *guanxi*. Alumni *guanxi* were usually established during overseas study and expanded to China alongside alumni's return journeys. As most overseas Chinese students treated overseas education as a kind of vocational training rather than a process to obtain knowledge (Beech, 2019), they usually worked in the same industry if they graduated from the same department. Thus senior returnees who moved back in earlier years could share their work experience, job information and internal news to junior returnees through alumni *guanxi*. Weng got her job in a famous American bank through her senior alumna's recommendation,

> *When I was about to start job-hunting, a senior alumna contacted me. She told me that she was going to quit her current position and the bank asked her for any recommended applicant. She asked me whether I was interested in her job and perhaps to take over her position. Actually I was not very close to this senior. I just did her a small favour before her graduation. I did not expect she would think of me when she needed to recommend someone for the job. I was lucky and appreciated my senior very much. (Interview with Weng, November 2018)*

Thanks to the recommendation of her senior alumna, Weng's job-hunting went rather smoothly. She told me more details of her job application in a peaceful and pleasant tone, which was rather different from other struggling job applicants. In Weng's case, alumni *guanxi* was social capital acquired overseas. Her job-hunting was a successful transfer of overseas social capital to local economic capital.

Alumni *guanxi* also provided great emotional support to junior returnees who were struggling in job-hunting. The following is a quote from my field diary on a career fair which was particularly open to alumni from some British universities.

> *Obviously many attendees knew each other. They casually chatted in the waiting area. I could hear their chat, which was mostly related to thesis, the choice of work, the choice of living city, personal life and so on. Although the chat topics seemed serious, their tone and expression were quite relaxed and pleasant. These chats were like that of friends exchanging news of everyday life with each other. Because of friendship, the waiting area was less obviously filled with anxiety and nervousness than usual career fairs. (Field diary, September 2018)*
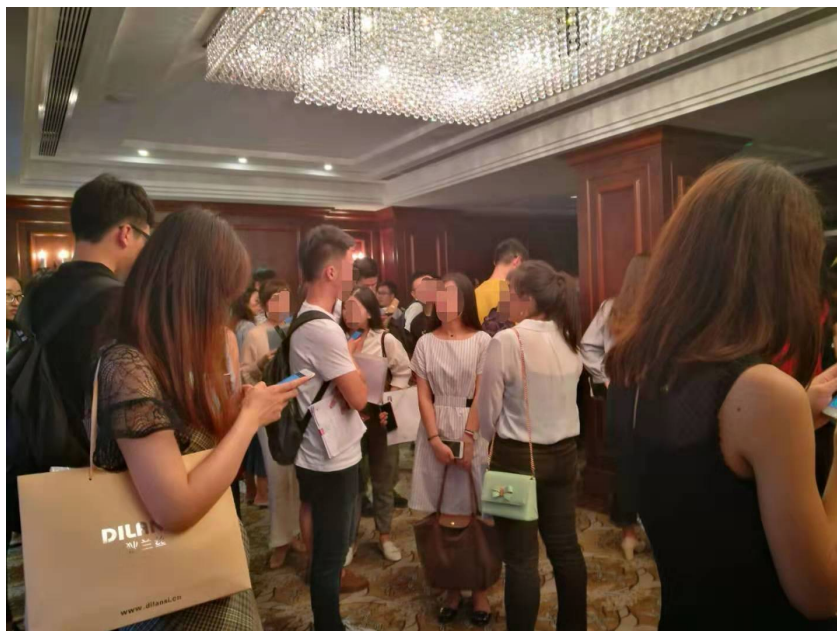
Fig. 4.4 Waiting area of the career fair in September 2018 (Photo by author)

Such a noisy but relaxed atmosphere in the waiting area was a sharp distinction with the silent but anxious waiting areas in other career fairs I observed. The usual scene was that while job applicants queued in front of the entrance, they

checked their printed résumés and other documents again and again and seldom talked with other applicants. Their nervousness was clearly displayed through repetitive document checks and serious looks. In the alumni career fair, the friendship between alumni seemed to provide great emotional support and comfort to each job applicant.

Some participants relied on the *guanxi* of their family in job-hunting. Compared to appreciation and happiness displayed in alumni *guanxi*, participants expressed a mix of emotion towards employing *guanxi* owned by their family. Zhou was annoyed by her unsuccessful job-hunting but still expressed a strong resistance towards employing her familial *guanxi*.

> *This was my last job interview. If I fail again, I really cannot find a job by myself. Then I have to ask my uncle to give me a job in his or his friend's company. My god… What can I do? I will be getting unemployed. I do not want my family to do me a favour. But if I do not, I truly will be unemployed. If so, I have to rely on my parents' financial support and become a scrounger of my family; or my family gives me a job, that is also a scrounger. I do not want to still rely on my family after graduation, that sounds like my education is in vain. (interview with Zhou, December 2018)*

Zhou had a good relationship with her family. Her resistance to her family's *guanxi* was because she was seeking overall independence after graduation and took a successful career launch as a symbol of independence. In terms of capital transfer, Zhou's family invested economic capital in her overseas education and Zhou returned with social, cultural and symbolic capital acquired overseas. Due to the devaluation of overseas qualifications and the hard economic period, Zhou failed to transfer overseas capital to develop her career in Shanghai. So she was in a dilemma about her career – if she refused the *guanxi* of her family, she would continue to be unemployed and reliant on the financial support of her family; if she accepted the *guanxi* of her family, her career was not fully independent in her mind. No matter which options she chose, she perceived a strong sense of failure and resignation. To some extent, the dilemma derived from the change in Zhou's sense of identity from dependent child-student to independent adult-worker in the family (Gill, 2010).

Yao was more open-minded towards using family-endowed *guanxi*. She studied music education in the UK, where she knew and fell int love with her husband. After graduation, she moved to Shanghai with her husband; "*The only reason why I moved to Shanghai was my husband. I had no special emotion towards Shanghai but he loves the city very much.*" As the system of music education in China was distinct from the UK, Yao failed to work as a music teacher. Finally, her father-in-law helped her to get a job as an editor in a new media company owned by his friend. She talked about her experience of job-hunting,

> *To be honest, I envy someone like you who has your own beloved career. So wonderful for your life! But I am just thinking of it. Action is stronger than words but I am bad at action. When I was a student, I was terrible at studying; now that I am working, I just muddle through. My family was more serious about my work than me. My father-in-law helped me to find this job. Family is the centre of my life. Get a job with a salary and do not be a housewife. That would be enough for me. (Interview with Yao, November 2018)*

To be noted, although Yao accepted *guanxi* and welcomed it as a shortcut for job-hunting, the emotions she displayed were mostly calmness and indifference. Yao was not a career-driven person like Zhou, so that was the reason why Yao did not hold such negative emotions towards *guanxi* in job-hunting.

Guanxi could help participants to secure a job in China, that was to transfer overseas human capital they obtained overseas to local social capital. Such transfers of social capital were presented through exchanging job information and providing mutual emotional support between people in *guanxi*. The *guanxi* as transnational/local social capital could be transferred with other capitals. Most of my participants benefited from *guanxi* because they or their family was able to possess *guanxi* and employ it as a part of capital transfer. However, overseas returned students held a mix of emotions towards *guanxi* in job-hunting. If the *guanxi* was acquired by the participants themselves, it proved their personal competence and helped them to realise their ideal life, positive emotions were invoked; if the *guanxi* represented a failure of participants in job-hunting, negative emotions could be expected.

4.2.5 Discussion

As the return migration of my participants was greatly career-driven, job-hunting constituted an essential part of life after returning to China. To some extent, it was job-hunting that started participants' new life chapter after moving back. Job-hunting was not only a process of getting a job, but also a process of transnational capital transfer and a process of settlement into the wider Chinese society. Section 4.2 discussed four aspects of job-hunting, including the judgement of overseas qualification, challenging socio-economic contexts, study and *guanxi*, and investigated participants' emotional responses to their job-hunting.

Existing literature suggests that overseas study and post-study return involve a series of capital transfers. Their family had invested economic capital into their overseas education and helped them to gain symbolic capital (the overseas degree) and related social, cultural capitals (professional knowledge, cultural knowledge, social networks and other skills); then, students move back to the homeland with overseas capital and hope to exchange overseas capital for local economic, social and symbolic capitals for the purpose of personal development and familial social reproduction (Brooks & Waters, 2011). However, my research suggested a failed capital transfer after return for some participants, resulting from the rising competition of local graduates and the devaluation of overseas qualifications. The failure resulted in difficulties in job-hunting and career development below expectations. My participants responded to the failure with a series of negative emotions, like Xia's desperation, Zi's self-doubt and anxiety I observed in career fairs. While job-hunting would stop at some point, transnational capital transfer and related judgements on overseas qualifications likely continued to exist in everyday life, which might evoke negative emotions of overseas returned students.

The rapid economic growth of China in recent decades has been supposed as an important context of returnees' job-hunting (J. Hao & Welch, 2012; Ma & Pan, 2015). The argument was reasonable in earlier years, but does not meet the contemporary context of China since 2018 very effectively. The slowing growth rate of the Chinese economy and Sino-American trade war interfered with the

usual transnational capital transfer in job-hunting of overseas returned students. My participants who had job-hunting experiences since 2018 expressed more negative emotions due to the greater challenges in job-hunting as well as the socio-economic situation which was totally out of their control.

Various *guanxi* were embedded in everyday practices of job-hunting. My participants mostly benefited from personal or family-endowed *guanxi* in job-hunting, but they held a mix of emotions rather than purely positive emotions towards it. The kinds of emotions were upon whether *guanxi* proved their personal competence and whether *guanxi* brought them an ideal career-life. My research went against the argument that overseas returnees were usually bad at dealing with *guanxi* and held a rather hostile attitude towards *guanxi* (J. Hao *et al.*, 2016). Compared to overseas returnees in earlier years, my participants were more open-minded towards using *guanxi* in job-hunting, while they also emphasised personal efforts and personal achievement at the same time.

For most participants, job-hunting was their first step to re-adapt themselves to Chinese society. If the flight to China was the physical return journey, job-hunting launched the return process into Chinese society and cultures, which was embedded in their everyday life in Shanghai. The process evoked a variety of emotions. Although negative emotions were more obvious than positive ones in this section, overseas education still brings some advantages to participants. The mix of emotions not only suggested the success and struggles of job-hunting, but also disclosed participants' attitudes towards overseas education. On the one hand, they appreciated the social capital acquired overseas; on the other hand, they were disappointed to see the devaluation of overseas qualifications in Chinese career fairs.

4.3 Emotions in everyday work

Most of my participants had completed job-hunting and had been in full-time employment while they were participating in this research. This section focuses on their everyday experiences of work and related emotions. Existing literature has discussed return migrants' experiences of work, particularly in terms of

cultural adaptation in the workplace and the contribution of returnees' work. In this section, I am going to further related debates through bringing everydayness and emotionality of work into discussion. I find that it is hard to categorise diverse experiences into several types. Given that emotions, which were evoked in everyday work, could be identified and categorised more easily, I use different kinds of emotions or emotional situations to lead the discussion in this section, namely passions and enjoyment, indifference, struggles, and anger and desperation.

4.3.1 Passions and enjoyment

The strong interest in work content aroused participants' passion for their work. Ma (Male/26-30/Singapore/Shanghainese/IT) was appointed by his company to help in a national exhibition in later 2018. At a weekday dinner, he explained his job duties in the project.

> *I am responsible for testing a software that predicts the flow of people. You know, everyone uses mobile phones nowadays. So we can estimate the population in the exhibition venue through calculating the number of active mobile signals. Moreover, through the change of mobile signals in past hours and at this time on other dates, we can predict how the flow of people will change in the next few hours. This will help organisers to manage the flow of people and avoid any safety accidents. This is actually a process of machine learning. Before the official opening of the exhibition, we run the program according to the simulation scenarios which are built by the telecommunication company. My job is to compare the results of the machine learning program and the "actual" results of the simulated scene, and constantly fine-tune and optimise the programme. We call this a "training" programme. This process is very interesting. You know that I was studying machine learning theories in Singapore, and now I have the opportunity to apply those theoretical things in practice. It is really amazing. The exhibition is really a rare opportunity to test the machine learning program, as it can provide such a great amount of data. (Interview with Ma, November 2018)*

In this interview, Ma spent a lot of time introducing machine learning, which was wonderful and precise in his mind, to me, a totally layperson of computing sciences. Although I could not fully comprehend these theoretical issues, I clearly perceived his unquestioned passion for machine learning through his

tireless promotion of machine learning and his excited tone. His work matched the long-standing interest in machine learning which was stimulated in his postgraduate study in Singapore. The interesting work content made him enjoy the job very much.

Participants' past experiences in China as well as overseas could shape their interest in certain work. Tang (Female/26-30/Denmark/Shanghainese/Embassy) majored in European Studies. Unlike most Shanghainese participants, her first job after moving back to China was in Beijing, which was in the publicity department of an international organisation with headquarters in Europe. Her duty was to review Chinese news about Europe every day and submit the summary to her boss. She described the job as "*not a job, but something which I was in favour of and which I had great motivations to do*". Her passionate and energetic narrative about everyday work was rather unusual among my participants. She explained why she accepted a job in Beijing,

> *This is a superb job opportunity! I wanted to work in the media and I also want to do a job about international relations. And it would be perfect if I can apply my past experiences in European studies to work. Very few positions can satisfy these conditions at the same time. When I was hunting for a job, I did not have any clear goals. But when I had the interview for this position, I was determined that I must do this job. I had pleasant talks with the team leader in the interview. Work content is attractive and the team leader is very handsome, haha. [After starting work] I enjoyed reading various news every day. It was really interesting to see how China views Europe and how Europe views China. (interview with Tang, August 2019)*

Before she went overseas for her Master's degree, her education background in global history stimulated her interest in international relations. Her travelling and living experiences in Europe increased her interest in European affairs. Further, the actual experiences of work further enhanced her enthusiasm in such work. Although she left the job in Beijing after only six months, the passion for such kind of work had made her determined to develop her career in international relations. In her words, "*If I cannot do what I like, what is the point of my life?*"

However, a strong passion for work did not mean that participants would persist in a particular job. While Ma and Tang held a strong passion for their work, both of them resigned. There were multiple reasons why Ma quit his job. First, as I mentioned in the last section, he wanted to move to Shenzhen and be reunited with his girlfriend; second, he did not like the company, which Ma charged with chaotic management, and he was dissatisfied with his salary. As Ma told me, his monthly salary was about 12,000 Chinese Yuan, which was below the average monthly salary of similar positions that was around 15,000 to 20,000 Chinese Yuan. As for Tang, she enjoyed the work, the organisation and established a rather close, friendly relationship with her colleagues, but she could not get used to the everyday life in Beijing.

> *Me: How was your life in Beijing?*
> *Tang: Very terrible. [in a very firm tone] Otherwise, what am I doing here in Shanghai? When I left, there was a vacancy in my team. My boss and all my colleagues thought I could be promoted to that position. But at that time, I wanted to go back to Shanghai. I am regretting it now, really. I liked the job and the team very much, and got along well with everyone.*
> *Me: Why did you dislike life in Beijing?*
> *Tang: I did not like the food in Beijing. If I did not cook by myself, there was no food I wanted to eat. But most of the time, I dined out or used a food delivery service. Terrible food and bad mood every day. (interview with Tang, August 2019)*

Tang was not the only Shanghainese participant who suggested it was hard to adapt to life in northern China. Her dislike towards material life in Beijing and further resignation hinted at the intertwinement of different aspects of everyday experiences. Despite the attractive work content, the material condition of job, like salary and food, spoiled some participants' enjoyment of the work and drove them to resign, which resounded researchers' call for attention to everyday life of skilled migrants beyond workplaces (Yeoh & Huang, 2011). Moreover, Tang's life in Beijing and Shanghai denied migrants' movement to homelands as a process of returning home, as although within China, she hardly adapted to the stranger socio-cultural sphere and made a new everyday life in Beijing. The unsuccessful embeddedness in Beijing motivated her to move back to her hometown for a satisfied familiar everyday life, that also indicated the translocality of post-return everyday life.

In some cases, material conditions of work could bring extra enjoyment. Qi (Female/26-30/Hong Kong/non-Shanghainese/Higher education) worked as an administrator in a university in Shanghai. She did not have a special passion for never-ending paperwork, which was her duty as a member of administrative staff, but she appreciated the university campus as her working environment. She was passionate about learning different kinds of knowledge through classes, seminars and education resources provided by the university. The following excerpt from my field diary was about our visit to an exhibition about the Mogao Caves[41]. She received two free tickets from the university and invited me to join her.

> *Qi had visited the Mogao caves before so she knew related knowledge about the Mogao caves better than me. She explained these pictures to me. When we were discussing the architecture of the Mogao caves, she told me that she attended a course entitled the history of Chinese architecture. It is an undergraduate module. She obtained the permission of the professor to sit in class. The class time is in the evening, so it does not affect her work in the daytime. The professor is a big name and provides wonderful lectures. Many students sat in the class as well. The only sit-in staff member was her. They will conduct fieldwork in an ancient village in Zhejiang next weekend. She looks forward to it very much. (field diary, October 2018)*

One week later, after she came back from the field trip in Zhejiang, she sent me messages and told me interesting stories during her trip. Excitement could be easily witnessed from her messages. During my fieldwork, Qi often invited me to join cultural or academic events with her. She spent lots of her spare time attending classes, seminars and other activities. Before working in the university, she worked for a well-known securities company with much higher pay. However, she did not like the work environment full of office politics and competition. She wanted greater personal development in terms of knowledge and skills. Given the reason she left her previous job and everyday experiences on campus, she valued the job and enjoyed the work environment very much.

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[41] The Mogao caves act as an important religious and cultural site on the Silk Road, in Gansu province, China. The Mogao Caves contain about 500 Buddhist temples, which record some brilliant examples of Buddhist art spanning a period of 1000 years beginning in the year of AD 366.

Wang (Male/21-25/UK/non-Shanghainese/IT) had a similar experience. He was not ambitious in career development; rather, he attached greater importance to a balanced and relaxed work-life. Because of his concern for work-life balance, he was very satisfied with his job in an American multinational technology company, because the company provided many relaxation facilities in the office building and implemented flexible working hours. In interviews, he repeatedly described the wonderful foods in the canteen, friendly environment, relaxing work and various entertainment facilities in his company in a euphoric tone. Attracted by his description, I visited his company on a weekday after working hours.

> *The foyer is quite unusual compared to foyers of most office buildings. It looks more like the foyer of a university library [Fig. 4.5]. A big rest area with fabric sofas, many green plants, a small café, decorations in warm colours, and so on. It is totally a social space. Other foyers of office buildings I visited are just cold marble rooms. Wang said that many colleagues get used to taking a coffee break here. [...] Wang's favourite room is the games room [Fig. 4.6]. This games room really shocked me. It is larger than any games rooms I have seen in other companies and organizations. The facilities here are similar to the commercial games halls. Wang showed me his favourite games. For example, the King of Fighters which was published more than 20 years ago and constituted his childhood memory. It is hard to find such an old game elsewhere. Wang was really happy to see this game again. And live football games. Wang and his colleagues often played live football when they had completed work tasks before working hours ended. The games room is a good place for them to kill time. (Field diary, November 2018)*

Fig. 4.5 The foyer of Wang's company (Photo by author)

Fig. 4.6 The games room of Wang's company (Photo by author)

His enthusiasm was contagious when he introduced his company facilities to me. He enjoyed and felt proud of the working environment. In previous interviews, he told me that he could receive twice or even three times the salary if he moved to some Chinese technology companies. But more salary meant more workload. He preferred a life with work-life balance and enough relaxation, rather than a life with a high salary but intense workload. Wang linked his choice of work-life style to his identity as an overseas returnee: "*I think that local graduates prefer a rich but busy life more than overseas*

returned students. Nothing to do with overseas education. It is the economic condition of the family. We usually come from middle class families or above. No need to worry money too much." The interview with Zhu in section 4.2.1, "*compared to local graduates, we do not work hard*" echoed Wang's words. In this sense, overseas returned students might be distinguished from local graduates in terms of familial background and attitudes towards the making of work-life balance.

Pleasant interpersonal relationships also contributed to positive emotions towards everyday work. In my research, participants tended to categorise their relationships with colleagues into several clear levels, the best of which was friendship. A symbol of friendship between colleagues was that their interaction usually spanned beyond the workplace to other spaces of everyday life. Dong (Female/26-30/US/non-Shanghainese/Business) and Shu (Female/26-30/US/non-Shanghainese/Business) were colleagues as well as good friends. They invited me to have a Sunday brunch together and I conducted an interview there.

> *Dong: Our company does not check the actual time when we arrive in the office every morning. Working hours start at 9am. She [Shu] comes to the office at 9.30am nearly every day.*
> *Shu: (laugh) It sounds like you are not the same.*
> *Dong: Well, at least earlier than you. 9.15am in my case.*
> *Me: aha, better than my expectation. I guessed that Shu arrive at 9.30am and you arrive 5 minutes earlier than her.*
> *Shu: Yes, almost like that. I arrive at 9.20am and she comes at 9.25am.*
> *Dong: She talks nonsense. Really. I am the earlier one in 4 days out of 5 weekdays each week.*
> *Shu: Really. She is the earlier one in 2 days out of 5 weekdays each week.*
> *(Interview with Dong and Shu, November 2018)*

The childish argument about who came earlier to office well represented their friendship. The jokes between friends had brought laughter and happiness as a refreshment to repeated boring work. Friends-as-colleagues also provided emotional support when encountering problems in everyday work. While Dong and Shu thought a great match of personal attributes would be the essential factor of friendship, they also felt that they could find common interest more

easily with other overseas returnees, particularly those from the US, which had resonated with their friendship.

In the above discussions, passion and enjoyment could be evoked from different aspects of everyday work, such as the strong interest in work content, the reward of work, the pleasant environment of workplaces and the friendship with colleagues. The process of evocation of passion and enjoyment was accompanied by a series of pleasant feelings, like comfort when receiving a friend's support, happiness when doing an interesting job and excitement when enjoying facilities in the workplace. These instant feelings greatly contributed to the perception of passion and enjoyment. While this section primarily focuses on participants who held generally positive emotions towards their everyday work, there were still negative emotions which were observed, such as Ma's dissatisfaction with his company and salary. The mixed emotions led participants to rethink their career path and everyday work.

4.3.2 Indifference

Being indifferent towards everyday work was the most common situation I observed during fieldwork. Indifference implied that neither passion nor aversion was expressed by participants towards their everyday work. Work was just a way to earn a living. Participants who were indifferent to their work usually expressed mild emotions while talking about work. Chen (male/31-35/Singapore/non-Shanghainese/bank) was a typical case of indifference. He worked in a state-owned bank in Shanghai.

> *Me: How do you feel about your work?*
> *Chen: Fine, my work is fine. Everything goes well.*
> *Me: What do you mean "fine"? Do you enjoy work?*
> *Chen: Well, I get along with my work. Salary is okay. Not much overtime work. Colleagues are friendly. Tasks are easy to finish…. Enjoy?…. I do not know. It is not a bad job.*
> *Me: Could you share with me some examples of "fine" in your work?*
> *Chen: [thinking for a while] hmmm…. I cannot think of any examples in such a short while. My work is generally okay. (Interview with Chen, September 2018)*

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Chen always used some simple positive words to describe his perception of work, company and colleague relationships, but he failed to raise any specific examples to prove the positive aspect of his work. Considering that Chen generously shared with me great memories of Singapore, sweet moments with his wife and crazy experiences in pubs, he was not a reserved person. His performance while talking about his job might be because he did not perceive strong emotions, either positive or negative ones, towards his work. Chen sought a stable everyday life after getting married. He had been used to this job and did not want to change it. Although the job in the bank could not evoke his interest, it provided him with a decent social position and satisfactory salary. Thus, he chose to stay at the job while maintaining an indifferent attitude towards his work.

Chen was not the only case which suggested that marriage and family life might contribute to the indifference towards work. I quoted an interview with Yao in section 4.2.4, in which she said *"now I am working, I just muddle through."* . Her indifferent attitude towards work was largely because she gave the primary priority to her family, namely her husband and her upcoming baby. For Yao, work was just a way to keep financial independence and she did not care what the job was.

The reason why some participants did not change to a job that they felt more passionate about was that they did not have better choices, particularly given the difficult economic period. Weng had worked in the American bank for three years by mid-2018. In our meeting in late 2018, she told me that she felt bored with her work, as she spent most of her working hours doing repetitive work, and perceived that there would be very limited improvement in terms of personal skills and knowledge if she continued to do the job. Thus, she was considering resigning;

> *The economic situation is not good. I want to change jobs but dare not. Many positions in the financial industry have been frozen. My current job is to support other departments in the bank, not too much affected by the economic situation. Even if I change job successfully, it will be hard to do if the new job is to serve customers directly. (Interview with Weng, November 2018)*

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After months of consideration and hesitancy, she had nearly determined to quit her job. However, she received an unexpected promotion in early 2019. The promotion was rather rare, *"because our bank has completely stopped recruiting people this year. Even if someone leaves, they will freeze the position directly and assign the work to other existing staff instead of recruiting people."* *(Interview with Weng, March 2019).* The unexpected promotion disrupted Weng's plan of job-hunting, because it brought extra opportunity cost of resignation. Finally, Weng stayed in that job. As the content of everyday work did not change alongside the promotion, she did not develop extra interest in this job.

As for participants who were indifferent to their work, their relationships with colleagues were usually friendly but remote. Participants described such colleague relationships as "acquaintances", which implied that participants had kept friendly interactions with their colleagues and rarely encountered tensions and conflicts, while they did not become real friends. Participants' interactions with acquaintance colleagues usually remained in workplaces and social events organised by employers. Chen and Yao usually spent their spare time with their families. They never did anything other than work with their colleagues. Weng mentioned that she went to entertainment activities with her colleagues only if it was her employer who organised these activities. In my several ethnographic observations involving Weng, she usually spent time with her friends who were not her colleagues. As such, the acquaintance relationship between colleagues hardly brought positive emotions to them during their everyday work. Dong and Shu, who I discussed in section 4.3.1, had no particular interest in their work content, but their friendship as well as the friendship with other colleagues made them value the work environment and jobs very much and further evoked passion for their everyday work. Such a situation was rarely seen in acquaintance relationships.

In the above cases, participants chose to continue their job due to the trade-off between personal interest, financial benefit, family, career development, socio-economic contexts and other issues. On the one hand, they lost interest in work and viewed work simply as a way to make a living; on the other hand, they felt

that salary, future promotion, work environment and colleague relationships were acceptable in current life stages and under specific socio-economic contexts. Thus, they intended to stick to the job, which they usually described as repetitively completing tasks, and suggested indifferent emotions while talking about their job.

4.3.3 Struggles

In my fieldwork, many participants struggled in their everyday work and perceived many negative emotions. Compared to those participants who were indifferent to their work and were able to stick to their job even without much passion, participants in this section felt that some aspects of their everyday work had been hard to tolerate and they were considering making changes in their career. As a variety of emotions were suggested by participants in this section, it is difficult to find one word to summarise or to represent all the emotions. Thus, I used "struggles" to illustrate participants' (emotional) reactions to everyday work.

Financial stress was an important contributor to participants' struggles. Shanghai is one of the most expensive cities in China in terms of living costs and property prices. Although as Wang suggested in section 4.3.1, while most overseas returned students did not have to worry too much about money, they did not have absolute financial freedom. Despite financial support from their families, young people still need sufficient income to support their current lives in Shanghai, and perhaps to save money for later life. In section 4.3.1, I mentioned that Ma wanted to quit his interesting job because of his low salary. He was not the only one who planned to change jobs due to financial stress. Xiong (Female/26-30/US/non-Shanghainese/business), who had worked as an accountant in the Shanghai branch of an American company for one year when I interviewed her, was considering returning to the United States. Before working in Shanghai, she had worked at the US headquarters of her company for two years. She explained why she wanted to move back to the US through calculating the living cost and her salary in Shanghai.

When I did not perceive how expensive everyday life is in Shanghai, I had considered living in Shanghai permanently. Property rental in Shanghai is cheaper than the US, but the purchase price is so expensive. The rental market in China is chaotic and it is hard to find an ideal apartment with a long-term rent. So if I want to live in Shanghai for good, I have better buy my own apartment, but I cannot afford it. Even in the case of renting a residence, I made 4,000 dollars each month in America and I could save one third of my salary. Now in Shanghai, my monthly pre-tax salary is 12,000 to 13,000 Chinese Yuan. It is the usual salary in my industry. After deducting tax, social insurance and medical insurance, I receive about 9,000 Chinese Yuan. If I want a comfortable residence, rental would cost me 3,000 to 4,000 each month, that is one third of my income. I usually have a healthy diet. You know, no-added yoghurt, wholemeal bread, or something like that. Three meals on a weekday cost me at least 100 Yuan. If I order milk tea or other snacks as refreshment during work, extra 50 Yuan will be spent. Meals in weekday cost me about 3,000 Chinese Yuan each month. It is more expensive at the weekend. If I dine out with friends at the weekend, it will cost at least 100 Yuan per person per meal. Taking taxis and other expenses into consideration, one weekend costs me at least 250 Yuan. Then, I will spend 1,000 Yuan for weekends in one month. Clothes are also expensive in Shanghai, at least more expensive than in America. In terms of everyday transport… hmmm, forget it. Public transport is quite cheap. Then, I need to pay utility bills, mobile bills…. Add up all these expenses and I will have little money left. (Interview with Xiong, September 2018)

She made the calculation in a fast and slightly agitated tone. The process whereby she deducted her daily expenses item by item from her salary until no money was left was really anxious and stressful. Xiong perceived a better life in the US given her salary and living expenses. Although she had many sweet memories of her universities in Shanghai, Xiong was slightly disappointed by the comparatively low salary after she completed her overseas Master's degree and lived in Shanghai as a financially independent adult. Under the financial stress, Xiong felt much anxiety when she had to spend money very carefully.

For some participants, the struggles in everyday work suggested a hard re-adaptation to the Chinese labour market. Yun (Female/26-30/US/non-Shanghainese/business) had been hesitant about whether to change jobs for the whole year of my fieldwork. Her job was quite special among my participants.

She remotely worked for a marketing company located in the US. Her working hours were based on American time zones, which meant that she usually worked at night in China.

> *I usually work from 9pm to 3am. My biological clock has totally been adjusted to American time zones. When I just started the job, I was very sleepy. But now, I am not sleepy at all after 12am. After I finish work at 3am, I cannot fall asleep until 4am. I usually get up around 12pm. Eat one or two pieces of toast. Then I may go to gym for Yoga or just go out for a walk. I have no social life at all. Just work at home in the night and sleep in the daytime. As I spend less time with my husband during weekdays, I usually spend all weekend with him. It has been a long time since I have been sitting in a café and talking to a friend like we are doing now. This state makes me feel completely out of this society. My job is too "American" and cannot help my career in China. I should find a new job, a job that I like better and lead a life with the usual working hours and spare time of most urban white collar workers. (Interview with Yun, October 2018)*

Although Yun was fine with the work content and the length of working hours, the working schedule on American time annoyed her very much. When we had this interview, she had been in Shanghai for less than two months and needed to adapt to the city where she had never lived before, but her work on American time hindered the adaptation process. Yun was sad about being "*completely out of this society*" and worried that the American work also harmed her career prospects in China. While she had planned to move to a new job since October 2018, she had not made her determination until the end of my fieldwork.

> *I am still considering it [changing job]. I am in a very tangled state. There are always some pros and cons no matter whether I quit the job or stick to it. If I persist with the job, I would enjoy a flexible schedule. Because I am on an independent work contract and receive an hourly salary. So I can work anywhere. Even if I go on holiday, I do not need to ask my boss for leave, as long as I bring my laptop with me to holiday and work at night. But my American employer cannot provide me with social insurance and medical insurance in China. And my future career path… I am not working in an office with colleagues. So I always feel that I am just a temporary worker. Although my boss appreciates my work competence, I still receive very limited opportunities for career promotion. Maybe my salary will increase, but I cannot get a higher position. Very limited promotion space, you see? I have gotten used to my current life. I doubt whether I can manage the life in which I need to*

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get up at 7am and deal with work in the office and with colleagues. I am bad at office politics. I am not that person… it must be very tiring… I do not mean office politics as intrigues, but it definitely involves a lot of competitions. … I am always valuing the pros and cons in the last year. Many friends asked about my career plan, I do not know. I really do not know. I have no idea what kinds of jobs in Shanghai are good for me. My current job has nothing to do with the domestic market of China and I have very little knowledge of the local labour market. I am not sure whether my work experience and qualification could be recognised by Chinese employers. (Interview with Yun, August 2019)

Worry was the primary emotion suggested by her words. On the one hand, she worried that it would hurt her future career development if she persisted in this job; on the other hand, she worried that she could not adapt herself to the new working environment and local labour market. The quotation also suggested her fears about office politics. Compared to the earlier interview, Yun had got used to the American job. The job also provided her with a sense of security in terms of colleague relationships. If she changed the job, she feared that the security would be broken. Moreover, she repeated and addressed the lack of ideas about her future career path and her limited knowledge of the local job market through the words like "*I do not know*", "*I have no idea*" and "*I am not sure…*". These words suggested the strong helplessness she perceived in the struggle of everyday work.

Participants' struggles in everyday work might be related to their concerns about future career development. Song (Female/26-30/US/non-Shanghainese/hotel) worked as an administrator in a famous hotel. She felt satisfied with her job, including interesting work content, insightful boss, friendly colleagues and decent salary. But she had planned to move jobs for a long time due to her worry about her future career. As she argued, it was not her current position or the hotel that limited her career development, but the whole industry:

Career development in the hotel industry relies on work experience and working years very much. Generally, the top executives of the hotel have worked in the hotel industry for a lifetime, like my boss. Few young people could achieve such a high position. Young people, who have worked for just several years like me, have definitely not been able to

*compare with those top executives, but there are no great differences between us and managers at the intermediate level. If someone continues to do similar things in this industry year by year until retirement [就是慢慢**熬**，**熬**到快退休的年纪], he or she could make some achievement. But I do not want this. Actually, it is not bad to stick to the industry [**熬**着也不差], because the hotel industry is relatively secure. After all, there are always people who need to dine out, go for business trips or holidays. I just feel that it would be quite boring if I stick to one thing for the whole lifetime [就是觉得一辈子都在**熬**同一件事，太没意思了]. I cannot learn something new. Many of my friends in the same industry are thinking about changing jobs or have already done it. The work experience in the hotel industry mostly can be applied in other industries. For example, a friend of mine, who used to be a human resource personnel of a hotel, moved to a trade company and acted as human resource manager there. If he wants a similar position in a hotel, he needs to continue working for extra years [如果他想做到类似的位子，在酒店里还得再**熬**几年]. (Interview with Song, March 2019)*

I quoted her original words in Chinese here, because she repeatedly used a Chinese word, 熬 *ao*, to describe the status if she continued to work in the hotel industry in the future. "*ao*" in Chinese has multiple implications when it means persistence in one thing. First, the persistence will last for a long time, which, in the context of her words, referred to a lifetime; second, the persistence will not be pleasant, but perhaps be boring, stressful and even tormented. In Song's case, although she was satisfied with her career status quo, she foresaw the lack of freshness and potentially the limited development of personal skills if she continued to work in the hotel industry. Song's concern was rooted in her current life stages – at the stage of early-career, Song ambitiously expected a great development potential and promised promotion in a foreseeable future, rather than achieving her career goal until the end of career life, which went against what she observed in reality and evoked her idea of moving jobs.

Unpleasant relationships with colleagues aggravated participants' struggles in everyday work and brought negative emotions to participants. Given Chinese cultural norms which attach much importance to interpersonal harmony, most participants would not express their dissent towards colleagues and would

instead perform as an amiable colleague. Zhang (Female/26-30/US/non-Shanghainese/Business) worked in a famous manufacturing enterprise. She disliked her boss very much. The following pieces were selected from her Weibo during October and November 2018.

> *October 2018: We just got a fabulous pantry in company. Many dining chairs and tables, new oven and microwave oven. Then my boss introduces new regulation: No food is allowed in the office building…. Perhaps I am working in a stupid unknown mill rather than a global top 500 enterprise. [the sticker of Doge[42]]*
> *November 2018: Thanks to my boss's new regulation of no food, I swallowed an egg in one bite in a dark formaldehyde-filled staircase. Don't want to be found…Almost choked to death. Life is so hard.*
> *November 2018: Gloomy rainy day. Stay in the shared office with my boss. Husband leaves home and goes for a business trip…. The value of my desperation reaches 100%.*

These online posts clearly suggested her anger, contempt, desperation and dissatisfaction with her company. She viewed her boss as inconsiderate, stupid and mean. She never posted similar comments on WeChat Moments[43], as her boss and other colleagues could access her WeChat while they did not know her Weibo account. The concealment of negative emotions was due not only to Chinese cultural norms, but also the unequal power relations between her and her boss. However, despite her strong dissent towards her boss and her struggles in everyday work, she had to stay at this job for a while because of her desire for a positive employment history in her résumé. As she said,

> *I will definitely leave the job, but not now. I just started the job this March and will stay in the job for at least two years. It is not required by my contract. Just because changing jobs too often will make my résumé look bad. You know, as if I am a picky and disloyal worker. So I have to endure my annoying colleagues for a while. (Interview with Zhang, December 2018)*

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[42] Doge refers to a collection of stickers based on images of Kabosu, a female Shiba Inu. Doge is very popular on Chinese Internet. Chinese youth often employed stickers of doge to express their emotions, opinions or comments towards a specific issue. These emotions, opinions and comments are mostly negative. More information can be found https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doge_(meme), accessed on 22 May 2020.

[43] Moments, a function of WeChat, allows users to post pictures, texts and links to all contacts on their WeChat account.

Four participants discussed in this section, Xiong, Yun, Song and Zhang, were experiencing struggles in their everyday work due to different reasons, including financial stress, hard adaptation to the local labour market, worry about their future career and unpleasant relationships. Particularly, the cases of Xiong and Yun indicated that their overseas experience had an impact on their everyday work and related emotional perceptions. The struggles in everyday work evoked a series of emotions, most of which were negative, like worry, anger and desperation. These negative emotions might motivate participants to consider making changes to their career path. But, according to the four participants, actual actions were taken largely according to the whole socio-economic society and their temporal situation.

4.3.4 Anger and desperation

While many participants perceived positive as well as negative emotions from different aspects of everyday work, a few participants overwhelmingly suffered from fierce negative emotions and hardly felt any positive emotions in their everyday work. Under such circumstances, everyday work had been viewed as a kind of torture by these participants. As a result, they usually resigned from their job even with the sacrifices of decent salary and the risk of unemployment.

Tang (Female/26-30/Denmark/Shanghainese/Embassy) obtained a job in the consulate of a European country after she moved back from Beijing to Shanghai. That was the job which she was working on when participating in this research. Initially she was very satisfied with the job because of the good salary, relaxing work, convenient commute between the consulate and her home and a great match with her interest in European diplomatic issues. According to her work contract, Tang worked with the title of administrative assistant. She was the only administrative assistant and needed to help senior diplomats with paperwork and other administrative procedures. Due to the specific organisational structure of the consulate, the administrative assistant needed to take on some receptionist duties, like supporting customer service and receiving

visa applications. However, just one week after she started working, the dispute around Tang's job duty caused the conflicts between her and her boss.

> *The new boss asked me to open the door for him every morning! Can you imagine? Ask me to open the door for him every day. I could not accept this requirement. I am not a maid! Although I would open the door for visitors, it is my duty to receive them. And they could not open the door by themselves without an access card. My boss has his own access card. Why let me open the door for him? I was very unhappy that he asked me to do this. This is **degrading** me! I raised a protest. The boss was **surprised** by my protest and I was also **surprised** by his request. We had argued in the office. I felt that I could score Band 8 in IELTS speaking examination for the argument[44]. I resigned the next day. [...] The most unhappy time in the past year was when I quarrelled with him. I was so angry. Hey, I am so angry every time I think about it. [...] I felt that I had not been **well respected** and felt I was **being bullied**. The requirement that did not require any personal skills of me is a kind of disparagement to me. Why did he want me to do this? **Show his power?**[45] (Interview with Tang, August 2019)*

Fig. 4.7 Receptionist counter of the consulate (Photo by Tang)

Fig. 4.8 The foyer and entrance door of the consulate (Photo by Tang)

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[44] Band 8 in IELTS speaking examination means that the candidate can speak English very fluently and almost reaches the level of native speakers.
[45] Bold words in this quotation were used originally in English by Tang.

As can be seen in Fig. 4.7 and 4.8, her boss required Tang to walk out from behind the receptionist counter, walk through the foyer and open the door for him. Tang was surprised with this requirement, because she did not expect this requirement when she took this job offer; she was angry, because she took it as a kind of devaluation of herself and bullying in the workplace which represented unequal power relations between her and her boss. After the fierce dispute with the boss, she could not bear the devaluation day by day and worried that the tension with the boss would harm her future work if she had stayed at this position. Meanwhile, she believed that she could find a better job with firm confidence in her qualifications and personal competence. Thus, she resigned from this job.

Bao's (Female/26-30/France/Shanghainese/Bank) first job after she moved back to Shanghai was in a start-up company. She suffered enormously from a series of negative emotions while she had been working there:

> *I felt okay when I just joined, but many negative emotions broke out later. The working environment of the whole company was very unpleasant. I tolerated the environment for a long time. Maybe because I always talked in a frank way, the conflict between the boss and I was greater than other colleagues ... There ... [sigh] There were a lot of unspeakable sufferings. Very very sad to do the work. Every day was torture. I hated my state at that time. I could not let the work devastate my mind. I wanted to recover to my original state. (Interview with Bao, August 2019)*

In this interview, Bao used phrases like "*unpleasant*", "*sad*" and "*unspeakable suffering*" to describe her perception of everyday work in her previous company. When Bao answered questions about her overseas study and everyday life, her words were quite organised. However, in the quotations about her previous work, she paused and repeated emotional words. The negative emotions in her previous work indeed struck her. Bao attributed most negative emotions to her boss who created an unpleasant working environment and established harsh workplace regulations.

> *He installed cameras on every office desk. The cameras did not work like CCTV for security purposes, but just to keep an eye on each employee. We had to turn on the camera as soon as we arrived in the*

office. When I just started the work, I just occasionally worked on Saturday; later, we were required to work every Saturday. It was compulsory. But we did not have work! The boss just asked us to go to the office and turn on the camera to prove our attendance. We did not have any work. I was doing my personal work on the office computer, like learning Japanese and reading. The boss did not care what we were doing. He just required us to be on standby all the time. We did not get any extra pay or make-up holidays for overtime work. This is just the tip of the iceberg. You can imagine how depressed I was at that time. Due to the mean and ridiculous boss, our colleagues are very united and resisted his regulations together. As a result, many crazy regulations were not fully implemented. The boss and all the regulations made me super angry. (Interview with Bao, August 2019)

In the start-up company, the boss, also the founder, had absolute power in the workplace, which allowed him to establish various unreasonable regulations. The monitoring camera and compulsory overtime work without extra pay made Bao rather uncomfortable and angry. The unequal power relation in workplaces made Bao feel rather helpless and further aggravated her disgust towards her boss and the whole work environment. Although there existed mutual emotional support between colleagues, the emotional support from colleagues hardly eased her strong negative emotions. As Bao told me, the stories she shared with me had been the less serious ones. Thus, the negative emotions she suggested in this interview merely constituted a small part of her emotional suffering. The last motivation which drove her to resign was the disappointment towards her career prospects: "*All the promises about salary, future promotion and the vision of the company were full of hot air. I felt I was being cheated (Interview with Bao, August 2019)*". In two years, Bao was disappointed to see the slow development of the company and worried that her career prospects would be greatly limited by the company. With the strong disappointment and other negative emotions, she resigned in April 2019.

As I discussed in previous sections, the years of 2018 and 2019 were difficult for job-hunting as well as for moving jobs. Many participants, particularly those in the financial industry, who were dissatisfied with their work had been hesitant to change jobs, or they would resign only after receiving a new job offer. But

when Bao quit her job, she had not started looking for another job, which was quite unusual among my participants.

> *Me: You resigned this April? No job lined up? So courageous. I heard that it has been rather difficult to get a job in the financial industry this year.*
> *Bao: Actually I … Gosh … Yes … I had no choice… You can see how desperate I was in the previous company. Otherwise, I would not take such high risk of unemployment to resign at that time. I knew that I would suffer heavy emotional stress if I resigned without having another job lined up. I knew that feeling in my previous job-hunting experiences. But I had felt that my work had been totally nonsense. Perhaps it was better for me to spend time on self-improvement rather than tolerating the pointless job. During the period before I resigned, I was almost in an explosion of anger every second. Just do not mess with me. If you mess with me, I will blow up at once. After resigning, I became much calmer. (Interview with Bao, August 2019)*

Bao had understood that there would be great risks and difficulties if she resigned at this time, but the negative emotions she perceived in everyday work overwhelmed the potential emotional stress in job-hunting. This interview happened four months after her resignation. When she talked about the previous work and resignation, she still was rather emotional and had to pause several times to organise her words. Under the serious distress, she resigned. The resignation released her from the depressing working environment and domineering boss, and consequently eased her negative emotions. The emotional diagram below (Fig. 4.9) which was drawn by Bao, illustrated the great depression before her resignation and the intense release afterwards.
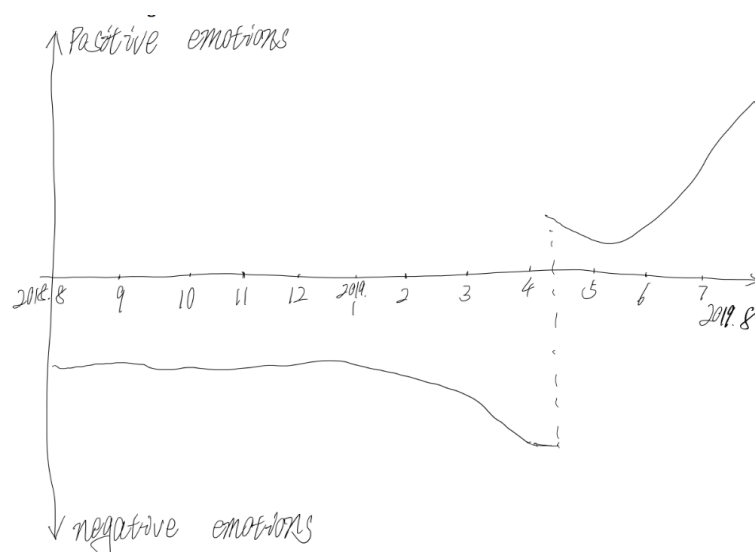
Fig. 4.9 The emotional diagram drawn by Bao

In Tang's and Bao's experiences, the unpleasant relations with senior colleagues greatly evoked their anger and desperation in everyday work and resulted in their resignations. Given the emphasis on interpersonal harmony in Chinese culture and the unequal power relations between employer and employee, it was rare in my fieldwork to hear about furious outbreaks of negative emotions in everyday work spaces, particularly in front of the boss; Tang and Bao were the only two. In addition to terrible relations with senior colleagues, materiality issues also helped to shape the negative emotions. In Tang's case, her boss aggravated her due to the unreasonable requirements as well as the devaluation of her personal competence behind the requirement. Tang perceived great confidence in her personal qualifications and work competence in her previous experiences of study and work. Thus, the devaluation had become completely intolerable in Tang's view. In Bao's case, her boss invaded her privacy in working time through the camera and reduced her deserved income through refusing to pay extra for overtime work. Moreover, the company did not provide her positive career prospects. All the materiality issues further enhanced negative emotions they perceived in everyday work. Considering all the factors, it was no wonder that Tang and Bao resigned with great anger and desperation.

4.3.5 Discussion

In this section, I investigated the everyday work of my participants through focusing on various emotions they expressed towards work. I categorised emotions according to whether they were positive or negative and selected one or two representative emotions to lead the discussion. Strong personal interest in work content and appreciated work benefits (like salary, bonus, annual leave and subsidy) could contribute to positive emotions towards everyday work. Office space not only provided the physical environment of everyday work, but also created an atmosphere. For example, the games room in Wang's company made a happy, relaxing and friendly space for Wang and his colleagues, and further enhanced his satisfaction with the company; the monitoring camera installed by Bao's boss created an upsetting and uncomfortable atmosphere.

Colleague relations was another important impact factor of participants' emotions. Friendship between colleagues provided (emotional) support, while conflicts with colleagues likely evoked anger and other negative emotions. The wider socio-economic context in 2018 and 2019 might influence participants' everyday work and further brought extra emotional stress and struggles to them. Notably, emotions which participants held towards their everyday work were usually mixed. Even if participants felt strong dissent towards some aspects of their everyday life, they might be in favour of other aspects. Taking Ma as an example, although he enjoyed the work and had good relations with his colleagues, he was dissatisfied with his salary and finally quit the job.

While much existing literature highlights the difference between local workers and overseas returnees in workplaces from the perspective of cultural norms and everyday practices, my research suggested that there were just some mild differences. For instance, some participants also suggested that it was easier to establish friendship with colleagues who had overseas experience because of similar memories and more common interests. Most participants suggested nearly no difference between local graduates when they conducted everyday work. According to my participants, once starting full-time employment, it had been the actual experiences of work in Shanghai rather than past overseas experiences that shaped everyday work.

4.4 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have discussed my participants' everyday experiences of job-hunting and full-time work. A wide range of emotions were evoked from the perspectives of materiality, relationality and temporality of their everyday work. In terms of materiality, when overseas returned students were looking for a job, their experiences of job applications, the (de)valuation of overseas qualifications and transnational capital transfer aroused their emotions towards the process of job-hunting and the wider Chinese labour market; in full-time work, material contributors of emotions included (interesting or boring) work content, salary and benefits and office facilities. As for relationality, participants perhaps (un)willingly employed various *guanxi* in job-hunting; in everyday

work, they likely encountered and carefully dealt with colleague relationships with different levels of closeness. Notably, the interaction between material spaces and interpersonal relations might create specific atmospheres. Through ethnographic research, I was able to find out about various atmospheres and their impacts on emotions. Shanghai as the most developed as well as the most expensive city in China and the challenging economic context in 2018 and 2019 constituted the spatio-temporal context of discussion, which might bring more stress and uncertainty to my participants' career path. Under affects of these atmospheres, emotions discussed in this chapter likely existed in participants' lives for a while until specific material, relational or temporal factors had changed. Participants expressed these emotions mostly through their daily practices, such as muddling through work and venting dissent on social media and sometimes through more definitive actions, like resignation.

As suggested by mundane experiences of everyday work and their emotions, the greatest problem encountered by overseas returned students was difficulties in their early career stages when they transferred from students to adults. My participants did not suggest much confusion about their identity and sense of belonging as existing literature suggested (de Bree *et al.*, 2010; J. Hao *et al.*, 2016; Holmes & Burrows, 2012). The difference might be because of the specific profiles of my participants. Existing literature usually studies returnees who moved overseas at a young age or who had spent most of their life time overseas. My participants moved overseas after university at around 22-23 years old and spent merely two to three years overseas, that means that they had a better understanding of Chinese socio-cultural norms than foreign ones. Thus, they adapted themselves into Chinese workplaces quite smoothly. The different finding is due to specific attributes of the researched group. More precisely, compared to informants in many existing literature, my participants migrated at a more mature age and stayed overseas for a relatively short term. It is important to take participants' life stages and personal profiles into discussion of return migration.

Overseas experience plays an important role in participants' everyday experiences of job-hunting and everyday work. Overseas qualifications and

guanxi established overseas brought great advantages as well as disadvantages to my participants' job-hunting. In everyday work, participants suggested they had more in common with colleagues who had overseas experience; overseas experience also shaped their work interest and ideas about work-life balance and provided more career path options. The impact of overseas experience in much existing literature is about cultural tensions in work places (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011; Ralph, 2014). However, my research suggests that, although cultural differences did exist, my participants did not experience many cultural tensions in everyday work. There is not a dualism of Chinese culture and foreign cultures. Overseas returned students do not necessarily choose one of the cultures or struggle between the two cultures. In this chapter, my participants showed a good balance between obeying Chinese cultural norms and respecting the two-sided impact of overseas experience in their everyday work. Both past and present experiences in China and overseas education had impacted their everyday work.

Chapter V: Everyday Life beyond the Workplace

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I suggested that overseas returned students led a work-centred everyday life and discussed their everyday experiences taking place in workplaces and wider labour markets. Notably, work was not all of their everyday life; beyond work, they had a series of activities of daily living and entertainment, which supported and acted as a reward for everyday work (Burkitt, 2004). Taking their everyday experiences out of workplaces could help researchers to understand returned students as lived human beings leading their own everyday life of vividness and diversity rather than only a part of an economic mechanism (Yeoh & S. Huang, 2011). Thus, a consideration of the everyday experiences beyond the workplace could contribute to a comprehensive knowledge of returnees' everyday life.

Focusing on the practices, encounters and emotions regarding my participants' everyday life beyond the workplaces, this chapter will highlight the spatial and temporal embeddedness of their experiences. To clarify, I refer "workplace" to their office spaces and career fairs if they had not worked as full-time workers. Thus, some everyday practices which were closely related to their everyday work but did not occur in their offices, like weekday lunch, will be discussed in this chapter. Particularly, I will explore how the city of Shanghai has shaped my participants' everyday leisure life and emotions particularly in terms of its multicultural environment, governance and urban infrastructures. Some researchers describe the everyday life of transnational migrants as "multi-local livings", because no matter whether they have settled down in a place permanently or they are still sojourning, their everyday life is influenced by their lived experiences in present as well as past places and sometimes by their aspiration for future migration and settlement (Collins, 2012; Weiske *et al.*, 2015). Such translocality and trans-temporality have also emerged from the everyday life of my participants in Shanghai involving different elements of the places they had experienced in China and overseas at different life stages.

In this chapter, I explore what kind of embodied practices, material encounters and emotions constitute overseas returned students' everyday life beyond the workplace and interrogate the impact of spatiality and temporality on these everyday experiences. The organisation of this chapter is inspired by the themes raised in the empirical data collected in my ethnographic fieldwork and traditional Chinese cultural norms[46]. I will respectively discuss food, residence and transportation of overseas returned students in this chapter.

5.2 Food

Food plays an essential role in everyday life (Cook, 2008). Such an argument echoes a Chinese proverb, "*seven things to start a new day – firewood, rice, oil, salt, soy sauce, vinegar and tea*"[47]. All the seven objects are relevant to Chinese dietary habits, which implies that diet plays an important role in Chinese everyday life. Food is not merely what people eat to sustain life or satisfy appetite, but also an expression of the relations between human and non-human, between people and environment (Hall, 2011). Given that, it is no wonder that a body of transnationalism scholarship has employed food as a research lens to disclose migrants' social assimilation/integration in a particular place and their sense of identity (Chapman & Beagan, 2013; Johnston & Longhurst, 2012). Food can invoke migrants' geographical imagination of certain places and elicits various emotions (Daya, 2016; Jackson, 2009; Kim, 2012). In this section, I will portray my participants' everyday dietary practices and explore their emotions, which were derived from and expressed in these practices. In particular I interrogate how their dietary practices and emotions help to understand their perception of everyday life and ideas of return.

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[46] There is a Chinese idiom to describe everyday life, *yi shi zhu xing*. *Yi* refers to dressing and clothes; *shi* means food; *zhu* is residence; and *xing* means transportation. In Chinese common sense, the four characters represent the most important aspects of everyday life. I excluded *yi* in discussion, not because it has been no longer important in my participants' everyday life, but because my fieldwork data did not suggest a strong relevance between the dressing habits and their transnational journeys.

[47] The original Chinese is 开门七件事——柴米油盐酱醋茶.

5.2.1 Weekday lunch

Given my participants' work-centred everyday life, lunch breaks during weekdays constituted an important part of everyday dietary practice. Weekday lunch usually had spatial and relational proximity with everyday work. Put simply, weekday lunch usually occurred near participants' offices and involved colleagues or other contacts at work. Thus, weekday lunch possibly supplement the knowledge of participants' everyday work.

Many organisations in Shanghai provide employees with hot meals at affiliated canteens. A pleasant experience in the company canteen is likely to evoke the enjoyment of food and further influence participants' emotions towards everyday work. In the last chapter, I mentioned that Tang (Female/26-30/Denmark/Shanghainese/Embassy) quit her position in Beijing despite the great passion towards the job. She attributed her resignation to her dislike of food in Beijing which illustrated her failed adaptation to everyday life in the city. The general negative emotions towards everyday life in Beijing overwhelmed her fondness for the job. The impact of the weekday lunch was also witnessed in her later experiences of work in Shanghai. After she quarrelled with her boss over her job duty, she resigned and was going to leave the job immediately, but the consulate hoped she would stay on for one month until a replacement was recruited. She agreed to stay-on because she felt that the great food provided in the affiliated canteen would enable her to persist in the position for one more month.

> *I went to lunch at around 11.30pm. Lucky today, as there was just a short line in the canteen. The canteen was usually busy. It is really fantastic. I love it! The canteen is the only thing I don't want to lose in this work. It provides breakfast, lunch and dinner. 11am-1pm is the lunch time. I order maoxuewang[48], cauliflower, vegetable soup and rice for today's lunch, which just cost me 18.30 Chinese Yuan[49]. The canteen is operated by the property company of our office company and receives a governmental grant. That's why the food is so cheap. Yummy food and*

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[48] *Maoxuewang* is a Sichuanese dish in China (see the top right-hand dish in Fig. 5.2).

[49] 18.30 Chinese Yuan is about 2 British Pounds. The canteen price of Tang's lunch is significantly cheaper than the usual market price in Shanghai, which should be around 30 Chinese Yuan.

cheap prices. I cannot bear losing such a lovely canteen. (Tang's Photo-diary, August 2019)

Fig. 5.1 The order counter in Tang's office canteen (Photo by Tang)

Fig. 5.2 Tang's weekday lunch (Photo by Tang)

This photo-diary was made after her resignation. In her interview she clearly expressed her fondness for the canteen and the unwillingness to leave it; the expression "*the only thing I don't want to lose in this work*" also suggested her dislike of her work and food as an incentive to stay on for a while. Although she had resigned with strong anger and dissatisfaction, the fondness for the office canteen comforted her from intense negative emotions and encouraged her to stay on for a month. As she planned to rest for two months before finding a new job, the persistence in the consulate was not due to career development. Notably,

not all participants held a positive emotion towards the company canteen, due to the quality of food and the canteen environment. For example, Song (Female/26-30/US/non-Shanghainese/Hotel) often accused her company canteen of terrible food and crowded space and would rather spend more time eating out over the lunch break.

It is usual to observe a multicultural atmosphere in multinational enterprises in Shanghai, due to the internationalised management system, multinational staff and the wider multicultural environment of Shanghai. The canteens in multinational enterprises further enhance the multicultural atmosphere through providing international food. Wang (Male/26-30/ UK/non-Shanghainese/IT) told me how his company celebrated Deepavali for Indian colleagues,

> *The dietary service moved outdoors and offered a wide range of Indian food. You know, curry, snacks and different kinds of Indian pancakes. I cannot remember these food names. So long and rather different from the naming in China and in Britain. But it tasted good. There were some cultural activities and performances related to Deepavali. We had a lot of fun. I did not know many Indian friends when I studied in the UK, but the Deepavali event brought some familiar feelings back to me. In the UK, we celebrated Chinese festivals and foreign students celebrated their traditional festivals in student halls. We shared festive food and festival legends with each other. I cannot say there was a strong friendship between foreign students and me. But that feeling was good. You study overseas. You must know what I mean. (Interview with Wang, November 2018)*

Through the Deepavali event, Wang recalled his fond experiences of studying in the UK, which was full of fun and warm-heartedness. In addition to the single event like Deepavali, Wang's company canteen set up a counter for international food and provided food from different countries every day. Through these food practices, Wang perceived a similarity between the atmosphere of his present workplace and the one of his past student hall. The atmosphere was created through international food, people from different cultures/nations and a physical space decorated by different cultural elements. The similar atmosphere reminded him how he missed his time in the UK as well as enhanced his belonging to his company.

Weekday lunch also provided good illustrations of colleague relationships. Song recorded a quick weekday lunch in her photo-diary (see Fig. 5.3 and 5.4).
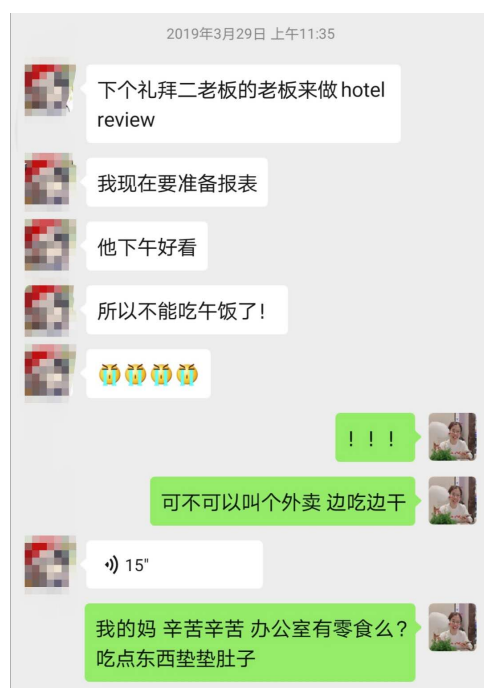
Fig. 5.3 Screenshot-2 of Song's Photo-diary (Picture by author)

Fig. 5.4 Screenshot-3 of Song's Photo-diary (Picture by author)

[In Fig. 5.3] 29 March 2019 11:35am
Song: My boss's boss will make a review of our hotel next Tuesday.
Song: I need to prepare some information sheets for my boss
Song: He wants to read them this afternoon.
Song: It means that I have no time for lunch!
Song: [The emojis of crying face]
Me: !!!
Me: Can you order delivered food? Eat while working?
Song: [in the audio] My boss will leave the hotel for an external meeting at 3pm. So I must submit the information sheets to him before 3pm. Alas… I will see whether I have time for lunch after he leaves.
Me: Okay… Work so hard… Do you have any snacks in your office? Just eat something. Don't be too hungry.

[In Fig. 5.4] 29 March 2019 13:16

Song: I have not had time for lunch. Quite unusual that the canteen food seems okay today.
Song: [Fig. 5.5]
Me: Wow. It looks good.
Song: Didn't go for it~ ~ ~ ~
Me: [the emoji of helpless]
Me: So your colleague sent you the pic?
Song: One colleague worried that I would be hungry and brought me a coffee and a sandwich from Family Mart [a popular convenience store chain in Shanghai] nearby.
Song: Yes, pic from my colleague.
Song: [Fig. 5.6].
Me: Take care! You can eat the sandwich while working on the information sheet.

Fig. 5.5 Noodle Soup provided by Song's company canteen on the day of this photo-diary (Photo by Song)

Fig. 5.6 Song's light lunch/refreshment on the day of this photo-diary (Photo by Song)

Song expressed a mix of emotions in this excerpt of her photo-diary. The emoji of crying face and "*alas…*" suggested her unhappiness towards overtime work and the missed lunch. The phrase "*quite unusual that …*" expressed her surprise that the canteen food that day was much better than her expectation and the usual disappointment towards everyday food in the canteen. What interested me

the most in her diary was the relationship with her colleagues. Previous conversations had shown that Song had a pleasant relationship with her boss, so even if she needed to work overtime sometimes, she would be unhappy but would not complain about it too much. In my previous visits to her workplace, I had observed the pleasant relationship between Song and her colleagues (e.g., they kindly kidded each other, planned a drink after work, and made an appointment for weekend hot pot at one colleague's home). Given that their interaction had expanded beyond the workplace (as Song told me, she and her colleagues hung out for food and other fun on weekends), there existed friendship between her and her colleagues. The interactions with her colleagues in this diary, like sharing pictures of lunch, caring for Song and taking food, further proved the friendship. The care of colleagues emotionally comforted Song during intense overtime work.

Xia's (Female/21-25/UK/non-Shanghainese/Bank) experience provided a counterexample of colleague relationships regarding weekday lunch. She had disputes about weekday lunch with her colleagues as she described in an interview:

> *Most colleagues in my office are female in their 40s and 50s. Just like my mom's age. They keep meddling in issues that do not concern them. For example, lunch box. We do not have an office canteen and they usually bring their own lunch box. I would rather spend half an hour sleeping than preparing a lunch box in the early morning. So, I did not bring a lunch box in the first week, just ordered delivered food. My colleagues were not happy with that and criticised my lunch as unhealthy and money-wasting. I was really uncomfortable and slightly angry about these comments. My mother did not criticise me like that! But I had to hold on to my anger because they are seniors and some are my mentors. In the next week, I started bringing my lunch box. My colleagues were very satisfied with my action and thought that I finally ate lunch in the right way. But I am not happy. The food delivery service is so convenient! (Interview with Xia, April 2019)*

The "correct format" of weekday lunch was the primary topic of the dispute. As the food delivery service through mobile apps was a recent phenomenon in Shanghai and its customers are mostly young people, it was no surprise that Xia's senior colleagues were not in favour of this lunch option. Behind the topic,

it was a generational gap regarding eating habits, unequal power relations between mentors and new staff in everyday work and age hierarchy rooted in Chinese social norms that resulted in the tense relation between Xia and her colleagues. She felt upset about these senior staff, but she had to conceal such negative emotions in front of her colleagues; the suppression further aggravated her upset and dissatisfaction.

5.2.2 Eating at home

If my participants cooked at home, they tended to make food relevant to their past experience in their hometown and overseas and they usually held positive emotions towards these experiences and places. The home-made food represented their emotions towards past experiences and displayed how the past experiences engaged with their present life in Shanghai.

I observed one of Song's Sunday dinners at her home, in which she made a Sichuan style noodle soup with her family's "secret" recipe. Song named the soup "*Song family's noodle soup*". Actually I frequently witnessed the noodle soup over my one-year observation of Song's everyday life, in her online posts, photo-diary and participant observation. I have eaten the noodle soup personally at least twice. The frequency suggested that the noodle soup played an important role in her everyday diet.

Fig. 5.7 Song family's noodle soup (Photo by author)

The ingredients of the noodle soup, including salt, sugar, soy sauce, home-made chilli oil and, the essential of the soup, Sichuan pickled pepper, suggested that it was a typical Sichuanese dish. She insisted on using chillies (including dried

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pepper and pickled pepper) originally from Sichuan to ensure the "authentic" taste of the noodle soup.

> *I helped her to wash vegetables and watched her making the noodle soup in her kitchen. She let me smell red dried pepper and yellow pickled pepper. I took a sniff of the peppers and said "such a nice smell". She answered in a rising tone and with a proud smile, "Of course these peppers are truly Sichuanese spices". I asked her to recommend a grocery store or an online website, because I wanted to buy some Sichuanese peppers at my place. She laughed, "No, I did not buy them in Shanghai or online, but from my hometown. I brought two big bags of peppers to Shanghai when I went back to my hometown last time". (Field diary, January 2019)*

As a Sichuanese, Song favoured a spicy taste. The preference for a spicy taste with Sichuan style had become her eating habit, which did not change even though she had lived outside her hometown for a decade. Her insistence on the eating habits of her hometown was not because as a migrant she was resisting social exclusion in the host society through consuming foods originating from her homeland as Chapman and Beagan (2013) suggest. In Song's case, the eating habits of her hometown were deeply rooted in the socio-cultural context of her experience of growing up (Collins, 2008). As I observed, Song had embraced Shanghainese food, which is seldom spicy and employs soy sauce and sugar as primary ingredients. Her eating habits originating from her hometown implied her strong emotional attachment to her hometown and left-behind family. While cooking the noodle soup, Song told me about many sweet moments she had spent with her parents. The family love and happiness evoked from her childhood memories provided much emotional support during intense everyday work. Moreover, as suggested by her online posts, given that she often cooked the noodle soup while studying in the US, the noodle soup constituted a common memory of overseas study between her and her friends and became a representation of overseas friendship as well. In Song's lived experiences, the noodle soup acted as an emotional tie connecting hometown, overseas and Shanghai across different life stages.

Overseas experience also helped to shape my participants' everyday dietary habits. Yun supposed that the greatest impact of her overseas experience on her everyday life was regarding food practices:

> *In the US, my husband and I liked Mexican food, like taco and burritos. We often visited Chipotle, a fast food restaurant selling Mexican meals. Not sure whether you can find it in the UK. Now if we want Mexican food very much, we will cook it at home. We buy tortillas, the big Mexican pancake, from supermarket and stir-fry minced beef, green pepper and onion together as fillings. And a Mexican sauce, minced tomato, minced onion, avocado paste and a little bit of lime juice. Mix all the ingredients together and wrap them in tortillas. Really really delicious. All the ingredients are available in supermarkets in Shanghai. And different kinds of cheese! I learnt a Jewish way of eating bagels. Spread cream cheese and put smoked salmon on a bagel. Very yummy! I can buy all the ingredients, like cream cheese and smoked salmon, easily in Shanghai. An outstanding advantage of living in Shanghai is that you can get any foreign products you want. I can even buy Dr. Pepper! That's cherry-flavoured cola originating from Texas. Amazing! [laugh] From the perspective of food, I had been used to making Chinese cuisines at home before studying in the US. After I went overseas, I tried a variety of exotic food and learnt something unfamiliar, something which made me "woo-hoo". Now I am back. Hey, I want some Mexican dishes today. Then I can make it by myself. There are also many Mexican restaurants in Shanghai. Ah… Bagel is very tasty, super tasty. But you must eat it with cream cheese or avocado, and smoked salmon. We learnt the Jewish style in America. Really good. (Interview with Yun, August 2019)*

In this interview, burritos, Jewish bagels and Dr. Pepper, no matter whether these were originally from the US, had become representations of Yun's American experiences. She attached place-specified emotions to these foods. As suggested by her words and the use of interjections (like *"ah", "woo-hoo"* and *"amazing"*), she perceived a series of positive emotions including excitement, enjoyment and fondness while encountering these foods overseas. When she replicated the cooking process, these emotions and fond memories of her overseas experience popped into Yun's mind. Her overseas experience had changed her eating habits and dietary practice through introducing a variety of foreign food to her everyday life. The change was rather obvious in Yun's comparison between her cooking practice before going overseas and after

returning. Moreover, given that the cooking was completed by Yun and her husband together either abroad or in Shanghai, the emotions attached to food were interwoven with her love with husband, which I will further discuss in Chapter VI.

Yun highlighted the convenience of life in Shanghai. The multicultural environment in Shanghai implied not only the open-minded attitudes towards foreign cultures pervading wider society, but also the accessibility of foreign products. The multicultural environment of Shanghai enables overseas returnees to persist with everyday habits established overseas and maintain the emotional ties and other connections with overseas experience (Tseng, 2011). In Yun's case, the multicultural environment made it possible to cook foreign food at home, which surprised and gratified her. The satisfaction towards the multicultural environment and the positive emotions attached to food greatly encouraged her to develop an affection for the city of Shanghai.

5.2.3 Dining-out

Participants showed two inclinations in terms of dining out. First, they behaved rather similarly to other young people in Shanghai particularly from the perspectives of food preference and the use of mobile applications; second, their practices of dining-out clearly hinted at their overseas experiences. The inclinations of dining-out were consistent with their personal profile, young people in their 20s or early 30s who studied overseas and were living in Shanghai. This section focuses on the two inclinations and interrogates how their dining-out practices often wove together the elements of their overseas experiences and life in Shanghai.

During fieldwork, I often went out for meals with my participants and I also observed their dining-out with other friends through their photo-diaries and online posts. In these activities, my participants chose food with a wide range of styles, like Sichuanese hot pot, Cantonese dim sum, Shanghainese cuisine, Japanese sushi and so on, according to their preference and instant decisions. Also, their dining-out practices were influenced by Internet celebrities, a new

socio-economic phenomenon in China, which was more influential in a metropolis like Shanghai. In addition to traditional advertisements, some restaurants cooperated with Internet celebrities, food bloggers and famous singers/actors and employed the influence of celebrities to advertise. Taking Xiong (Female/26-30/US/non-Shanghainese/business) as an example, in late 2018 she adored a particular actor very much. Once we were going to eat out on the weekend and she eagerly proposed a restaurant. When I asked why she decided on this restaurant, she happily answered, "*because my little brother (wo jia xiao ge ge)*[50] *just visited this restaurant a few days ago. He posted the photo on Weibo. I want to try the one he recommended!*". Over that dinner, we even ordered exactly the same food as her idol. Xiong was not the only participant that suggested the influence of celebrities in everyday dining-out. In fact, when my participants decided where to eat out, they would (un)intentionally choose the one recommended by celebrities. Going for food which was popular on the Internet or received celebrity endorsement brought them extra excitement and curiosity and they perceived stronger enjoyment or greater disappointment upon the taste of food. Thus, their consumption of dining-out food was greatly impacted by personal preference and commercial advertisements. At this point, there were no differences between overseas returned students and local young people.

The rapid development of the Internet and mobile technology had shaped my participants' practices of dining out. If my participants wanted to eat out in Shanghai, a typical process was: first, they talked with friends via *WeChat* to discuss the meeting time and the preferred cuisines; then, they opened the application called "*da zhong dian ping*"[51] on their mobile phone and searched for a suitable restaurant; third, they discussed with friends on *WeChat* again and decided on the specific restaurant; fourth, they used the map applications, usually *Amap* or *Baidu map*, to find their way to the restaurant; during the meal,

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[50] In the discourse system of contemporary Chinese fandom, fans refer to male idols as my little brother ("我家小哥哥") and female idols as my little sister ("我家小姐姐") to show their love for idols.

[51] *Da zhong dian ping* functions similarly to Yelp. It is the most popular mobile application to search for food recommendations in China.

some restaurants asked customers to service themselves (like ordering food) through *Mei Tuan* or other mobile applications; finally, after the meal, they paid the bill through *Alipay* or *WeChat Pay*[52]. As can be seen from the process, all steps involved mobile applications, namely *WeChat*, *da zhong dian ping*, *Amap*, *Baidu Map*, *Mei Tuan*, *Alipay* and *WeChat pay*.

The everyday practice of dining out could be supposed as a microcosm of everyday life with mobile Internet, which had become ubiquitous in Shanghai. As most of my participants missed the early growing stage of the Chinese Internet economy between 2015 and 2017, they took a while to get used to the pervasiveness of mobile Internet technology on their return to China. They were shocked by the wide use of mobile Internet. Shanghai is one of the most active cities in terms of mobile payment, which had been rare in my participants' overseas experiences, so many of my participants had experienced moments of embarrassment when they clumsily paid with cash or bank cards while other people skilfully checked out through scanning a quick response code with their mobile phone. As Zhu (Female/26-30/Singapore/non-Shanghainese/bank) said, "*I was like a country bumpkin who had just come to a modern city*". The embarrassment disappeared once they got used to the mobile Internet, which was not a challenge for most young people. The initial encounters with mobile technology impressed them very much.

My participants' dining-out practices hinted at their overseas experiences. They not only intended to consume foreign cuisine which they were familiar with, but also likely recalled past memories of life abroad and showed a good knowledge of "authentic" foreign food (Chapman & Beagan, 2013). When I arranged a first meeting with Zhu, she suggested that we had dinner together after she finished work and recommended a Vietnamese restaurant close to her company.

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[52] Alipay and WeChat pay are two primary applications for mobile payment. Customers and business owners complete payment through scanning QR codes. Given that mobile payment requires smart mobile Internet-connected phones as the only equipment and that Shanghai has the most comprehensive Internet infrastructure in China, mobile payment has been rapidly gaining popularity in Shanghai. To some extent, Shanghai was a cashless society for all residents during my fieldwork period.

I arrived at the restaurant before Zhu. The restaurant was full of Vietnamese elements in terms of decorations, menu and the uniform of waiters/waitresses. [Fig. 5.8, 5.9] [...] During our dinner, Zhu talked a lot about her experiences in Singapore. She told me she had favoured Vietnamese Pho since she had studied in Singapore. As I also studied in Singapore, we discussed different canteens on campus and our favourite restaurants. I can see she had a great time in Singapore and misses it very much. Zhu was elated when she found this restaurant by chance. She recommended it to her friends at once and has often visited this restaurant since then. (Field diary, March 2019)

Fig. 5.8 The decoration of the Vietnamese Restaurant (Photo by Author)

Fig. 5.9 The menu of the Vietnamese Restaurant (Photo by Author)

The consumption of a familiar foreign flavour recalled Zhu's fond memories of life overseas and evoked emotions like loss, enjoyment and happiness. In this vein, overseas food functions as a bridge connecting overseas places in the past to present everyday life in Shanghai, which is like the hometown food I discussed earlier.

There is a Chinese phrase to describe dining-out for a social purpose, *fan ju*[53], in which *fan* refers to having a meal together and *ju* means social network. In Chinese social norms, eating together is an important occasion to establish and

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[53] It is 饭局 in Chinese.

maintain social relations. Thus, it was no surprise that my participants not only ate out with friends casually, but also attended various *fan ju* involving colleagues, various contacts at work and other social acquaintances. I have discussed how overseas alumni relationships helped my participants' job-hunting and career development in the last chapter. A dinner/lunch party had become a popular choice to contribute to the maintenance of overseas alumni relationships as well as the career development of my participants. In this regard of *fan ju*, eating practices connected work and experiences outside of working hours. Qi's (Female/26-30/Hong Kong/non-Shanghainese/Higher education) alumni association organised alumni activities every two or three months. These activities were mostly cultural or professional events, but attendees often chose to have lunch or dinner together after events.

> *Don't you think it would be strange if everyone leaves immediately once the event is over? If it's time to eat, why not have dinner together? Dinner is a much better opportunity than the alumni event itself to talk with alumni and close our relationship. Delicious food, casual chat… Sometimes dinner is also a good opportunity to acquire knowledge from senior alumni and gain other useful information. We usually go to Cha Chaan Teng[54]. It is cheap and can be found easily in Shanghai. Sometimes we also go to some expensive restaurants for Dim Sum. We all studied in Hong Kong and we love the taste of Hong Kong. (Interview with Qi, March 2019)*

In Qi's narrative, dining-out with alumni is not simply an enjoyable moment to satisfy appetites, but more like a social occasion to accumulate human resources for other aspects of everyday life. The shared memory of Hong Kong and the common interest in Hong Kong food acted as great triggers to start information exchange over the alumni dinner. The informal interactions in *fan ju* have become a great supplement to the formal communication over alumni events as well as an important channel to collect career information.

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[54] Cha chaan teng (茶餐厅/茶餐廳), sometimes translated as Hong Kong-style cafés, is a kind of restaurant originated in Hong Kong. It offers Hong Kong cuisine and Hong Kong-style western cuisine with affordable prices and casual atmosphere. Cha chaan teng has been very popular in Shanghai.

5.2.4 Discussion

Eating food is more than a material practice, but represents a series of cultural codes inherent within certain places (Brightwell, 2012). Life stages also influence diners' perception of food (Massey, 2005). In other words, spatiality and temporality always interweave in the practices of food. Food as a kind of material culture can provide "an alternative way of advancing our understanding of contemporary transnationality" (P. Crang *et al*., 2003, p. 438). In this section, no matter whether my participants cooked at home or ate out in company canteens or restaurants, much of the food they consumed was related to places they had experienced. For example, Song's noodle soup was derived from her childhood experiences full of love in her hometown with parents; Yun's burritos represented her fond memories of the US with her husband; and the common flavour of Hong Kong-style food became a tool to maintain alumni relations in Qi's case. The emotions they expressed through eating and cooking were connected to the places as well as the time of childhood and overseas time. In other words, my participants attached their emotions towards a specific life stage and specific places to relevant food.

As diet is an autonomic action at most times, migrants tend to consume food which brings them a sense of familiarity or happy memories and which they enjoyed (Duruz, 2010; Johnston & Longhurst, 2012). That is why few negative emotions towards hometowns and overseas were mentioned in this section. Once returnees leave host places abroad, overseas food functions similarly to their hometown food. Overseas could be a place full of familiarity in my participants' perception and food could help to create a familiar atmosphere (Johnston & Longhurst, 2012, 2013). As Abdullah (2010) argues, there is "a strong and intimate entanglement between emotions, memory, food and the senses" (p. 157).

I also consider how the contemporary socio-cultural environment of Shanghai influenced my participants' everyday food practices. Researchers have noticed that in transnational migration, the local food of host places also greatly constitutes the everyday life of migrants overseas, providing "a form of 'global' familiarity" (Collins, 2008, p. 151). My participants, particularly non-

Shanghainese, experienced a similar process in getting used to the dietary customs in Shanghai. Here, I refer the dietary customs in Shanghai not only to the cooking and taste of traditional Shanghainese cuisine, but also to the recent development of Shanghai, such as the wide use of mobile Internet technology. Existing literature usually focuses on the conversation and/or conflicts between traditional culture in the host place and the culture represented by migrants, while overlooking the complexities of transnational mobility, such as the contemporary changes of socio-cultural contexts in one place of their transnational movement. Shanghai, the multicultural metropolis in rapid development, acted as an ideal research context to illustrate how overseas returned students adjusted their food practices under the impact of a series of cultures and new fashions. My participants' everyday food practice was emplaced in Shanghai and tangled with other aspects of everyday life, like work schedules, fandom and various social relations. Their experiences of weekday lunches, self-cooking and dining-out portrays their everyday life and adaptation after moving to Shanghai in a more comprehensive sense. In my exploration of overseas returned students' everyday experiences, food has acted as a conduit for understanding the process of transnational return migration as well as translocality presented in this process.

5.3 Residence

Home-making practices have increasingly aroused the interest of transnationalism scholars (e.g., Bilecen, 2017; Boccagni, 2017; Walsh, 2011; B. Wang, 2016). The search for dwelling places, the construction of domestic spaces and the interaction with other people in the same household illustrate migrants' struggles to feel at home (Boccagni, 2014). Migrants construct the physical, indifferent dwelling spaces as meaningful personal/familial places and seek familiarity, security and perhaps belonging through a series of actions regarding residence (X. Cai & Su, 2020; Walsh, 2011). Researchers view these mundane practices as a kind of emotional labour. While there have been inspired discussions about migrants' residence, my fieldwork data suggests some fresh findings given my participants' identity as return migrants and the specific socio-economic context of Shanghai. In this section, I respectively

analyse how my participants constructed their home in Shanghai and how they responded to the local management of their neighbourhood.

5.3.1 (Temporary) settlement in Shanghai

The residence choices of my participants depended upon their marital status and were distinct between Shanghainese and non-Shanghainese. Shanghainese participants lived in self-owned properties with their parents or partners. As their experiences in the household were greatly related to their family members, Shanghainese participants' domestic experiences will be discussed more in the next chapter about intimate relationships. Single non-Shanghainese participants usually rented a room in a shared flat with strangers as flatmates. If they were in a relationship, some of them rented an entire apartment and lived with their partners. Married non-Shanghainese participants usually purchased their own property. The connections between marital status and residence choice was easily understood given that an individual can rarely afford the expensive prices or rents of property in Shanghai and couples usually demanded more privacy than single persons. In my fieldwork, as married participants were more concerned about the privacy of themselves and their family, only several single participants allowed me to enter their residence. So this section is primarily based on my observation on single participants' residences.

My participants viewed having a dwelling place as a symbol of settlement in Shanghai. Sun (Female/20-25/UK/non-Shanghainese/Business) had never lived in Shanghai before she came back to China in mid-2018. She talked about her transitory residence when she was doing an internship and hunting for a formal position,

> *I am living in a serviced apartment on a monthly renewed contract. You know that kind of accommodation, right? A studio with housekeeping service. Quite expensive. The rental is higher than my monthly salary. Lucky that my mom will pay my rental before I get a formal position. [...] The internship I am doing cannot be transferred to a full-time formal position, so living in the serviced apartment is also temporary. I feel I am back to a hotel every day, not back home. I do wish to have my own residence. But it is too risky to find a long-term residence before I get a full-time job. I am "drifting" in Shanghai now. Perhaps I will*

change my dwelling place next week; perhaps I will still live here one year later. Who knows what will happen? (interview with Sun, December 2018)

Sun realised that she might change job at any time and, as a result, would move out of the serviced apartment. Thus, she took her room in the serviced apartment merely as a site for sleeping and was reluctant to invest time, effort and emotions to construct the room as a place full of personal meaning. The feeling of "*back to a hotel*" and "drifting *in Shanghai*" suggested a strong uncertainty and rootlessness Sun perceived from her initial experience in Shanghai after moving back to China.

Most of my participants tended to choose the location of their long-term residence according to the location of work and the convenience of commuting. Consequently, many participants rented a long-term dwelling place only after they had received a full-time job. Considering the long-time job-hunting overseas returned students often encountered in 2018 and 2019, a number of participants had to live in a transitory residence for months. The serviced apartment was one option. Other options included a friend's place, their relatives' home and a youth hostel. Participants widely felt uncertainty and rootlessness as Sun did. Some participants who lived in a friend's or relative's place worried that their transitory stay brought too many troubles to the host and caused emotional burdens on their intimate relationship. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, participants often experienced a series of negative emotions from job-hunting. The insecure accommodation further reinforced these negative emotions.

Once my participants had started full-time employment and established a long-term dwelling place, they started to attach personal meaning to the rented place. Many researchers have employed object interviews or participant observation to investigate domestic objects and decorations as a crucial part of home-making practices. Notably, most existing discussion is regarding reception rooms, hallways and living rooms (*e.g.*, Bilecen, 2017; Boccagni, 2014; X. Cai & Su, 2020; Walsh, 2006). However, as my participants mostly lived in a shared flat with strangers as flatmates, they seldom attached too much personal

meaning to public spaces in the flat and, instead, devoted their efforts to construct their bedrooms (Nasreen & Ruming, 2021). A wall in Song's bedroom attracted my interest. Her bedroom was rather tidy and did not have big storage space or display space. So she made the best of her bedroom wall (see Fig. 5.10).

Fig. 5.10 Song's bedroom wall (Photo by Song)

Objects displayed on the wall illustrated her childhood memories, overseas study experience, present everyday life and other experiences of mobility. As can be seen from the photo, most of the wall was occupied by pencil sketches drawn by Song, which implied that art was an important part of her everyday life. During the year of fieldwork, Song attended art classes or practised painting and drawing in the studio every weekend. She, as a beginner, had a lot of interest in painting. Once she finished a picture that she was satisfied with, she would stick it on the bedroom wall. Song's willingness to show her drawings suggested that she enjoyed it and was proud of her art. The enjoyment was also evoked by the friendship established in the drawing studio. In earlier fieldwork activities, Song had told me that the art class allowed her to make new friends and she would go on holiday with these friends. In addition to drawings, the sticky memoranda on the lower left corner of the wall recorded Song's to-do list in the next few days, which was one of her everyday habits. As discussed in the last chapter, Song frequently sat for various qualification examinations. Thus, it was

no surprise to see the guide books for examinations on her shelf. Some displayed items came from Song's childhood, like Buzz Lightyear and Luo Xiaohei, an animated figure of a black cat, that she had always liked since childhood. These objects help to reveal the multiplicity of Song's everyday life through illustrating her everyday practices outside the workplace.

This wall also hinted at Song's cosmopolitan trait, which was shaped by her overseas study experience and her travelling across boundaries. The most outstanding representation of Song's overseas study was her graduation photo of her master's degree in the United States, the second picture on the right. The photo was carefully decorated with a graduation tassel and wooden frame. The careful decoration suggested Song's sense of belonging and pride in her American university, which were also proved by her other mundane practices, like the preference of the representative green colour of her university in dressing. Her overseas study experience was also reflected in some greeting cards and postcards written in English, which were displayed on the shelf at the lower left corner. These were written by her friends while she was studying in the United States. She had kept these cards for years and showed a great value of overseas friendship.

The cosmopolitan traits of my participants' home were not only evoked by their overseas education experience, but also other transnational journeys. In Song's bedroom shelf, there were mugs from Eastern Europe and postcards from Nanjing, which she purchased in past travels. Souvenirs as materialisation of cultures further contributed to the cosmopolitan atmosphere of her room (Haldrup, 2017). Weng (Female/26-30/UK/non-Shanghainese/Bank) provided another example of domestic decoration with a cosmopolitan atmosphere. She lived in a talent apartment[55] which did not allow residents to change the domestic design very much, but Weng tried her best to make personal decoration while complying with the apartment management regulations.

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[55] The Shanghai government provides special public housing for people who are qualified with the talent policy. These properties are called talent apartments. Due to government subsidies, the rental of talent apartments is usually lower than the market price.

She put a rug in front of the entrance door and installed a curtain on the door. The rug and curtain were bought from Daiso[56], and they were obviously in Japanese style. She hung a curtain of small lights around her bed, which looked like the light curtains British families would use during Christmas. There was also a poster of the Eiffel Tower in the style of Pop Art on the wall. I saw several French books and albums of British singers on the shelf. A poster of a British rock band was also stuck on the cabinet. (Field diary, March 2019)

Given her study experience in the UK, it was no surprise to see British items in her room, like the albums of British singers and the poster of a British rock band. The French elements were relevant to her undergraduate major, French studies. Although she had not engaged with any work/study related to France since university, she still maintained a strong interest in French culture. Japanese elements in her room were derived from her personal interest in Japanese culture, although she even had never visited Japan. The cosmopolitan traits of her room were shaped by her past experiences across multiple cultures, including but not limited to overseas study. Also, the multicultural environment in Shanghai enabled Weng to make a cosmopolitan home. For example, she could purchase Japanese decorations easily in Shanghai. Such findings could contribute to home studies of transnational migration, as most existing literature merely focuses on how home/host society influences migrants' home-making practices (Boccagni, 2014; Wang, 2016), but overlooks how migrants' temporary translocal/transnational experience/lived places feed into their home spaces. Transnational mobilities, including return migration across national borders, might be more complex than existing home studies have argued.

My participants seldom talked about their flatmates who were almost strangers to them. Even after they had been living in a household for months or years, their interaction remained very limited; similar findings can be seen in other studies on youth sharing housing (Clark *et al.*, 2017; Nasreen & Ruming, 2021). Some participants made simple complaints about flatmates in interviews. For example, Wen (Female/26-30/Singapore/non-Shanghainese/Financial industry) complained that her flatmates always made a mess in the kitchen, so she seldom

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[56] Diaso is a Japanese supermarket chain which sells Japanese style household items. It has several branches in Shanghai.

cooked at home. Song was the only participant who suggested friendly and frequent interactions with flatmates in her everyday life. She and her flatmate shared recipes with each other and cooked together; also she and her flatmates attempted to make an atmosphere of home through decorating the public space.

Temporality was not only suggested by participants' transitory residence when they just arrived in Shanghai, but also by their long-term residence after they had received a full-time job. My participants usually signed a yearly renewed contract with the landlord and many of them would move home every year due to various reasons (*e.g.* the dissatisfaction towards last residence/flatmates, the change of workplace). Thus, not all participants were willing to expend much effort in making their residence homely. Fig. 5.11 shows Wen's (Female/26-30/Singapore/non-Shanghainese/Financial industry) bedroom, where she had lived for half a year. In her bedroom, all the furniture and decoration were provided by the landlord. As Wen told me, her primary concern about residence was to have a comfortable and spacious space for sleeping and relaxing after work. Thus, she did care very much about the nature of the space. Although Wen had received a Shanghainese *hukou*, she had decided to move back to her hometown after her fiancé completed his Master's degree in Shanghai. Given the decision of future migration, she became less willing to attach much personal meaning to the temporary residence in Shanghai.

Fig. 5.11 Wen's bedroom (Photo by Wen)

Home-making consists of everyday practices to express self (Walsh, 2006). My participants decorated their residences in Shanghai with objects collected from their previous transnational/translocal journey and present everyday life. Existing literature suggests that migrants express their belonging to specific places and create a familiar atmosphere in a strange host place through domestic objects (like Bilecen, 2017; B. Wang, 2016). In my research, overseas returned students tended to use objects to make a space of security and familiarity, but the home-making did not necessarily suggest belonging to any specific places. My participants mostly displayed cosmopolitan characteristics in everyday home-making practices. Similar to their food practices in which they usually consumed food from places towards which they held positive emotions, the objects which they used to decorate their home were also from these places with fond memories, like Song's graduation photo. Given that participants' home-making practices were influenced by their past experiences as well as future migration plans, home-making connected the past, present and future and reflected how overseas returned students made everyday life through negotiating different life stages (Walsh, 2018a).

5.3.2 The residents' committee and neighbourhood management

Existing literature which investigates the interaction between migrants and neighbours and the experiences of migrants in neighbourhoods is mostly focused on western contexts. For example, Neal *et al.* (2015) find that the common use of public neighbourhood parks by migrants and locals helps to create an inclusive open cultural environment; Ehrkamp (2006) suggests that Turkish migrants attach belonging to immigrant neighbourhoods in Germany and establish a new place-based identity. These studies in a western context mostly indicate social inclusion/exclusion experienced by migrants through exploring their interaction with neighbours who are native residents. Also the types of migration have an impact on interactions within neighbourhoods. For example, student migrants who live in student halls, skilled workers who live in a local community and unskilled migrants who live in ethnic ghettos are likely to interact in different ways with their neighbours. In my fieldwork, my participants did not suggest much interaction with their neighbours. Actually the lack of communication between neighbours is rather usual in gated communities in Shanghai. Meanwhile, my participants suggested that the residents' committee in their neighbourhood, a grassroots organisation, was widely involved in their everyday life.

The residents' committee is a unique form of social organisation in China. According to the constitution of China, the residents' committee is "self-managed, self-educated and self-serviced grassroots autonomous organisation"[57]. In practice, the residents' committees "assist the bureaucracy to influence citizen groups" and "help citizen groups to affect the bureaucracy" (Mok, 1988, p.164). In other words, the residents' committee functions as a bridge between government and residents. While dwelling in Shanghai, my participants enjoyed the social services delivered by the residents' committee and also encountered its maintenance of local public order. During my fieldwork year, I observed a good case to illustrate how my participants reacted

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[57] The original Chinese is "居民委员会是居民自我管理、自我教育、自我服务的基层群众性自治组织".

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to the unique local management, that was the new policy of garbage sorting and recycling.

Shanghai became the first pilot city in China to conduct garbage sorting and recycling due to its impressive infrastructure and the relatively high education level of residents. Since April 2019, the Shanghai Municipal Government has started to implement garbage sorting and recycling in the whole city, and encouraged each household to sort garbage before placing it in designated garbage bins at designated locations. The government took the period between April and July as the trial phase of the new policy. Since July 2019, sorting garbage had become the compulsory responsibility of residents. The residents' committee was the primary promoter of this policy at the neighbourhood level. It explained how to sort garbage to the residents and decided the location and opening hours of garbage collection points. The new policy of garbage sorting and recycling was inserted into every resident's everyday life in Shanghai and evoked much discussion.

The garbage sorting guidelines published by the Shanghai municipal government were rather complicated. For example, according to the guidelines, chicken bones are food waste but pig bones belong to general garbage. Such puzzling guidelines caused much confusion among residents and there were a lot of jokes about them. Fig. 5.12 illustrates one joke about how residents were confused by the guidelines.
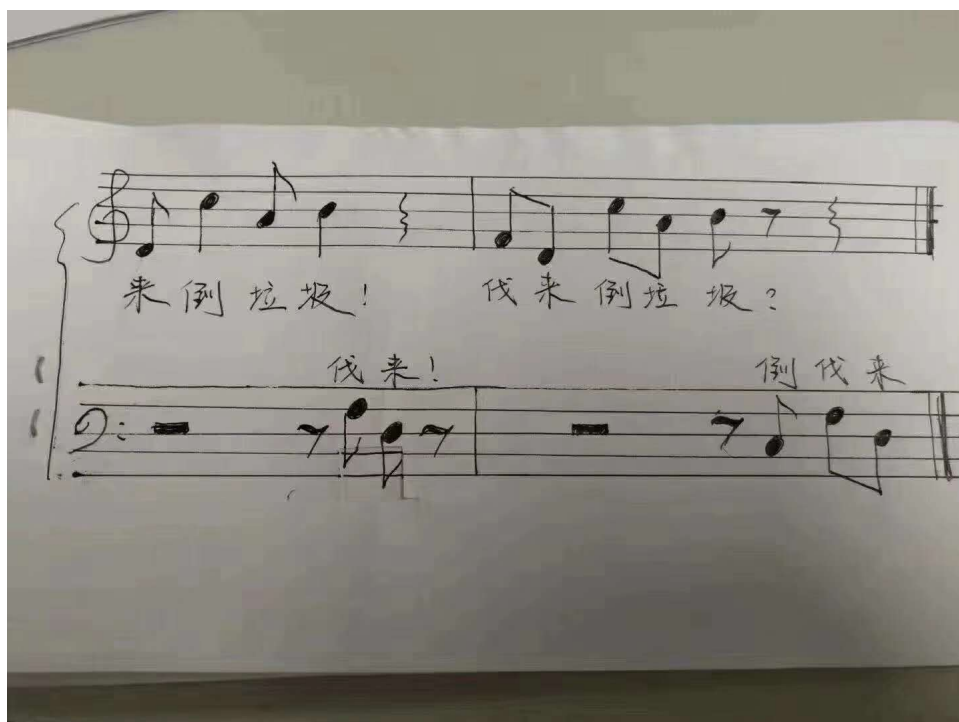
Fig. 5.12 A joke about garbage classification in Shanghai (Photo by Ma)

Ma (Male/26-30/Singapore/Shanghainese/IT) shared this picture on his Wechat Moment. The sheet music accurately mimicked the pronunciation of Shanghainese dialect with musical notes and expressed the following dialogue.

> *(From left to right of Fig. 5.12; A's words are in the treble sheet and B's words are in the bass sheet)*
> *A: Re Do La Si (in solfège)/rei dao la sei! (in Shanghaiese dialect)/lai dao la ji! (in Mandarin)/Come to throw your garbage! (in English)*
> *B: Fa Re/ fa rei! /bu lai! /No!*
> *A: Fa Re Do La Si/fa rei dao la sei?/bu lai dao la ji?/Why not?*
> *B: Do Fa Re/dao fa rei./dao bu lai. /Don't know how to throw rightly.[58]*

During April and July 2019, Shanghai was the only city in China which promoted garbage sorting. This sheet music spoke to Shanghainese residents' confusion about the new policy in local dialect, which clearly indicated that the joke occurred in Shanghai. Ma was not the only participant who felt puzzled about the new policy. From April to July 2019, I witnessed a variety of jokes and complaints about the guidelines in my fieldwork activities. While most

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[58] In written Chinese, "A：来倒垃圾 (in Shanghainese dialect/Mandarin)。 B：伐来 (in Shanghainese dialect)/不来 (in Mandarin) ！A：伐来倒垃圾？ (in Shanghainese dialect)/不来倒垃圾 (in Mandarin)？ B：倒伐来 (in Shanghainese dialect)/倒不来 (in Mandarin)。"

participants generally supported garbage sorting as an important action to protect the environment, they were unhappy about the confusing policy and disapproved of its sudden implementation. The residents' committee was responsible for explaining the guidelines to all residents and inspecting the garbage bins daily. Given its responsibility, the residents' committee as the assistant of the bureaucracy powerfully intervened into residents' everyday life and strongly changed their everyday practices. Residents' negative opinions towards the policy of garbage classification and the unhappiness with the changes to everyday life might stimulate dissatisfaction with the residents' committee.

The poor management of some residents' committees regarding garbage classification was another important factor which evoked residents' anger. As the new policy required residents to place garbage in designated garbage bins at designated locations, some residents' committees changed the previous position of garbage bins and restricted the opening hours of garbage bins, which caused much inconvenience. Chen (Male/31-35/Singapore/non-Shanghainese/ Bank) complained about the residents' committee in his neighbourhood:

> *Management does not mean the transfer of responsibility from public institutions to households/individuals. The residents' committee decides to set only four garbage collection stations in the whole neighbourhood instead of the garbage bins under each residence building. If I sort garbage carefully and rightly, can I get some subsidies for saving public resources? Or after a while, if the garbage classification policy fails, will I be roughly categorised into the misbehaving group and be charged extra fee for processing garbage? (Online post of Chen, June 2019)*

Before the new policy of garbage classification, Chen's everyday routine regarding garbage was throwing unsorted garbage into bins under his residence building when he left home. Now he needed to sort everyday garbage into food waste, general garbage, recycling garbage and hazardous garbage, and then walk a long distance to place garbage at a specific garbage collection station; moreover, he had to take care of the opening times of the garbage collection stations. Some responsibilities, like delivering garbage from scattered bins to collection stations and conducting some basic work of sorting and recycling, were transferred from the residents' committee to residents due to the new

policy. In other words, the implementation of the new policy reduced the cost of public resources but increased the cost of personal time and efforts. Thus, Chen felt unhappy and even angry about the poorly-designed policy of garbage classification.

Due to various overseas experiences, my participants might hold different opinions towards garbage classification from local residents; meanwhile, the attitudes towards the new policy were not homogeneous among my participants. Overseas returned students tended to compare the Shanghai policy with overseas policies of garbage sorting. The comparison evoked different emotions. For example, participants who had lived in foreign countries where there were no strict requirements of garbage sorting, like Singapore, usually expressed great discomfort and great confusion about the new policy. Their reaction was mostly similar to that of local residents. But for participants who studied in Japan, which has carried out a rather strict policy of garbage sorting, they felt that the policy in Shanghai was rather acceptable in terms of life convenience. My participants' criticism of garbage sorting policy in Shanghai was largely based on their overseas experience regarding garbage sorting and recycling.

In my participants' narrative, the government seldom appeared in most occasions of their everyday life apart from applying for *hukou* or car licences. However, the government did deeply influence my participants' everyday life in (in)direct ways through surveillance, the bureaucracy and various intangible policies. Although the residents' committee is not a part of the government according to the constitution of China, its function as a bridge between government and grassroots people provides a good opportunity for me to observe how my participants reacted to governance in everyday life. The policy of garbage sorting and recycling was implemented only in Shanghai from April to July 2019, which provided a unique spatial and temporal context to investigate how the municipal governance changed individuals' everyday routines. As for my participants, on the one hand, they shared many common emotions with residents without overseas experience, like the dissatisfaction with the sudden and powerful implementation of the new policy and the confusion over the guidelines. On the other hand, their overseas experience

impacted their judgement of the new policy and related emotions. If they had experienced a rather strict system of garbage classification during overseas dwelling, they usually appeared more tolerant towards the policy in Shanghai.

5.3.3 Discussion

In this section, I respectively discussed my participants' everyday home-making practices in their household and everyday encounters with local management in the neighbourhood. Their dwelling experiences suggested a variety of emotions. Emotions could be expressed through objects, such as Song's pride about her overseas university attached to the well-decorated and well-presented graduation photo. My participants' reaction to the new policy of garbage sorting and recycling suggested that the unwilling changes of everyday material practices evoked a series of negative emotions, like unhappiness and even anger. Experiences of social relations within residences, like (un)pleasant relationships with flatmates and the dispute with the residents' committee, also yielded emotional results.

No matter whether my participants were going to settle down in Shanghai permanently or whether they had been granted a Shanghai *hukou*, the residence of most participants remained temporary, which prevented them from investing time, efforts and emotions into home-making practices. The indifferent attitudes were more obvious when they dealt with neighbourhood issues. My fieldwork suggested that on most occasions, my participants' domestic experiences and neighbourhood experiences were almost separated from each other. While they could copy domestic decoration and created a similar atmosphere in different households as physical spaces, the home-like atmosphere was irrelevant to the neighbourhood. Thus, even if some participants, like Song, had developed a sense of belonging to a household, few of them perceived belonging to a neighbourhood.

Similar to food practices, the residence experience of my participants also suggested their cosmopolitan traits. Their past transnational and translocal experience was blended with their present experience in Shanghai in everyday

residence. On the one hand, my participants had gradually adjusted themselves to the wider society of Shanghai. In their domestic decoration, many objects were collected from their present life in Shanghai rather than places they experienced in the past. Despite their concerns about some specific policies, most participants understood and accepted the existence of the residents' committee in their everyday life. On the other hand, overseas experience was still having an impact on their everyday life, which was suggested from not only the domestic objects representing transnational/translocal memories, but also their questions towards specific policies in local management. Return is never a simply backward movement to a place which migrants had been familiar with, but implies a reconstruction of everyday life based on their existing experience involving multiple places across different life stages and the futures in their imagination.

5.4 Transportation

In scholarship on urban transportation, researchers interrogate how residents' mobility has been enabled or constrained by power inequalities in urban spaces through examining available options of transportation, travelling time, people's attitudes towards transportation and other aspects of everyday transportation (Bissell, 2016; Negishi & Bissell, 2020). In addition to the focus on the power-geometries of mobilities in studies on urban transportation, some researchers have paid their attention to how transportation creates affective spaces and how body, space, objects and subjectivity interact with each other during transportation (Latham & McCormack, 2004; Negishi & Bissell, 2020). However, the above discussion has been largely focused on non-migrant residents. As for the transportation experienced by transnational/translocal migrants, scholars mainly focus on commuting across national and/or regional boundaries through the research lens of power-geometries and pay very limited attention to everyday public/private transportation in urban spaces. Transnational migrants are not moving across national borders everyday but spend a lot of time in a specific place. Thus, it might be unwise to overlook their everyday transportation in cities if researchers aimed at a more comprehensive understanding of transnational migrants' everyday life. Moreover, given the

nature of return migration which is different from outward migration, return migrants' everyday transportation in their homeland might provide fresh insights into scholarship of return migration.

5.4.1 Public transport

The public transport system is not only a necessary part of urban infrastructure, but also greatly constitutes the image of a city, such as the red double-decker bus in London and the Mass Rapid Transit system in Taipei. The specific public transport system creates affective urban spaces, which invokes migrants' geographical imagination of a city before they actually arrive and has a series of emotional consequences. Shanghai has an extensive public transport system, including metro lines, light rails, maglev train, bus and city ferry. In existing limited discussion, researchers argue that migrants' familiarity with the public transportation system of the host place represents their social integration in wider society (Buhr, 2018). When my participants took part in my research, they had been in Shanghai for at least one month and most had developed a satisfactory knowledge of those bus routes and metro lines which they frequently used in everyday life. The knowledge of public transport was gained and internalised through repetitive travels, and figuring out their everyday routines had gradually become an effortless process (Negishi & Bissell, 2020). Notably, different participants had different levels of familiarity, depending on how long they had lived in Shanghai. When selecting places to meet, participants who had been in Shanghai for less than three months and did not live in Shanghai previously usually asked to meet with me in places close to their residence or workplaces, while participants who had more lived experiences in Shanghai did not mind the meeting place so much. The difference was partly because these newcomers felt nervous to find an unfamiliar way to their residence/workplaces. The nervousness and sense of uncertainty would diminish with their increasing familiarity with the city.

My participants had usually imagined the public transport in Shanghai as a crowded and time-consuming experience before they moved back to Shanghai from overseas. Such imagination had been proved by related statistics and their

personal experience to some extent later. As suggested by my participants, the metro carriages and buses in their commute were mostly crowded. Most participants relied on metro lines more than buses. My participants' choice was in accordance with the general trends of Shanghai residents' use of public transport. In August 2019, the daily average number of public transport passengers in Shanghai was 16.389 million. 66.6% passengers took metro lines and 32.6% bus[59]. On average, Shanghai residents spend about 54 minutes on single-way commutes between home and workplace, which is one of the longest commutating times among Chinese cities[60]. My participants spent from about 30 minutes to about 1 hour and 40 minutes on their single-way commute, which was almost in accordance with the statistics.

Given the busy public transport and long commuting time, the use of public transport was hardly pleasant. I attempted to undertake walk-along interviews with some participants during their transportation between residence and workplace, but failed to find appropriate opportunities. Instead, I experienced the daily routines of some participants on my own, recorded my experiences and discussed with participants later. The following field diary excerpt was my experience of Zhu's (Female/26-30/Singapore/non-Shanghainese/Bank) commute from her home to company during the morning peak time. Zhu lived in Baoshan district, a suburban district, and worked at the very centre of Shanghai. She selected her residence because of the transport convenience. While there was a long distance between her residence and workplace, she only needed to take Metro Line 1 and did not have to transfer to other means of transportation.

> *The station where I started this trip is the nearest subway station to Zhu's residence. She gets out of her flat around 8.10am every morning, and walks about 10 minutes to get to the metro station. I entered the Metro station around 8.20am. Many people waited for trains on the platform and needed to work in the downtown area. The order of the platform was generally fine. Most people queued well. Getting into the carriage was very challenging. Every time the door was open, no one got off the train but passengers on the platform attempted to get in the*

[59] Data source: Shanghai Municipal Transportation Commission.
http://jtw.sh.gov.cn/jttj/20190919/0010-33419.html
[60] Data source: https://www.sohu.com/a/350849115_131698

carriage. The passengers who had already been in the train had to move in and make some space near the door for passengers who were waiting to board. The passengers on the platform took some preparation for getting on the train, like moving the backpack to their chest or carrying bags with their hands, in order to reduce the space they occupy. Once the doors opened, they desperately squeezed into the doors and leaned in to prevent themselves from being caught when the doors closed. Every metro train was super crowded. I found the crowding understandable after I checked the map of Line 1 [Fig. 5.13]. The northern part of Line 1 passes through many populated residential areas and there is no transit station between the northern Line 1 and other metro lines. That is to say, for a long distance, most passengers try to get on Line 1, but few passengers get off, and the carriages will become more and more crowded. I had to miss two trains before I managed to squeeze into the third one, which upset me slightly. Being caught in a crowd, I couldn't hold any handrails or other fixed objects to stabilize my body. Soon I found that I would hardly fall, as I was supported by the surrounding crowd. I wanted to take a few photos of the crowd in the carriage, but there was no room for me to bend my arm and take my camera out of my bag. The carriage was quiet because most passengers did not talk on the phone or with each other. While I preferred a quiet trip, the environment was a little bit depressing, not like an energetic morning. The crowded environment made me uncomfortable, but the passengers around are obviously used to commuting like this. They only expressed anxiety when they needed to pass through the crowd and get off the train. When the train arrived at the Shanghai Railway Station Metro Station, many people got off the train and changed to Lines 3 and 4, and many people got on the train. Generally speaking, the carriage became less crowded. I felt much better for the rest of this trip. I got off at People's Square, which is one of the most crowded subway stations in Shanghai and the subway station closest to Zhu's company. My getting-off was basically smooth. I just need to follow the flow of people. Maybe it is because I am already familiar with Shanghai, but I did not feel much nervousness to find the way from Zhu's residence to her company. But I felt very uncomfortable, impatient and nervous during the trip. I worried whether I could arrive in Zhu's company on time. Zhu's working hours started at 9am. Finally, I was upset to find that I arrived at her company building at almost 9.10am. (Field Diary, March 2019)

Fig. 5.13 The routine of Metro Line 1

When I told her my negative emotions towards her daily commute, Zhu felt that the trip was not that bad.

> *I think it's okay to take the metro at 8.30. It has been less crowded. More passengers are around at 8.00am. I am used to taking the metro like this every day, and you may not be as familiar with this route as me. There are some small tips. For example, I know some corners of the platform which are less populated, some positions where I can get on the train more easily. Where I can find more space in the carriages and what kinds of preparation I should make before getting off… You know, some tips like that make me more comfortable and save me time. As for working hours, it doesn't matter if you are a few minutes late. Our company does not strictly say that you must arrive before 9 o'clock. I also often arrive a few minutes late. It would be okay if you are not too late. Given the intense morning peak period, it is difficult not to be late at all. (Interview with Zhu, March 2019)*

Zhu had gotten used to the trip from her residence to the company and established her personal knowledge of the everyday commute, like these helpful

skills. Once someone has internalised the knowledge of their everyday transport routine, he or she likely perceives fewer negative emotions towards the trip itself (Negishi & Bissell, 2020). The loose requirement of working hours further reduced her upset during the commute. However, for Zhu, the crowded everyday commute was never pleasant. Most participants in my research were similar to Zhu, who held slightly negative emotions towards everyday transportation. As I suggested in early sections, my participants tended to select the location of residence according to the location of their workplaces. Many participants had moved their residence for a more pleasant commute. For example, Wen (Female/26-30/Singapore/non-Shanghainese/Financial industry) moved her residence to a place just two metro stops away from her company in late 2018.

Researchers find that a variety of factors influence passengers' evaluation of public transport, including travel time, cost, the opportunity to relax, comfort, lack of public transport information and the performance of public transport (Beirao & Cabral, 2007). Some factors shaped my participants' use of public transport in Shanghai, like travel time, comfort, the opportunity to relax and the performance of public transport, particularly in terms of choosing different means of public transport, while other factors, such as cost and the lack of public transport information, had a very limited impact on my participants' commuting experiences. My participants did not mind the cost of public transport, because the price of public transport in Shanghai was rather cheap. The average monthly cost on public transport in 2018 was 33 US dollars per person[61], which means that Shanghai residents spent less than one British Pound on public transport per day. When Xiong (Female/26-30/US/non-Shanghainese/Business) calculated her everyday living expense in the last chapter, she intentionally ignored the cost of public transport, "*hmmm, forget it. Public transport is quite cheap.*" My participants were rather happy with the price of public transport, particularly after they had experienced expensive public transport overseas. Various mobile applications of transport and digital maps enabled my

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[61] The data is based on a consultation report published by Deloitte. Source: https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/cn/Documents/consumer-business/deloitte-cn-consumer-city-mobility-index-zh-180613.pdf, accessed on 18 July 2020.

participants to get public transport information. Thus, they rarely encountered the lack of public transport information.

My participants were likely to make flexible arrangements for commuting through taking all the factors into consideration. Taking Chen (Male/31-35/Singapore/non-Shanghainese/Bank) as an example,

> *The single-way commute between my home and company is about 50 minutes, no matter whether I take the bus or the metro. But I prefer buses, because buses come more frequently in the morning and there are dedicated lanes for buses. And the bus route is directly from my home to my company. If I take the metro, I need to transfer from Line 7 to Line 2 at Jing'an Temple. You know the station and you can imagine how crowded and how troublesome the transition is! A long distance to walk for the transition. Sometimes if I'm in a good mood after finishing one-day work and the weather is okay, I will take an electric bicycle back to home[62]. It's about forty-five minutes. Quite a long time and my bum hurts (laugh). It's more comfortable than being trapped in the metro carriage. (Interview with Chen, August 2018)*

While their commute between home and work place had become everyday routine, the routine was never fixed as only one option. My participants might choose between several means of public transport and sometimes changed their usual routine to gain a sense of freshness. Like Chen, the options of his everyday transportation included bus, metro lines and public-shared electric bicycle. He usually took the bus as his primary transportation in terms of time-saving, convenience and support, but he did not totally exclude metro lines from his everyday transportation. However, Chen did not express any positive emotions towards his way to work in the morning rush hour, no matter whether he took bus or metro lines. It might be because of the unpleasant public transport environment as well as his indifferent emotions towards work which I discussed in the previous chapter. The only positive emotion he mentioned was relaxation during the bicycling trip back home, which was reflected through "*good mood*", "*the weather is okay*", "*more comfortable*" and the laughter when he spoke of this experience. He was in favour of the bicycling trip despite the physical pain.

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[62] The electric bicycle Chen used was part of a public-shared bicycle scheme which was provided by commercial companies and could be found on the streets of Shanghai.

Overseas experience was hinted at in the changes of their behaviours and attitudes regarding public transport. Participants who studied in North America usually drove by themselves for transportation. After they moved back to Shanghai, they had to shift their transportation habits from private transport to public transport because of the inconvenience of private means, which I will discuss further in the following section. Even for participants who relied on public transport during overseas study, they had mostly spent some time getting used to the public transport in Shanghai and suggested dislike and helplessness towards the crowded and disorderly environment of public transport in Shanghai. Also, they tended to compare their overseas experience with current experience and the comparison between Shanghai and overseas likely recalled their memory of overseas study. As Chen commented,

> *When I was in Singapore, I liked taking the night bus back home very much. I sat on the second deck, listening to music and feeling the fresh air. Very relaxed. Most of the time, I was the only passenger on the bus. The whole space belonged to me. Enjoyable and comfortable. The metro in Shanghai is too crowded. […] By the way, don't you think the Shanghai metro and the Singaporean metro are very similar? Both Shanghai's Line 2 and Singapore's East-West Line are in green colour, connect the east and the west and end at airports. So do the Line 1 and North-South Line. Both are in red and run from north to south. (Interview with Chen, August 2018)*

The night bus in Singapore created a relaxing atmosphere for Chen, which was hardly duplicated in Shanghai. He missed the relaxing feeling and the related place, Singapore, while expressing dissatisfaction towards Shanghai. Some participants indicated their fondness for certain aspects of public transport in Shanghai. In an observed event, Weng and I were catching a metro train. Weng showed her mobile screen to me, "*Hey, look at the strong mobile signal! We can go Internet surfing free. But in London, the mobile connection would be completely lost in the tube. (Field diary, March 2019)*".

The use of public transport is a process of interaction between overseas returned students and urban infrastructure in Shanghai. Returned migrants needed to adapt themselves to the material infrastructure. When they just moved back to Shanghai, they might feel nervous to figure out the transport routes, but this

might be eased with familiarity. The comparison between different public transport systems evoked emotions like yearning, fondness and (dis)satisfaction. Meanwhile, they also perceived various atmospheres in spaces of public transport. Public transport in peak periods usually created an anxious atmosphere. The populated space, the huge transit stations and the intense timetable usually made my participants feel upset and fatigued. Moving back to China and starting a new life in Shanghai means that my participants needed to remove themselves from previous familiar urban environments and adapt to a new one. The change of living environment meant changes in living habits (Doody, 2020). The new environment and habits further evoked a series of emotions and might shape return migrants' perception of the new living city and ideas about their return journey.

5.4.2 Private transport

My participants seldom employed private transport as the primary means of everyday transportation between their residence and workplace due the developed public system and a series of restrictions on private transport imposed by the municipal government. However, private transport, like walking and cycling, supported my participants' commute as supplementary means. In the earlier section on the residents' committee, my participants' reaction towards governance was more like passive compliance. In this section, through investigating private transport used by my participants, I am able to observe how overseas returned students actively satisfied their own needs while respecting the governance and the wider socio-economic environment in their everyday life.

Given the great city size of Shanghai, the separation of business areas and residential areas in urban planning and expensive property prices, few young people in Shanghai, including my participants, are able to live within walking distance of their workplace. For my participants' commute, walking merely covered the distance between their residence/company and metro station/bus stop. Some researchers investigate how urban walking, which could be a kind of everyday transportation to certain sites or a kind of leisure activity, help

migrants to establish a better knowledge and stronger belonging to host society (Edensor, 2010; Prazeres, 2018). However, this is not the case in my research. My participants seldom treated everyday walking as a kind of urban exploration. Due to the trip purpose, various emotions towards going home or going to work made them focus on whether they could arrive at their destination on time rather than perceive the walking activity itself. In Zhu's photo-diary, she recorded her walking from her residence to the metro station in Fig. 5.14 and Fig. 5.15. For Fig. 5.14, she wrote "*it's 8.15am now. I just got out of my flat. Sunny day. A little bit later than usual. I need to hurry up.*" About ten minutes later, she took Fig. 5.15 and commented "*fewer people in the Metro station today! I could get on the train more easily and the routine will be less likely to be delayed.*" (Photo-Diary of Zhu, March 2019). In her record of walking, she did not pay much attention to whether the walking experience was pleasant, but only anxiously cared about whether the trip to work would go smoothly.

Fig. 5.14 Walking in Zhu's community (Photo by Zhu)

Fig. 5.15 The metro station close to Zhu' residence (Photo by Zhu)

(Electric) bicycle was another formal transport supplementing public transport in my participants' everyday transportation. As I mentioned in the last section, Chen sometimes hired an electric bicycle to go back home. More participants in my research employed bicycles similarly to walking to complete the distance between home/workplaces and metro stations/bus stops.

Despite the relatively high cost of private cars, including purchase, fuel and maintenance, an important reason why my participants, as well as most working people in Shanghai, seldom used a private car for everyday commute was the restricted control on private vehicles in Shanghai. The control is to ease traffic congestion and protect the environment. The Shanghai government issues a limited number of car number plates every month, approximately 9,000-10,000. Only people, who hold a Shanghai *hukou* or hold the city's temporary residence certificate and have tax records for three consecutive years in Shanghai, are eligible to apply for private number plates. Given that applying for a Shanghai *hukou* usually takes at least one year, this rule excluded many of my participants, particularly those who had just returned from overseas, from the group of eligible applicants. The Shanghai government uses an auction system to issue number plates. The auction is held once a month and applicants get their number plates through bidding. As the Shanghai Municipal Government has set an alert price (the alert price changes quarterly), bidders must not bid higher than the alert price. Therefore, the license plate auction is not only a monetary factor, but also largely depends on luck. Taking August 2019 as an example, the Shanghai Government issued 9,249 number plates and 162,756 people

participated in the bidding. The success rate was 5.7% and the average transaction price was 89,408 Chinese Yuan[63]. The complex system of number plates application, expensive price and low success rate had brought much difficulty to my participants in the use of private cars. Xin (Female/26-30/US/non-Shanghainese/Business) moved back to Shanghai in 2017 and received her Shanghai *hukou* in 2018. Since then, she and her fiancé had participated in the number plate auction every month. Until the end of my fieldwork, she had not been successful and could not purchase a car as the couple planned. They were rather annoyed by the effort- and time-consuming process.

Although the municipal government allows vehicles with non-Shanghainese number plates to travel in Shanghai, non-Shanghainese vehicles are not allowed to be driven on the motorways in the urban area during morning and afternoon peak times. Because of this, even if my participants applied for a number plate outside Shanghai, they would be unable to use it for everyday commutes between residence and workplaces. Wang was the only participant who used a private car as the primary means of everyday transportation. His number plate was issued in his hometown rather than in Shanghai. He could use his car every day because he worked and lived in suburban Shanghai where the restricted policy on non-Shanghainese cars was not applicable. Given the less developed public transport system in the suburbs, he was fond of driving his car.

> *It is very convenient to drive to work every day. Think of it, there are five kilometres between my residence and my company. Such a distance is not suitable for walking or cycling. Public transport nearby is not very convenient. It takes 50 minutes or even an hour if I take buses for work. But if I drive, only 15 minutes! Even in a traffic jam, I can enjoy air-conditioning and the whole space of a car alone. Much better than being trapped in a crowded bus. And no limitation on the travel of non-Shanghainese cars. So, it is totally okay for me to drive every day. I like cars as well as driving. I took my car from my hometown to Shanghai once my work and residence had been settled down. (Interview with Wang, October 2018)*

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[63] Data source: http://sh.sina.com.cn/news/m/2019-08-25/detail-ihytcern3348394.shtml, accessed on 21 July 2020.

In my following observation on Wang's everyday life, he used his car to complete nearly all his transportation in both weekdays and weekends. After a walk-along interview in his company, he kindly provided me with a lift to a nearby metro station. On the way, he showed me the road he drove every day, "*It feels so great to drive in the suburbs! Look at the wide six-lanes highway! Cannot imagine what if I need to catch a bus after one-day tired work!*". In early 2019, he purchased a new car with a specific discount for overseas returned students, which is a part of the talent policy in Shanghai. I could feel his excitement towards his new car through his enthusiastic introduction of the new car and his purchase experience. Another reason why Wang was able to drive every day was that there were enough parking areas in suburban Shanghai. Chen owned a car with a Shanghainese number plate and only used it for leisure activities, because "*My company is in the Bund area[64]. Even if I drive to work, there is no place for parking. Big bosses in my company also take public transport to company.*"

My participants' use of private transport was greatly shaped by urban planning (*e.g.*, the long distance between residential area and work area), urban infrastructure (*e.g.*, the public/commercial bicycle-sharing system) and governance (*e.g.*, restricted control on private vehicles); also, their personal preference encouraged them to choose specific transport. Different from the rubbish classification policy, towards which my participants mostly expressed negative emotions, my participants managed to make a balance between their own preference and restricted policies when they employed private transport in everyday transportation. Thus, in their employment of private transport, they perceived both positive and negative emotions, such as Zhu's worries about a delayed trip in walking and Wang's enjoyment in driving.

5.4.3 Discussion

My participants employed both public transport and private transport to complete their everyday transportation between residence and workplaces. Overseas returned students, at least in my observation, did not behave

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[64] The Bund area is the most central area of Shanghai

differently from local residents in terms of habits of everyday transportation, but they might perceive different emotions towards transportation in Shanghai due to the impact of overseas experiences. With the changes of contexts of everyday lived experiences, my participants had to change their transport habits and perhaps made a comparison between transport systems in different places, by which a series of emotions were evoked, like missing an overseas place, nervousness and upset about getting used to new transport routines. The process by which my participants adapted themselves to the Shanghai transport system was an interaction between overseas returned students and the urban environment of Shanghai. A place is never a simple material container. Shanghai has its specific urban planning, built environment, transport system and governance environment. Once overseas returned students moved to Shanghai, they have to negotiate with these changes and re-arrange their everyday life. I have discussed how my participants reconstructed their everyday life in the section of residence. Their experiences of everyday transportation further demonstrates that return migration is not returning to a previous familiar place or lived experiences, but necessarily involves many changes of everyday life. Migrants' emotional response to these changes could suggest how they feel about the "new" life after return and whether they get used to the new life smoothly.

The transportation discussed in this section connected my participants' residence and workplaces. Chronologically, my participants left home and took different means of transport to workplaces in the morning; and they conducted a backward movement in the afternoon. Given the bridging role of transportation, the emotions expressed in this section were not merely evoked by the trip itself, but also influenced by their everyday work and residing experiences. When my participants talked about their commute, they often reflected their emotions towards work. For example, Zhu worried about a delayed trip in going-to-work transportation and Chen bicycled back to home for better relaxation after a day at work. A pleasant transport trip might ease their negative emotions perceived from work; in contrast, an upsetting trip might make negative emotions more prominent. The discussion regarding everyday transportation reveals that everyday life is a unity. Work, food,

residence, transportation and other aspects I will discuss in following sections/chapters are connected to and engage with each other.

5.5 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have discussed overseas returned students' everyday lived experiences regarding food, residence and transportation. My participants presented various aspects of everyday life with different personal styles, which were shaped by their transnational/translocal journeys, past and present living environments, the change of life stages and personal preferences. Through ordinary and repetitive mundane practices, my participants expressed a wide range of emotions towards their everyday life outside workplaces after moving back from overseas. For example, some participants displayed how they missed past dwelling places through consuming specific foods. The investigation into everyday emotions may provide some fresh insights into the examination of return migration.

First, it is not only the backward movement from overseas to the homeland that influences their everyday life after return, but also migrants' lived experiences before moving overseas. My participants frequently mentioned their previous life before studying overseas in their narrative of everyday life in Shanghai. When they just moved back, they understood that their lived experiences overseas might not be applicable in the social environment in Shanghai. Alternatively, they hoped to rely on their previous experiences in China to help them integrate in Shanghai. However, given the different cities in China and the distinct living environment (such as university campus and gated community), most of my participants found that their previous experience only helped to a very limited extent. Hence, overseas returned students rarely perceived a familiar environment after moving back and further perceived more upset during social adaptation. Existing literature has noted the difficulties of adaptation that return migrants experience in the homeland, but attributed it to the socio-cultural differences between foreign countries and homeland. My research argues that the socio-cultural differences between the previously lived places in China and the present Shanghai also have a great impact on their

everyday life after moving back. In other words, the difficulties in social adaptation after moving back are not just about spatial differences, but related to various spatial-temporal changes.

Second, there was a blurring boundary between overseas returned students' everyday experiences in and outside workplaces. The impact of everyday work on overseas returned students' everyday lived experiences beyond workplaces was frequently noted in discussion of this chapter. Eating not only replenished energy during work, but also constituted an important part of colleague interactions as well as a social channel to collect career information. From the perspective of selecting residence and daily transportation, participants tended to make a careful balance between the convenience of everyday work and personal physical/emotional well-being. Such the connections between work and leisure time could be illustrated by that participants' emotions recorded in this chapter were often influenced by the emotions they perceived from everyday work. Either in transnationalism scholarship which conceptualises ISM as a part of highly-skilled migration or in labour geographies scholarship, work is usually analysed from the perspective of markets, political-economic circumstances and related power relations. This chapter suggests a porous boundary of "work" through highlighting the connections between everyday experiences in and outside workplaces. Also, the work-centred everyday life led by my participants echoed "the ubiquity of the entanglements between various realms of life" (Ho & Hatfield, 2011, p.708) and suggested that overseas returned students' everyday lives signalled the neoliberal rhythms existing in Chinese labour market and structural power relations (Ho, 2017, 2018).

Third, researchers should pay attention to the geographical scales of places involved in return migration. Transnational return migration in existing discussion is mostly taken as movement between two countries. In my research, because of the geographical diversity inside China, return to China and return to Shanghai would suggest different arguments, even if the group of my participants remained exactly the same. For overseas returned students, China as homeland implies familiarity, while Shanghai might imply strangeness, which likely results in different emotions. Moreover, the specific urban

environment also influenced returnees' everyday life and related emotions. In this chapter, I discussed the reliance of my participants' everyday life on the urban infrastructures of Shanghai and the impact of specific municipal policies, like the garbage recycling policy in Shanghai, on everyday routine practices. If overseas returned students moved back to another Chinese city with different municipal governance, their everyday life would possibly be different. Because of this, my discussion could help researchers to further think through how different geographical scales can make a difference of academic arguments.

Food, residence and transportation discussed in this chapter and everyday work in the previous chapter constitute the main content of the everyday life of overseas returned students. The exploration of everyday material/emotional experiences in and beyond workplaces contributes to a comprehensive knowledge of overseas returned students' post-study movement to China. In general, both this chapter and the previous chapter suggest that return migration is an ongoing process. It is hard, or perhaps impossible, to assert that one migrant has returned to one place, as returnees continue adapting themselves to the local social, economic, political and cultural environment in practices and in emotions.

Chapter VI: Everyday Intimate Relationships

6.1 Introduction

Intimate relationships, including friendship, romance and familial relations, lie at the centre of everyday relations, which implies great emotional, and sometimes physical closeness (Hall, 2019). As Highmore (2010) suggests, "There is a sense that a phrase like 'the intimacy of everyday life' is tautological: after all the everyday is full of intimate knowledges precisely because the everyday is the world most close met. Intimacy connotes proximity, familiarity and habit" (p.15). Transnationalism scholarship has a long-standing interest in everyday intimacy to think through migration processes and transnational spaces relationally. More specifically, intimate relationships, behind which there exist a range of duties, obligations, practices and subjectivities, could help researchers to understand how migration is embodied through physical interactions between individuals, material practices in spaces and related emotions (Walsh, 2009, 2018b). Existing literature on intimate relations of transnational migrants has dealt with concerns like the gendered roles and domestic labour division involved in transnational marriage (*e.g.*, Abrego & LaRossa, 2009; Chiang, 2008; S. Huang & Yeoh, 2005), emotions attached to left-behind family members (*e.g.*, King *et al.*, 2014; Vermot, 2015), and the constitution and maintenance of intimate relations during temporary overseas stay (*e.g.*, Holton, 2017; Prazeres, 2018; Walsh, 2005). Various migrant groups have been brought into the discussion, including retired migrants, students, highly-skilled and unskilled migrants. Notably, most researched groups are still living overseas and the attention paid to intimate relations experienced by return migrants is comparatively limited. Intimate relations of return migrants might provide fresh insights into current debates about social relations of transnational migration, as the social, cultural and familial settings and life stages where migrants are situated are likely to change alongside their return journey which is often represented as a process of return to familiar places and the reunion with loved ones.

While intimate relations might be identified by the emotion of love (Walsh, 2009), love is not the only emotion entwined in intimate relations, but rather one of a wide range of emotions. Even some negative emotions could be evoked in intimate relations. For example, the gender identity of female migrants is influenced by their overseas lived experiences and this may lead them to express stronger resistance, unhappiness and even anger towards unequal gender relationships in domestic spaces (Barajas & Ramirez, 2007; McIlwaine, 2010). Thus, emotions could be a useful research tool to unravel the complexity of intimate relations experienced by migrants every day.

Migrants' intimate relations and related practices might be differentiated by their social strata, which refers to their socio-economic status and the access to various public, social and cultural resources in the wider socio-economic environment (Anagnost, 2008; Robertson, 2020; Valentine *et al.*, 2015). In my research, most of my participants were from families of the bifurcated professional or managerial stratum, which meant that their family had satisfactory but not huge financial incomes. More specifically, their parents could support their overseas study on a self-financing basis and were able to provide some but not all financial support for their life in Shanghai. A few participants were from families of the manual worker stratum, whose parents were unable to provide much financial support. These participants relied on scholarships to complete their overseas education. As all the participants from the manual worker stratum were local Shanghainese, they had fewer worries with housing, *hukou* and social insurance, which removed some potential financial and other difficulties from their everyday experiences. Because of this, my participants could afford a decent life in Shanghai, but still encountered stress occasionally. The knowledge of their socio-economic context will help to understand various practices of everyday intimacy in the following sections.

As I have discussed friendship in previous chapters, in this chapter I primarily focus on how overseas returned students experienced and perceived romance and family relations in their everyday life in Shanghai; I also pay attention to their everyday experiences involving the (potential) loss of intimate ones in the

section of bereavement and disease. Particularly, I examine how these intimate relationships were embedded in participants' transnational journeys.

6.2 Romance

Given the age group of my participants, that was 20s or early 30s, dating and romance were frequently observed in their everyday life. Out of 33 participants[65], 14 participants (ten women and four men) remained single; five participants (four women and one man) were in a relationship; three participants (two women and one man, including one couple) got married during the research; five participants (three women and two men, including one couple) had married when they joined this research; and two female participants had experienced breaking-up. One married female participant had a son and another female participant was pregnant when she undertook my interview. None of the participants claimed an identity other than heterosexual; gay or other relationships were not mentioned, but participants were not asked directly about this[66]. As a researcher as well as a friend, I learnt many sweet or bitter moments full of emotions in my participants' romances through their narratives and embodied actions during fieldwork activities. Based on my observations, I mainly interrogate how my participants' translocal and transnational migration and romantic relationships mutually impacted each other, how my participants emotionally reflected on their romantic experiences alongside their migration journey, and how the romance was embodied through everyday material practices and embedded in the wider socio-cultural context.

6.2.1 Appropriate timing and appropriate partner

Marriage and even romance are temporally sensitive in terms of life course and are deeply rooted in the Chinese cultural context within which my participants had grown up. There is a Chinese proverb, "*a man of age should get married,*

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[65] As different participants had different time lengths of participation in this research, the summary of their relationship status was based on data collected during their participation rather than my whole fieldwork period. For example, if one participant joined in October 2018 and left in March 2019, I only discussed his/her marital status in this period in this thesis.

[66] Considering homosexuality remains a sensitive topic in wider Chinese society, it is understandable if any participants wished to conceal his/her sexuality from me, a person they had just met. Due to the lack of related data, I will not discuss sexuality in this thesis.

so should a woman"[67]. In ancient China, people would even be punished if they had reached the age of marriage but did not get married. Thus, to some extent, the idea that a young person should get married at the "right" age has long been a part of Chinese cultural norms, which are still recognised by many Chinese nowadays, particularly those in the older generations. In her research on early-career Chinese academic returnees, B. Wang (2019) also pointed out the connection between appropriate timing of life stages and Chinese culture and finds that the "appropriate" timing in the opinion of older generations has brought extra stress and upset to early-career returnees. In my research, many participants were expected by their parents to find someone to date and marry once they had completed their overseas education, as parents supposed dating and marriage as the primary mission in the post-graduation life stage. After a weekday dinner in a shopping mall, Sun (Female/21-25/UK/non-Shanghainese/Business), who was the same age as me, suddenly asked me a question.

> *Sun: Do your parents urge you to find a boyfriend and get married soon?*
> *Me: They want me to do that, but not urge. Why do you ask that?*
> *Sun: Well, my parents, particularly my dad, eagerly urges me to find someone to date. When I went back to my hometown last time, they even wanted to arrange blind-dates for me! I refused. It is so enlightening of your parents!*
> *Me: Maybe because I am still a student?*
> *Sun: huh?*
> *Me: PhD student is still a student. I have not worked yet. See?*
> *Sun: (thoughtful for a few seconds and then laughed) hahahaha, yes, yes, true. You are a student! (Fieldwork diary, December 2018)*

Sun's parents' encouragement must have annoyed her very much, because she suddenly stopped our discussion about Christmas promotions and raised this question with an upset tone and a troubled face. In many Chinese parents' opinion, an ideal life track should be receiving education, dating, and then getting married and starting a career at the same time. Thus in our conversation, we both agreed that the identity of the student was my shelter from parental pressure to marry. At the time of our conversation, Sun had just started an internship and had not received a full-time job offer. While she prioritised her

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[67] Its original Chinese is "男大当婚，女大当嫁".

career over dating and marriage, her parents made the opposite choice. In addition to great stress because of tough job-hunting, the divergence of her life arrangements from that desired by her parents had brought extra distress to her.

Notably, Sun was not refusing dating with the eventual aim of marriage, but the life schedule determined by her family. Overseas lived experiences had presented different possibilities of a future life to my participants and spurred them to reflect in my research on their movement from overseas to China, or to Shanghai. While narrating the marriage pressure they were encountering, many participants mentioned that they had met some foreign friends who had not married but led a brilliant life and complained that it was nearly impossible to escape marriage pressure imposed by senior family members in China. Some participants, like Xiong (Female/26-30/UK/non-Shanghainese/Business), even used their overseas experiences as a shelter from marriage pressure. As Xiong said,

> *They [her parents] do not know the actual situation of the US and hold a stereotype that foreigners do not want to get married early. So they surely assumed that it was impossible for me to meet someone suitable [in the US]. Of course, the assumption is not correct, but it released my marriage pressure. So, I like the assumption! More importantly, they do not have an overseas network. They are unable to know the truth of foreign society, unless from me, and cannot arrange blind-dates for me. In this respect, I am more free in the US. (Interview with Xiong, September 2018)*

The knowledge of overseas society became a kind of cultural capital to help overseas returnees to deal with marriage pressure when they were overseas. However, once they moved back, they lost such capital. Even if they were not moving back to their hometown, parents were likely to possess enough social knowledge and networks to impose their wishes on children. Thus, it was understandable to observe that many participants regretted their return and missed being overseas from the perspective of marriage pressure.

Although both male and female single participants had encountered the marriage pressure, females usually suffered more seriously than males, as single females not only suffered the marriage pressure from family, but also

encountered gender discrimination in the job market. In one observation at a career fair,

> *When I was finishing a conversation with a member of HR staff, she asked me, "sorry, the last question. Are you married or engaged?" I answered, "no, I'm single". She looked at my résumé in her hand hesitantly with an apologetic expression. "What a pity… If we recruit female employees, we prefer them to be married or engaged, because we think that single females are more likely to leave their job than men or married women. If you have a partner in Shanghai, you will be less likely to move to other cities, right? But if you are single… Anyway, we will assess your résumé, but you may not be our first preference." To be honest, I had learnt that there might exist unfair treatment to female applicants, particularly single ones, which has been reported by a body of newspaper articles and academic work. But I still was astonished because I did not expect that the member of HR staff would speak about discrimination so frankly; I'm also uncontrollably and helplessly angry, because being single is not my fault. (Field diary, May 2019)*

The discrimination towards unmarried females was taken-for-granted and pervasive in the Chinese job market. Some female participants missed their preferred position due to their gender and their marital status. For example, Xia (Female/21-25/UK/non-Shanghainese/Bank) lost to a male counterpart, who was inferior to Xia in terms of education background and work experience, in a job application. Similar to my reaction in the career fair, she was angry and inconvenienced by this result, but helpless to change it. The gender discrimination at career fairs had also urged my female participants to consider getting married while they were starting their career. In this respect, work and personal romantic experiences intertwined together in cases of female participants. Work issues influence many aspects of everyday experiences rather than just everyday work.

Many participants suggested that finding an appropriate match was more important than getting married according to the schedule determined by parents, because "*getting married is a matter of one day and finding the right one is a matter of one lifetime*" (interview with Weng (Female/26-30/UK/non-Shanghainese/Bank), July 2019). While my participants selected the significant other, they primarily emphasised the match in terms of spirit for the purpose of

mutual understanding and domestic bliss. Meanwhile, they also addressed, maybe unintentionally, the match in terms of education background, childhood experiences and social status. My participants who had been married or in a relationship mostly met their partners at student age (overseas Master's study, Chinese university or even earlier), everyday work or friends' social networks. Thus, it was unsurprising to observe much commonality in terms of education, professional positions, financial income and social status of the family. Given their own overseas experiences, my participants displayed a preference for other overseas returned students in terms of partner selection. Song (Female/26-30/US/non-Shanghainese/Hotel), although she had been single, explained why she preferred someone with overseas experience,

> *After I moved back to Shanghai, I had dated a guy, but we had not established our relationship. You know, just having a thing for each other. He is a professional photographer and has travelled to different places to shoot wildlife. A funny and nice guy, but he never attended university. At the beginning, I did not care about education at all. He has travelled to so many places and had so many fabulous experiences. I cannot say I have more knowledge of the world than him, right? But after a while, I felt it's not the issue. Education does matter. When we were kidding, if I said anything which needed to be understood with knowledge learnt from general advanced education, he never got my point. Our knowledge belongs to different fields, so I often felt lost and tired when talking to him, although I liked his interesting personality. Finally, we decided not to further our relationship and are seldom in contact now. Since then, I determine that my partner must be educated and have overseas study experience at best. (Interview with Song, October 2018)*

I followed with a question about whether she particularly wanted someone from the US. She denied it saying,

> *No, I do not care where he received his education. You study in the UK and never visit the US, but you can always get my point, can't you? (Interview with Song, October 2018)*

As Song suggested, the shared overseas experiences could bring common interesting topics to partners and make them feel understood. Song was not the only participant who wished for a partner with overseas experiences; out of 15 non-single participants, eight participants' partners studied overseas as well and all their partners had attended university. The mutual understanding between

partners contributed to domestic bliss and other positive emotions, like happiness. The partner compatibility requiring overseas experiences indicated that return is not the end of transnational experiences, as these experiences likely have long-lasting implications in post-return everyday life, such as spousal choices.

Considering that most overseas returned students came from well-off families, shared overseas experiences or other experiences when growing up implied the compatibility between partners in terms of social status and economic wealth of themselves and their families. That is to say, the marriage and romantic relationships of overseas returned students likely occurred in the same social strata. It was unsurprising for me to witness that married participants were able to receive financial and social support from both parents and parents-in-law, which helped them to settle down in Shanghai and maintain a decent life. To some extent, my participants' marriage helped them maintain social status and achieve social reproduction. While researchers have widely recognised a career as a primary format of transnational capital transfer and an important route to achieve social reproduction after student migrants' return to their homeland for work (Waters, 2012; Waters & Leung, 2012), the significance of marriage in returnees' social reproduction deserves more academic exploration. In the case of my participants, their overseas education, personal competence, and familial social and economic context constituted their social and cultural capital in the marriage market. Romantic relationships, particularly marriage, could bring not only emotional delight, but also material satisfaction to individual overseas returnees and their families.

As can be seen from the above discussion, timing and partner of a romantic relationship may not be a purely personal choice, but shaped by familial, social norms and cultural habits (Gopalkrishnan & Babacan, 2007). My participants' romantic relations were deeply rooted in the wider socio-cultural context of China while being influenced by their overseas experiences. Various tensions I mentioned in this section, including conflicts with parents and anger towards discriminating employers, was not simply a conflict between Chinese culture and foreign culture, but involved generational differences, gender relations and

unequal power relations in workplaces. Their choice regarding romance reflected my participants' identities as overseas returnees, children, female/male, junior staff in workplaces and Chinese. Thus, it would be unwise to only interrogate the connection between overseas experiences and their romantic relationship in present everyday life.

6.2.2 Falling in Love

Romance was an important factor which encouraged many of my participants' movement to Shanghai. Out of 15 non-single participants, six participants, including two couples and two female participants, migrated from overseas to Shanghai together with their partners; the movement to Shanghai helped another three female participants to be reunited with their boyfriends. Even for some single participants, a crush on someone who was living in Shanghai had also helped to determine their decision to move to Shanghai. Yao (Female/26-30/UK/non-Shanghainese/Business) migrated to Shanghai after overseas education because of her husband,

> *I had never lived in Shanghai and had no passion for the city. But my husband likes Shanghai very much. Like me, he had never lived or studied in Shanghai for a long period. He just likes everything in Shanghai. It's an unfounded fondness, I guess. He insisted that we move to Shanghai, rather than his or my hometown, when we graduated from the UK. I don't really mind which city we live in as long as we are together. I'm also fine with Shanghai. So, we are here! (Interview with Yao, November 2018)*

As can be seen in this interview fragment and also in the quoted interview with Yao in section 4.2.4, Yao tended to give great priority to her family, particularly her husband, while she was planning her career and future life course. In her words, a happy sweet family was the primary target of her lifetime. Thus, it was not surprising to witness the strong impact of her husband, who was her boyfriend when they returned to China, on her return decision. Notably, following her husband to Shanghai was not the only option, but her final choice of living city regarding return. Yao also maintained her job and avoided being a full-time housewife. Yao saw her migration to Shanghai as a trip full of romantic love and hope for future happy domestic life.

Female participants in this research whose migration to Shanghai was greatly influenced by their partners were not dependent migrants in the economic and legal senses. They had retained financial independence from their partners before and after their movement to Shanghai through receiving financial support from their parents and working as full-time employees; also, they could enter China with their Chinese passport and moved to Shanghai without the requirement of *hukou*[68], which meant that, unlike dependent migrants to overseas, their migration to Shanghai did not need any support or guarantee from their partners. In this sense, it was inappropriate to describe female participants as dependants or followers. On most occasions, the movement to Shanghai was a joint decision between partners. Yun (Female/26-30/US/non-Shanghainese/Business) told me why she and her husband chose Shanghai while neither she nor her husband were from or had lived in Shanghai,

> *The most important reason is that Shanghai has many more job opportunities than other Chinese cities. It is a popular destination among overseas returnees. Our friends who have returned to Shanghai like the city very much. And considering our own life, I'm from northeast China and my husband from Guangdong. I do not want to live in Guangdong with my family-in-law and my husband doesn't like the climate and life habits in my hometown. Also, we cannot find suitable jobs in my hometown. Bad economy, you know. See, Shanghai is the midpoint of our hometowns and good for our careers. So we finally decided to move to Shanghai. (Interview with Yun, October 2018)*

Yun and her husband's decision was based on concerns over career development, friends' fondness for Shanghai and the reluctance to live in their hometowns, which involved both emotional motivations and realistic considerations. Yun expected bright career prospects and a domestic life full of pleasure after moving to Shanghai.

Once they had, although maybe temporarily, settled down in Shanghai, a range of everyday interactions suggested the love between partners. Through online

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[68] Residence in Shanghai does not require a Shanghai *hukou*. While the lack of a Shanghai *hukou* may restrict my participants' access to social welfare and some significant purchases (like buying property and cars) in the future, a lack of *hukou* would not hinder my participants' movement to Shanghai.

ethnography, I observed many mundane but sweet moments shared by my participants and their partners. These moments were embedded in various aspects of everyday life, including residence, leisure and food. In Yun's narrative about how she and her husband made the Mexican dishes together at home (see the interview excerpt with Yun about Mexican food in section 5.2.2), she frequently used phrases like "*we often visited…*", "*we want…*" and "*we buy…*" with pleasant tones and expressions. It suggested that, first, Yun and her husband shared many fantastic memories regarding Mexican food in the US and still held a passion for the food after they moved back to China. Given that they knew each other and started dating in the US, the memory regarding delicious food had become a part of their romantic experiences. Their romantic love and their fondness for Mexican food were blended together. Second, in terms of material practices, it was Yun and her husband, rather than Yun herself, who conducted housework and spent leisure time together. In her online posts, Yun recorded spending significant leisure time with her husband, such as exploring delicious restaurants in Shanghai, art classes and trips to places of interest. During the interview in October 2018, Yun answered her husband's phone call and told me that she needed to leave.

> *Yun: Sorry, it's my husband. He has been off work today and is waiting for me at a nearby bus stop. We are going home and preparing our dinner. Do you mind if we stop chatting today? I need to meet my husband now. We can talk another day.*
> *Me: Sure. No problem. Do you and your husband make dinner together every day after he gets off work?*
> *Yun: (smile) Yes. You know I need to work long into the night. So dinner time is important for us! (Interview with Yun, October 2018)*

The mundane housework and leisure activities not only helped to create a home space in Yun's temporary residence in Shanghai, but also further evoked her emotions, like contentment, joy and relaxation. More importantly, the love between Yun and her husband was clearly reflected from these practices.

To some extent, sharing housework has become a significant way to express love to partners among my participants. For example, Wen (Female/26-30/Singapore/non-Shanghainese/Financial industry) recorded how her fiancé and herself decorated their new rented flat together. Given that Wen was rather

reluctant to decorate her single flat before (see the discussion in section 5.3.1), her fiancé's movement to Shanghai encouraged her to change her indifferent attitude towards temporary residence, as she needed to make a home space full of warmth and love for herself and her fiancé. The changing attitudes towards domestic home-making suggested the complex temporality existing in domestic spaces as an intimate sphere (C. Liu, 2020). Many female participants in this research requested their male family members undertake their duty for domestic work and male participants were also willing to share housework with their partners. Moreover, the domestic labour division might be influenced by the wider socio-cultural environment where they had lived or were living. In Fang's (Female/36-40/Germany/Shanghainese/Bank) family, young female members rarely conducted housework which would be shared instead by the senior generation, partner or hired domestic helpers. In Fang's word,

> *We Shanghainese girls never do housework. I have never done it before or after getting married. My husband and his family are also from Shanghai. They understand it, and of course they can accept it. So the housework, including most caring work for my son, is almost all undertaken by my parents-in-law. My husband is on sick leave recently, so he would help. I don't do housework. I just spend half an hour checking my son's homework every day and take him to training classes and play with him on weekends. (Interview with Fang, April 2019)*

Fang attributed such a labour division to the cultural habits in Shanghai society, which was also reflected in the experiences of other female Shanghainese participants. However, given that in most cases the partners came from different cities, the impact of a specific city on domestic labour division that was so explicit and strong, was seldom observed in this research. Actually the domestic division in Shanghainese families may not be the general situation in Chinese society, as the majority of housework in Chinese families is still undertaken by females (Hu, 2018; Zhang, 2017).

In addition to mundane practices, there were also some remarkable and significant moments in participants' romantic lives as well as in the whole life course, like engagements, weddings and the birth of a baby. I mostly learnt about this news and their reflections through my participants' online posts and interviews, in which they expressed excitement, happiness and thankfulness

towards these great events and sometimes fatigue about the preparations. A couple of participants, Zhang (Female/26-30/US/non-Shanghainese/Business) and Xu (Male/26-30/US/Shanghainese/Business), invited me to their wedding, through which I was able to observe the significant moment of their romance closely. The following field diary extract was about the videos they played at the wedding:

> *After all the guests arrived and before the wedding began, they played a video about their romantic story, which is a common practice in Chinese weddings now. The background music sounded cheerful, relaxed, and warm. It was a piece by Joe Hisaishi[69]. The sound of music successfully attracted people's attention. The previously excited and noisy environment in the venue gradually became quiet. The music seemed to bring a new atmosphere to the venue. Almost all the guests were smiling and looking at the screen with relaxed, happy, and blessed expressions. The video first showed the photos of them in university. They fell in love on campus when they were undergraduates, which was 7 years ago. These photos are really historical, especially in terms of dressing, which was popular fashion during our university age but looks rather outdated now. Then their photos in the US were displayed – they went to the US for Master's study together, but studied in different cities, so there was a long-distance relationship between them. Different from the photos taken on campus during undergraduate years, most of the photos in the US were taken during holidays. Following that, the video did not show much of their everyday life in Shanghai after returning to China, but showed many marriage photos[70]. Finally, some friends who could not attend the wedding in person sent their regards in the form of videos. These friends were close friends of the couple, so many of them reviewed Xu and Zhang's romantic experiences from their viewpoint and expressed blessings for their future. After the video, the Wedding March replaced Joe Hisaishi's music, and the wedding ceremony officially began. (Field diary, October 2018)*

Through the wedding video, I further understood why weddings could be such a milestone in one's life course. In terms of social relations, there were few venues which could bring together different kinds of intimate relationships, like friends, spouse, parents and other familial members. The event had knitted

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[69] Joe Hisaishi is a Japanese composer and musical director, whose musical works are rather popular among Chinese young people.
[70] According to Chinese wedding customs, before the formal wedding, the newlyweds would take a group of photos wearing western-style wedding dress as well as Chinese wedding outfits and present these photos at the formal wedding.

together different intimate relationships to express regards to the new couple and established new intimate relationships through the marital match, such as the newlyweds and parents-in-law. Xu and Zhang also expressed a range of emotions, including love, gratitude and respect to these intimate ones in their later speeches. From a temporal perspective, the wedding reviewed Xu and Zhang's romantic experiences which were embedded in their past life stages and imagined a happy, wonderful future life. The wedding commenced a new life stage with newly-established intimate relationships for Xu and Zhang and naturally, the changes of everyday practices and related emotions could be expected in the future, which I indeed observed in following fieldwork.

Xu and Zhang's wedding closely followed Chinese marriage customs. For example, they registered the marriage certificate in the Civil Affairs Bureau before the wedding, bowed and served tea to parents and parents-in-law and toasted guests one by one in the wedding. Moreover, guests' blessing towards their wedding suggested the Chinese cultural meaning attached to marriage. In Chinese view, one's marriage and career could mutually benefit each other, that is "*cheng jia li ye*"[71] in Chinese. Thus, many senior family members wished Zhang and Xu to have bright career prospects, although it might not be necessarily relevant to a happy marriage. Biological reproduction is seen as a primary duty of couples in China. It could be suggested by "*zao sheng gui zi*"[72], a very common wedding message, which wishes the newlyweds to have their baby soon. In western society, this message might seem an impolite intervention into the couple's personal life, but it is widely welcomed at Chinese weddings. I heard "*zao sheng gui zi*" several times at Zhang and Xu's wedding and they happily accepted it, although they felt annoyed and helpless when parents actually started urging them to have a baby shortly after their wedding. Despite their practices and emotions in everyday life outside the wedding, their practices during the wedding did not hint at any impact of their overseas experiences. Although foreign music was played at the wedding, including Joe Hisaishi's song and the Wedding March, this foreign music had become an usual practice

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[71] The original Chinese is 成家立业.

[72] The original Chinese is 早生贵子.

in Chinese weddings, no matter whether the newlyweds and their family have overseas experiences. One potential reason was that their two to three years of overseas stay did not change their sense of identity as ethnic Chinese. Thus, being influenced by their experiences growing up and sense of identity, they would follow the Chinese customs at their wedding, a ritual full of cultural importance. One more example was that Yun is a member of an ethnic minority in China and part of her wedding ceremony was in the style of her ethnic group. Another reason was the engagement of senior family members, who had a greater preference for Chinese wedding customs. Moreover, given that the wedding was held in Xu's hometown, the local socio-cultural context further reduced the impact of overseas experiences on their wedding. Considering the site of the wedding, it was not surprising that overseas experiences seemed to have very little direct impact on their wedding practices.

Romance is not always happy and lovely, but may include sad or even heart-broken moments. In my fieldwork, two participants, Zhou (Female/26-30/UK/non-Shanghainese/Business) and Jiang (Female/26-30/US/non-Shanghainese/Business), shared their recent breaking-up experiences with me and displayed a range of negative emotions towards the broken romance, such as disappointment, sadness and agitation. In addition to emotional hurt, breaking-up also negatively influenced their mundane practices in other aspects of everyday life. For example, Zhou cried a lot and could not focus on job-hunting after her break-up. In that case, friendship was partly able to make up for the hurt brought by a broken romance. As Zhou told me, she "*talked to my friends. They comforted me a lot and asked me to hang out to distract my attention. We complained about ex-boyfriends together. Well, that is a bit funny. I feel better now. See, I can relate the story peacefully*" (Interview with Zhou, December 2018). Jiang also had an online post that "*friendship can soothe the hurts of relationship*" with photos of dinner with friends after a break-up in June 2019. Friendship usually acted as an important material and emotional support to an unmarried romantic relationship, while in my observations familial relations were seldom actively engaged in the unmarried relationships.

6.2.3 Discussion

In romantic relationships and related practices, emotions constituted an important part of my participants' everyday life. In terms of materiality, romantic relationships encouraged non-single participants to spend more time together with their partners on various mundane practices and might change some of their everyday living habits compared to living alone. In terms of emotion, while love was the most significant emotion, a range of positive as well as negative emotions were evoked by romantic relationships and related practices. These emotions could influence the practices and emotions regarding other aspects of life. Romantic relations also interwove with other intimate relationships in my participants' everyday life, such as the support of friendship during a break-up. Moreover, the temporal sensitivity of romantic relationships urged overseas returned students to deal with marriage pressure if they were still single in their 20s or early 30s, or to adapt themselves to different lived experiences and the key transitions of life stages. Through the lens of romantic relationships, I am able to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of my participants' everyday life.

Given my participants' identity as overseas returned students, their romantic relationships hinted at their overseas experiences to some extent. The most significant example was their partner compatibility, that many participants preferred a partner with an overseas education background for the purpose of mutual understanding. Some specific practices of my participants and their partners, like cooking Mexican food in Yun's case, also suggested the impact of overseas experiences. However, the influence of overseas experiences on their present practices and emotions regarding romance remained limited. One potential reason was that the relatively short term of overseas stay did not result in the assimilation of foreign cultural codes and they still retained the sense of identity as Chinese, which could be illustrated by compliance with Chinese cultural norms in significant events, like weddings. Another potential reason was that they were living in Shanghai and many romantic practices needed to be adapted to the socio-cultural and commercial environment of Shanghai. That is to say, romance, although being greatly personal, was embedded in the wider socio-cultural context.

Gender is a topic which cannot be ignored while discussing romantic and marital relationships. In this section, I have observed various gender issues, such as gender inequality in terms of marriage pressure and discrimination towards single females in the job market. What interested me the most was the generally equal gender labour division in the domestic sphere, which was different from that reported in previous literature (McIlwaine, 2010). The equality might be due to similar economic income and social status between partners, the pervading idea of gender equality among Chinese youth as well as the life stage and specific living environment in which my participants were situated. Existing literature on domestic gender issues of transnational migrants usually focused on transnational families involving long-distance marriage/relationship and transnational parenting (*e.g.*, Chiang, 2008; Yeoh *et al.*, 2000). Compared to these informants in existing literature, my participants were in a relatively early life stage – they had just established their own nuclear family, mostly without children, or had not been married yet. Thus, there were fewer caring duties in their family and they suffered less tension between career and family. It is possible that when my participants stepped into middle age and started raising children and facing fiercer tensions between career and family, the domestic labour division might change. Whether the temporary gender equality could continue by then remains questionable. Moreover, my participants had moved back to China, which implied that they could receive the support of other family members more conveniently. For example, Fang's parents-in-law helped her to take care of her son; and Yao's parents-in-law also sometimes came to help during her pregnancy. To some extent, my participants' specificity helped to disclose the diversity of transnational migrants in terms of gender issues.

6.3 Parents

Different from other intimate relationships, the relationship with parents has usually existed since the very beginning of one's life, although adoption and the creation of step-families are among the exceptions. Parental relations are greatly shaped by the wider socio-cultural contexts in which the family have lived. The

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relationship with parents is difficult to break given the biological ties[73] between parents and children; it displays great diversity between different families due to the unique everyday life of each family and the specific socio-cultural and economic circumstances; also the relationship with parents often changes while their demands for each other and what they could do for each other have become different with the increasing age of both parents and children. Existing transnationalism scholarship has mainly focused on the relationship between student migrants and their parents and the care relationship between (un)skilled migrant workers and their left-behind aged parents. For student migrants, who are usually teenagers or young adults, they still depend on their parents' financial support, protective care and daily guidance in their everyday life. While a body of literature has recognised the agency of student migrants from the perspective of migration decision, self-care in everyday life and future career, parents still powerfully engage in their children's life (King & Raghuram, 2013; King & Sondhi, 2018). For (un)skilled migrants, who are usually in middle age, they have been independent from their parents and started to take on the duty to care for their aging parents (Bailey & Mulder, 2017). The long distance between the adult children and left-behind parents likely brings difficulties for migrants to fulfil their filial duty and evokes related emotions like guilt (De Silva, 2017a). My participants seemed different from the above two migrant groups. On the one hand, they had started their early-career stage and sought independence from their parents in young adulthood; on the other hand, many of my participants were unable to complete significant purchases in everyday life without the financial support of their parents. Moreover, all of my participants were the only child in their family. Thus, their relationship with parents might be different from the relationship between non-only children and parents. In this section, I primarily explore how the relationship with parents was involved in their everyday life and what kinds of emotions had been raised

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[73] I use the phrase of biological ties instead of some more general phrases, like life-long ties, because Chinese culture has emphasised the importance of biological ties in parental relationships. A famous Confucianist saying, that is 身体发肤受之父母 in original Chinese, argues that children's body, hair and skin were given by their parents and so children should follow parents' guidance and instruction. In my fieldwork, many participants also took the biological ties with parents as a natural existence as well as the most solid cornerstone of the parental relationship.

in their interaction with parents. According to the residence status of my participants and their parents, I will respectively discuss the long-distance filial duty and the relationship with parents in the same household.

6.3.1 Long-distance filial duty

Long-distance relationships with parents refers to situations where the participants and their parents were living in different cities or even different countries. The separation between aging parents and adult children has been frequently observed in existing literature (*e.g.*, De Silva, 2017a, 2017b; Katigbak, 2015), which primarily focuses on how overseas adult children fulfil their filial duty towards their left-behind parents through financial and other material support, emotional care and occasional return visits. The long-distance relationship with parents was widely experienced by my participants. In fact, all of my participants had experienced long-distance relationships with their parents while they studied overseas; even after they moved to Shanghai, about two thirds of participants, who were not local Shanghainese, still lived far away from their parents who were usually left behind in their hometown. Jiang's parents lived in her hometown in a province neighbouring Shanghai. She talked about her thoughts of migration.

> *In the next few years or even in the next decade, re-migration to overseas is a possible and feasible option for me, if I can see benefits in terms of career or relationship. But in the longer future, it is impossible for me to settle down overseas. My parents only have me to take care of them. I definitely will live in China for the convenience of fulfilling my filial duty. Maybe I will not return to my hometown or home province, but it will be easier for me to get my parents to whichever city I am living in in China than to overseas. (Interview with Jiang, April 2019)*

Jiang's words suggested an idea pervading my participants, that they accepted the separation from their parents for now, but would end the separation at an appropriate point in the future. The idea implied that, first, the relationship between parents and children was greatly shaped by specific life stages of children and parents. Most of my participants' parents were in their 50s or early 60s and many had not retired yet. They were able to take care of themselves and did not have many demands for other support from their children, which made

my participants less worried about their parents' everyday life. Also, in the early-career stage, my participants intended to prioritise their career over the reunion with parents. Thus, my participants were not urged to end the long-distance separation from their parents. Second, the long-distance relationship with parents would be temporary. Once the life stages of my participants and their parents changed, particularly in terms of increasing age, my participants would likely end the separated status through their or their parents' migration and fulfil the filial duty of the only child in the family.

While my participants widely accepted the temporary separation from parents, parents displayed greater concerns for the long-distance relationship with their children and even urged their children to close the distance. This has become an important factor in motivating some of my participants' migration back to China. For example, Tian highlighted:

> *My grades while studying in the UK were not very good. After graduation, I could hardly find a very decent job in a well-known company or other organisation, but there were still some temporary jobs for me. I preferred the living environment abroad and did not want to come back. But my parents felt that this was not the "right" way of life, so they forced me to return. At that time, I was not completely financially independent. After fighting for a while, I had to return to China as my parents' wish. Once arriving in my hometown, my parents asked me to find a job as soon as possible. They hoped I would find a job like civil servant or teacher in my hometown and urged me to prepare for related exams. But at that time my rebellious mentality was really serious. I refused to do anything that my parents hoped me to do. I had rested for nearly a year at home, and my relationship with my parents was rather terrible. They did not like my everyday living style and I didn't want to follow any of their instructions. Later, I found a job in Shanghai through a friend's recommendation, but I still didn't work at home as my parents wished. However, my relationship with my parents has gradually improved since I have started my career. (Interview with Tian, November 2018)*

Due to his parents' pressure, Tian's migration back to China was not a fully voluntary trip and the decision process became less pleasant. Tian's description about the process of his movement from the UK to China and the tension with his parents clearly suggested his emotions like helplessness, anguish, annoyance

and pain. Although not all participants had experienced such a fierce tension with their parents, the disputes about where they would live and future life arrangements between my participants and their parents were widespread. Many parents preferred their children to take a job in the public sector in their hometown. The preference was deeply rooted in the socio-economic context where the generation of parents had lived and worked. In recent decades, a job in the public sector in China not only referred to a decent and secure job, but also meant better social welfare, medical insurance and other benefits. If young people worked in their hometown, their parents might be able to employ local social networks (*guan xi*) to promote their children's career. In this regard, parents' wish that adult children could work in their hometown was not due to their demands for daily care, but because of their love for their children. Despite the adult age of their children, parents still wish to provide guidance and protection to their children. However, such parental love and career tracks determined by parents often evoked negative emotions among adult children like Tian. For my participants who were overseas returned students, staying overseas or at least keeping a long distance from parents could prevent parents from intervening in their personal lives too much and further reduce related tensions. In Tian's case, after he moved to Shanghai, his relationship with parents had gradually improved. Thus, it was unsurprising to witness that some participants even welcomed the significant spatial distance between their parents.

Despite various disputes between parents and my participants, their long-distance relationship primarily involved much love and emotional care. In the age of information technology, people could conveniently express various emotions to their beloved ones across a long geographical distance through phones, messages, emails and other materialised care like remittances (Baak, 2015; Baldassar, 2015; Bonifazi & Paparusso, 2019; De Silva, 2017b). In my research, Wechat had become the most frequently used mobile application to connect my participants and their parents. Wechat works similarly to WhatsApp and some functions of Facebook and enables users to make one-to-one chats, group chats, audio/video calls and posts about everyday life and thoughts. When I interviewed Yun,

[The iconic ringtone of the WeChat audio call interrupted our interview.]
Yun: Sorry, it's my mom. (answering the call)
Yun: Sorry, my mom just messaged me on Wechat and I didn't note it. So my mom called me to see what I am doing and whether everything is okay.
Me: Totally understand. If I don't reply to my mom's message and call shortly, she will immediately worry that something bad has happened to me and keeps calling me. Do you always keep in contact with your parents through Wechat?
Yun: Haha, sounds like what my mom would do! Yes, Wechat is the most convenient way, isn't it? I don't call them every day but have some brief messages on Wechat. You know, just let them know I am fine and see how they are doing.
Me: Through private messages or family group chat?
Yun: I use both. We established a new chat group after I got married. There are my parents, my parents-in-law, my husband and myself. As I often miss my mom's private messages, my mom would ask in the chat group, "where is Yun?", and then my husband reminds me to reply to my mom. After several times, they name the chat group "Where is Yun?". That's very funny (laugh). (Interview with Yun, October 2018)

Yun's mother checked her everyday well-being through brief messages on Wechat and Yun also expressed her care for her parents in the same way. Brief messages or chats was one approach that my participants used to express their care for parents. Some other participants, like Song, would spend hours on video calls with their parents on weekends. Despite the different approaches, the primary topic was various details of my participants' mundane practices, including but not limited to food, recent work status, friends they met recently and plans for the next few days. These talks about everyday life were usually casual, relaxed, pleasant and lovely. However, if parents raised issues like marriage pressure, career tracks and other life plans in everyday communication, a series of unpleasant emotions could be expected.

The emotional care and love between parents and my participants were expressed not only through online talks, but also through my participants' visits home. In particular, a series of materialised representations of love could be observed in their trips to parents' households. Jiang posted her experience in the Chinese New Year of 2019 online,

It has been four years that I have not celebrated Chinese New Year at home with my beloved parents [the emoji of pity]. In the last four years, my parents have stubbornly attached the spring couplets[74] I wrote in 2014 – so sweet and lovely of them! This year! I wrote new spring couplets and the old ones can be removed finally. [the emoji of laugh] May there be a very happy new year to everyone! [photos of spring couplets in Jiang's handwriting were attached] (Online posts of Jiang, February 2019)

According to Chinese cultural norms, Chinese New Year is the most significant family moment in the year. Young people are expected to go back to their parents' households and celebrate Chinese New Year with them. During the four years when Jiang was absent in Chinese New Year due to overseas study and business trips, her parents took the spring couplets in Jiang's handwriting as a kind of representation of their daughter and refused to replace them with new ones unless the new ones were written by Jiang. The maintenance of old spring couplets implied her parents' wish that Jiang could celebrate Chinese New Year with them and further indicated their love and pride in their daughter and how they missed her. In this online post, Jiang also expressed pity about the previous four Chinese New Years as the emoji suggested and felt touched towards her parents' lovely action. In Jiang's case, the old spring couplets acted as a material representation of parents' love towards their absent daughter and the new spring couplets represented the love and sweetness when the family reunited again at the festive moment.

6.3.2 Living in the same household

If my participants were local Shanghainese and had not yet got married, they usually lived with their parents in the same household. Different from the "boomerang generation" in western context, whose return to the parental household is considered a potential risk to parental well-being (Sage *et al.*, 2013), my participants' cohabitation with parents largely complied with Chinese socio-cultural codes and was even welcomed by most participants'

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[74] Spring couplet is a traditional decoration used during Chinese New Year. It is a pair of lines of poetry which expresses happiness and hopeful thoughts for the coming new year and are usually hand-written or printed on red paper. Chinese people remove old spring couplets used in the last year and stick new spring couplets in doorways or on windows on the first day of Chinese New Year.

parents. Unmarried children, despite their adult age, are not supposed to achieve full adulthood in Chinese society. Before they establish their own nuclear family, young people are expected to live with their parents in the same household. Thus, it was unsurprising that nearly all the unmarried Shanghainese participants lived in their parents' household[75]. Moreover, given that all local Shanghainese families in my research lived in their own property, my participants could avoid expenses on rental and other related bills if they lived in their parents' household. Living in the same household implied that these participants had more frequent face-to-face communication with their parents and domestic interactions with their parents than participants in long-distance parental relationships. Through everyday practices in the same household, my participants and their parents expressed mutual love and care for each other; meanwhile, the experiences of living together also made generational tension acute and further evoked a series of negative emotions. In this section, I interrogate how different emotions were embedded in the living-together experiences.

Different from married participants who usually tended to share housework with their spouse, participants discussed in this section were the primary care receivers at home and their parents undertook most of the housework. Both my participants and their parents took such domestic labour divisions for granted. Their attitude was partially derived from the past experiences of the family. As the only child in the family, my participants had been placed at the centre of the family and received great attention and careful care from parents, grandparents and other senior family members. Thus, it had been a habit of many participants' families for over two decades that my participants would not undertake housework at home and this hardly changed even if my participants had achieved adult age and lived independently overseas for years. As Shen described her weekday dinner,

> *If I do not eat out or need to work in the evening, I would have dinner at home with my parents. They cook at home and wait for me to eat after getting off work. It is really happy and sweet to enjoy home-made warm*

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[75] The only exception was Cheng, as her job required her to live on campus with students on weekdays.

food after one day's work! Although quarrels sometimes seem inevitable if living with parents, one benefit is that I do not have to do housework. Just lead an easy life with everything provided. It was the same when I was in school and is still like that now. They are used to it and do not let me help even if I want to. They do not think that I can manage to do housework appropriately. (Interview with Shen, August 2019)

Shen enjoyed the care and "easy life" provided by her parents and her parents had been used to taking care of Shen as if she was still a school child. Shen's university was outside Shanghai. Shen's parents were absent from and did not witness her independent life of six years, that was four years of university in China and two years of overseas study. Once Shen returned and lived with them again, the presence of family members, the parental relationship and the familiar physical space made the household an affective space, which recalled past memories and encouraged parents to imagine adult Shen as a teenager who still needed care.

In addition to habits rooted in past experiences, everyday work schedules in the present were another factor that shaped the domestic labour division. Bao explained why her parents undertook most housework in her family,

I would like to help, but I don't have time. My working hours officially end at 6pm, but I usually work overtime and leave the bank between 6.30-7.00pm. It takes me more than one hour from the bank to my home. So when I get home, it is past 8pm. At this time, I am very tired. It is impossible for me to spend half an hour or one hour cooking, and it is impossible for my parents to wait for me in hunger. Even at weekends, maybe I have to work or deal with my personal issues. Although my parents have not retired yet, their work is relatively leisurely. Their workplace is also very close to my home, which can be reached on foot. So they take on most of the housework. Moreover, they know that I am busy at work and they are reluctant to let me do too much (housework). (Interview with Bao, August 2019)

In Bao's experience, overtime work and the related commute had occupied much of her leisure time which could be used to help with housework. The domestic labour division in Bao's family was a reasonable arrangement based on her and her parents' work schedule. As I have suggested in Chapter IV, overtime work was rather common among my participants. Thus, Bao's family

was not the only case where parents undertook most of the housework due to adult children's intensive work schedule and their love for children. In terms of domestic labour division, parents reduced my participants' workload outside the workplace and provided a more relaxed environment full of love and emotional care at home through undertaking most of the housework.

My participants employed various ways to express their love and care to parents. However, similar to parental love which might cause disputes with adult children, my participants' care for their parents did not always create a sweet atmosphere. Some tensions were related to generational differences. Like many senior people, Ma's mother tended to use folk remedies to keep healthy, which mostly lacked the support of scientific evidence or in some cases was even proven to damage health. For example, his mother believed that one apple must be eaten every day and it would be best to eat it in the morning[76]. While daily fruit has been proven to be good for health, Ma's mother tended to dramatically exaggerate apple's function and might overlook the benefits of other foods. Ma always tried but failed to persuade his mother to stop employing these folk remedies in everyday life through explaining scientific and medical knowledge. His mother trusted folk health experience more than obscure scientific truth, towards which Ma felt helpless and annoyed.

Different everyday habits established in past experiences also contributed to the quarrels between my participants and their parents, particularly about various mundane details. Tang's mother was pleasant and touched when Tang occasionally helped with the housework, such as weekend cleaning and domestic decoration. Tang and her mother enjoyed the sweet family moment, but also sometimes quarrelled.

> *My mother always thinks I don't clean in the right way. But I cleaned my room like this when I was abroad. I think my way works well. In addition, we [her family] are decorating a new apartment and there are many different opinions about the decorations. She does not like the*

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[76] Its original Chinese is 早上金苹果，下午银苹果，晚上铜苹果, which is similar to the English proverb "an apple a day keeps the doctor away".

style I like and I do not want her style. So ... we quarrel a lot. Both of us are very angry. (Interview with Tang, August 2019)

During overseas independent life, Tang had developed her own approach to deal with housework and other everyday issues, which was different from her mother's habits. These disagreements about mundane practices stimulated the anger of Tang and her mother. Tang's as well as many other participants' experiences suggested that although the love between participants and their parents had not changed, the both sides needed some time to get used to each other, particularly from the perspective of everyday material practices, after they had been away for years and returned to their parents' household.

While living in the same household, my participants still hoped to maintain personal space, such as their bedroom, at home and keep some independence. However, given that many parents still imagined my participants as kids without autonomy, they often interrupted my participants' personal space and tried to control their everyday actions. Ma complained in the interview,

> *If she [his mother] thinks that one apple is necessary for every day, I won't stop her. Anyway, eating apples does not hurt health. But I am very unhappy if she forces me to eat. Think of that, when I am playing virtual games online or doing some personal things, my mom enters my room without knocking, puts an apple next to my mouth and asks me to eat it at once without negotiation. Of course, it pisses me off! Or, when I am staying up later and playing games on weekends, my mom repeatedly asks me to stop playing and go to bed ... I didn't have any other conflicts with my mother. Just these little things she forces me to do, which makes me very upset. (Interview with Ma, January 2019)*

Even in the shared home space, Ma still hoped to have his own place without interruption from others including parents. His mother's entrance without his approval broke the boundary of his personal space and the encouragement about eating apples disturbed his personal life arrangements. Also, the personal space had a temporal aspect. Ma emphasised that when he was dealing with personal things, his mother's interruptions had become rather annoying. In other words, his mother not only broke into his private space, but also occupied his personal time. Before Ma moved back to Shanghai in 2018, he had led an independent life free from parental control for years. Thus, he was more reluctant to accept

parental interruption in his life and felt angry, even though he understood that the parental control was due to parental love.

While parents' absence had widely existed in most Chinese young people's university and further education, no matter whether they had overseas education experience, my participants suggested that parents' absence from overseas education had a greater impact on parental relationships after they moved back to China. Due to the institutional system of Chinese higher education, university works as a surrogate guardian in students' everyday life rather than a simple education provider. In Chinese universities, most students, including my participants, lived on campus, ate in student canteens or even did shopping within campus, and they did not have to deal with most everyday chores which they did in later overseas education, like landlords, repairs and payment of utility bills. Thus, overseas experiences encouraged my participants to learn about leading an independent life better than Chinese universities did. Moreover, parents would be able to visit their children frequently on Chinese campuses, but had to be totally absent from children's overseas education due to border controls. Thus, it was unsurprising to witness that my participants' parents usually overlooked their experience of becoming mature overseas and still imagined them as dependent children.

6.3.3 Discussion

Both intimacy and tension were frequently observed in the relationships between my participants and their parents. On the one hand, my participants and their parents were caring for and loving each other in both long-distance relationships and the same household. They might not express the love in frank language, but through paying attention to various details of everyday well-being. On the other hand, due to the generational gaps, different experiences over the previous few years and other individualised factors, the love between each other likely involved the intervention in personal everyday life and further evoked tensions and related negative emotions. In other intimate relationships, friends and partners usually attempted to avoid any quarrels with loved ones which might hurt the intimate relationship, but no participants discussed in this section

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would carefully hold their temper in front of their parents. If peaceful negotiation could not deal with the disputes with parents, more fierce arguments and related negative emotions could be expected. The biological ties, decades of parenthood and great knowledge of each other protected the relationship between parents and adult children from being hurt by these tensions. To some extent, tensions in the relationship between my participants and parents did not imply serious conflict, but was a special kind of expression of their love and care for each other. Positive emotions, like love, happiness and sweet-heartedness, and negative emotions, such as upset, annoyance and anger, reached an interesting balance in the relationship between my participants and their parents.

While the mix of intimacy and tension widely exists in the relationship between young people and their parents, my participants' overseas experiences had an extra impact on the relationship. As parents were absent from my participants' overseas experiences, they usually imagined their adult children according to their previous knowledge; meanwhile, with the transition of life stages from the independent student period to early career, my participants started to seek more independence from their family. Also, the overseas experiences might make a difference in my participants' personal habits in everyday life. Both my participants and their parents had to adapt themselves to all the changes brought by overseas experiences and a mix of positive and negative emotions were perceived during the adaptation period.

6.4 Bereavement and disease

> *I used to like to watch TVB[77] TV series, which called bitter gourd "half-life melon". Why this name? Because young people don't like its bitterness and don't eat it; when they have experienced the suffering of the world in person and accept bitter gourd, their lives would have been halfway through. More bitterness in the mouth and less bitterness in the*

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[77] TVB, which is short for Television Broadcasts Limited, is a television broadcasting company based in Hong Kong. It has produced a number of TV series which have gained great popularity in Mainland China.

heart. Now, my life is halfway through. (Interview with Fang, August 2019)

The lament was made by Fang after she told me that her husband was diagnosed with a malignant tumour several months ago. Although she remained calm and did not use many emotional words to express the bitterness in her mind while narrating her husband's disease, the story about the bitter gourd vividly indicated her grief and suffering when she encountered the sudden change of family. While bereavement is an inevitable life experience for every person, I was not going to pay much attention to death and illness in my participants' everyday life when I started my fieldwork, because, first, I did not expect that my participants, who were in their 20s or early 30s, had experienced much bereavement; and second, death and illness were relatively infrequent compared to other aspects of everyday life like work, eating and residence. However, the experiences of several participants who had experienced the death or illness of loved ones suggested that bereavement had a great impact on their migration journey and everyday life after moving back from overseas. In this section, I primarily focus on these participants' experiences and interrogate the material and emotional consequences of bereavement and disease.

Bereavement could greatly change my participants' migration plans, but the change might vary depending upon various personal circumstances. Cheng interrupted her Master's study in Canada and returned to Shanghai to take care of her father who had been in the terminal stage of cancer. Her experience in hospital made her determined to migrate to Canada in the future.

> *The emergency department was very crowded, always full of people. You can hardly find a seat to rest for a while. When I helped nurses to add a bed in the corridor for my father, I accidentally broke a glass full of hot water. Every person in the Emergency Department was scolding me. No one asked me, "hi, are you hurt by the hot water?". Everyone was scolding me, "How can you be so careless? What if the broken glass gets someone injured?" It was 4 or 5am. I didn't sleep all night. I could not bear these criticisms anymore and ran out of the building. When my mother came back, the first thing I told her was "Mom, I want to emigrate to Canada". I don't think these people are bad, but our medical environment is too competitive. Even a seat needs to be grabbed! In hospital, I not only needed to worry about my father, I also had to try*

to compete with others for various resources. As long as you make any minor mistakes, others will scold you cruelly. In an environment where medical resources are not always sufficient, I have become very, very tired while taking care of my father. I want to give myself a better environment one day. I really do not want to be in such an upsetting environment again. My mother always said that I am too sensitive, but I think if that environment makes me too uncomfortable, I would like to change my living place. (Interview with Cheng, August 2019)

The experience in hospital struck Cheng with fear, helplessness, disappointment, tiredness, upset as well as the worry about her father. She attributed these negative emotions mostly to the unfriendly medical environment in China. Once she had been impressed by the reputable medical service in Canada, she expressed a lower tolerance to the hospital environment in China and was determined to settle down in Canada in the future. But in Xia's case, the missed farewell with her grandfather had motivated her movement from the UK to China after graduation. She explained,

On the third day I arrived in the UK, my grandpa passed away. I am bad at expressing myself. Grandpa was already in the hospital when I left, and in very bad condition. My mother said that it might be the last time between grandpa and me. At that time, I wanted to say a lot of things to him, but I still held it in my heart and did not say it. I have regretted it very, very much. It will be a regret for my whole life, but it was impossible for me to go back on the third day after arriving in the UK. After this incident, I have understood the importance of expressing my thoughts to loved ones. Also, I do not want to miss any significant moments like this in the future. I want to be close to and accompany my family. (Interview with Xia, October 2018)

While Xia had recovered from the sorrowful event, the regret had impressed her so much that she did not want to experience such regret again and valued the time with family more than before. Thus, she moved back to China once she completed her Master's program in the UK.

The illness of intimate ones and bereavement also made a great impact on my participants' everyday practices and emotions. Participants who were experiencing the illness of intimate ones had to adjust their everyday arrangements according to the care demand of family. When Fang's husband was just diagnosed with malignant tumour, Fang not only experienced sudden

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emotional collapse (as can be seen in Fig 6.1) due to overwhelming sorrow, shock and helplessness, but also altered her usual everyday schedule. During February and May 2019, the caring work for her son had been totally undertaken by her parents-in-law. Fang cancelled her fitness class, travelling and all other leisure activities and spent most leisure time taking care of her husband in hospital and at home. With the progress of her husband's treatment, Fang had gradually recovered from emotional collapse and resumed her fitness classes and some other leisure activities. But given that the anti-cancer treatment was a time-consuming process, it was hard to restore her everyday life to the way it was before the illness of her husband. For example, Fang said that her family would not go for an overseas holiday before her husband completely recovered, which had been twice a year in the past.
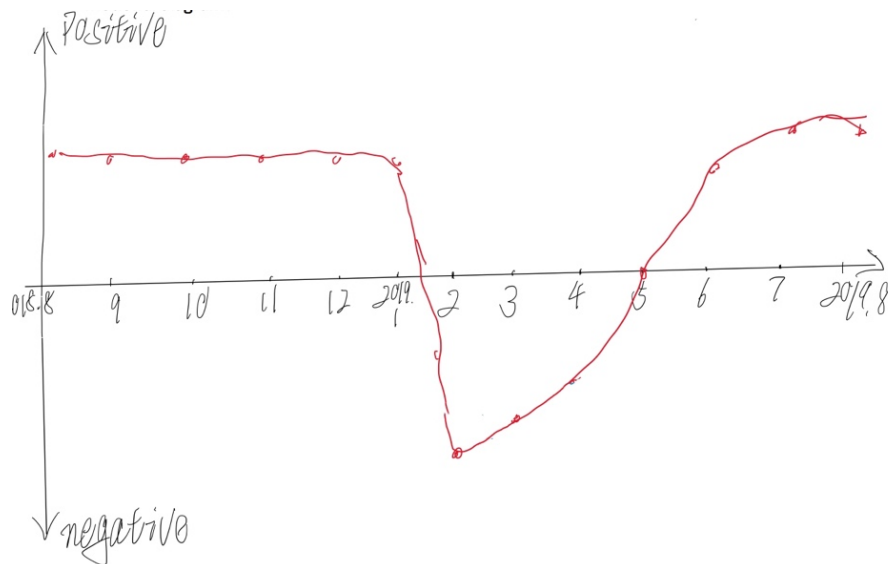
Fig. 6.1 The emotional diagram drawn by Fang

The death of loved ones not only caused overwhelming sorrow in the short term, but also devastatingly changed the interaction between the remaining family members in the longer term. Zhao's mother passed away due to a heart attack while Zhao was studying in France. The event occurred too abruptly to leave any time for Zhao to fly back and say farewell to her mother. In the remaining period of overseas study, her father provided great emotional support to help Zhao deal with her grief and guilt. While Zhao got along with her father in the long-distance relationship, they had often been in tension since Zhao moved back from France.

Before my mother passed away, my dad rarely did housework. My mother died so suddenly that she had no time to hand housework over to my father properly, like various tips of house cleaning, the location of specific tools, the payment of utility bills and so on. All are mundane details. But it was not so easy for my dad to learn these things by himself from the very beginning. He had not known how to cook and even never used a washing machine before. Actually, his living quality has not been as good as before. So he has always been unhappy about the less comfortable life, but I did not know his feelings when abroad. I am back now. Our home remained the same as when my mother died. I think it is time to clean up the rooms with my father. In the process of cleaning, my dad has started to express grievances. He felt that all the messy life was due to mom's sudden death. I was very angry, because it was not mom's fault, and she didn't want it either. So now we quarrel every few days. It upsets me very much. Very tired and sad. But we have been better in recent days. Fewer arguments and more negotiations now. (Interview with Zhao, August 2019)

Zhao's mother had acted as care provider in the family. Her death had required Zhao's father to learn to care for himself, which reduced the quality of his everyday life. The sorrow about his wife's death and the unhappiness towards his present life had interwoven with each other and evoked his grievances. When Zhao moved back from overseas, she also had to adapt herself to life without her mother and her father's grief. Zhao and her father had experienced a hard period to adjust themselves to the "new" family. Thus, bereavement would never merely mean a heartbroken absence of a loved one, but strongly re-shape the domestic labour division, familial structure and the relationships between other living family members.

Different from previous sections primarily focusing on the frequent material interaction and close emotional ties with intimate ones, bereavement and disease further contribute to the discussion about everyday intimate relationships through disclosing how the (potential) loss of loved ones makes an impact on everyday life. From the perspective of emotions, while all participants mentioned in this section had suffered overwhelming negative emotions in general, the specific emotions likely varied upon personal experiences. For example, guilt was expressed by Zhao and Xia who were unable to accompany their intimate ones at the very final stage in person, but

this was seldom mentioned by other participants. In terms of materiality, either death or illness of loved ones usually required my participants and their other family members to change everyday practices and life plans in the distant future. Notably, these changes were not only to fulfil the care demands of loved ones in illness or to recover themselves from the loss of loved ones, but also for the purpose of the well-being of other family members. For instance, Fang needed to ensure that her son could be well looked after by her parents-in-law while spending most of her time taking care of her husband. Moreover, all the emotional and material consequences of bereavement and disease were temporally sensitive. More specifically, my participants, who lost loved ones while studying overseas, likely had different experiences and emotional reflections regarding bereavement before and after moving back to China. In other words, their performance and emotions were embedded in specific living environments and social/intimate networks. Taking Zhao as an example, her experiences of sorrow and grief in France at the death of her mother, which was primarily crying and seeking comfort from her father and friends, were distinct from her actions later in Shanghai. When she actually returned to the household in which her mother had lived and still maintained the same appearance, she perceived a bereavement atmosphere and emotions like grief and loss. But as she had recovered from the overwhelming sorrow after a couple of years, she decided to change the domestic decoration and released herself from the sad past.

6.5 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have primarily discussed the romantic relationships, the relationships with parents in everyday life and the bereavement experienced by my participants during their outbound and backward migration journeys. My participants performed these intimate relationships through a series of mundane practices, like cooking, eating, housework and daily care, and perceived a range of emotions towards intimate relationships. In these concluding remarks, I am thinking over how the investigation of everyday intimate relationships benefits the understanding of overseas returned students' everyday life and further contributes to the theory of return migration.

As much existing literature has suggested, my participants perceived a mix of emotions from the everyday interactions with loved ones. These emotions were mostly expressed through mundane practices and occasionally through verbal discussions. The mutual care between my participants and their parents illustrated the diversity and materiality of emotions attached to the relationship. On the one hand, my participants and parents mutually took care of the counterpart's well-being through WeChat messages, calls and domestic (emotional) labour if they lived in the same household, which indicated the undoubted love between them; on the other hand, tensions frequently occurred between my participants and their parents, which were suggested by quarrels over various issues, and evoked unpleasant emotions like anger and sadness. One point to be highlighted here was that in my participants' experiences, love could be the cause of tensions and tensions could be a format of love. Parents' interruptions into children's personal lives could be derived from their love for their children; in a broken romantic relationship, sadness was likely evoked by past sweet memories which did not exist anymore. The interconnections between different emotions helps to unpack everyday life in detail.

The discussion in this chapter has largely remained in domestic spaces. Intimate relationships in the household encouraged my participants to attach specific emotions to the physical spaces. Taking Wen as an example, she changed her indifferent attitude towards the rented flat after her fiancé moved to Shanghai and started seeing the temporary residence as a kind of home space. Moreover, some domestic spaces, like the household where my participants had grown up, might imply specific atmospheres which had been shaped by past experiences of my participants and their loved ones. The established atmosphere influenced interactions between my participants and loved ones and further evoked a series of subjective reflections on the relationship and the space; in return, these interactions and emotions would likely reconstruct the domestic space through attaching their sense of home and home-making efforts to the household place. Beyond domestic spaces, intimate relationships were greatly embedded in the wider social, cultural and economic context of Shanghai where they were living and their hometown where they had grown up, which could be illustrated by

Zhang and Xu's wedding and Cheng's reflection on taking care of her father in hospital.

Migration journeys, including outward and backward movements, are an ongoing process, so also with intimate relationships. The ethnographic nature of my research has enabled me to observe how intimate relationships were greatly interwoven into overseas returned students' migration journey across life stages from dependent students to early-career workers, from single person to partners or even spouses. At different life stages, participants undertook different responsibilities for their intimate ones and kept negotiating their self-identities, due to which their migration periods were experienced differently (Ho, 2021). That was also why some key practices or events of intimate relationships could strongly influence the migration journey, such as Yao's marriage and Cheng's bereavement. Moreover, in my participants' experiences, past life stages, particularly their overseas study, greatly impacted their present practices of intimate relationships. For instance, they and their partners might replicate some practices in past overseas experiences in their present everyday life to recall sweet memories; overseas experiences had brought them new personal traits which might cause tensions with their parents.

In summary, my participants' experiences of intimate relationships suggested that their return experience had not terminated upon their arrival in China as they still needed to continue adapting intimate relationships, which had been greatly influenced by past overseas experiences, to the new living environment. In a more general sense, return migration is an ongoing process, which implies present everyday life, past experiences as well as future plans, and the process is embedded in wider social, cultural and economic contexts where return migrants have experienced.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The thesis is situated in the transnational migration scholarship. Focusing on overseas returned students to Shanghai China, this thesis compensates for the insufficient research on everyday material and/or emotional experiences of return migrants and further highlights the usefulness and significance of everydayness in transnationalism scholarship. Drawing on data collected from one year of ethnographic fieldwork in Shanghai from August 2018 to August 2019, this research aimed to shed light on the conceptualisation of return migration through unpacking the everyday experiences and emotions of overseas returned students in Shanghai and consider whether and how the categorisation of migration could help with future interrogation of transnational migration. I sought to do this through addressing three research questions: 1) what material practices/encounters and emotions constitute the everyday life of overseas returned students after moving to Shanghai; 2) how places along their migration journey, the city of Shanghai and specific locations in Shanghai shape their everyday experiences; and 3) how their present everyday life and emotions interconnect with their past experiences and future plans.

In this concluding chapter, I first consolidate the main findings emerging from the empirical chapters and highlight how these fit within the overall research aim and research questions; in the subsequent section, I highlight the empirical and theoretical contributions made by this thesis to wider transnationalism scholarship; then, I indicate potential areas for further research; finally, I critically reflect on the research project in the concluding remarks of this chapter.

7.2 Research findings

Based on themes emerging from my ethnographic observation and my participants' narrative in interviews, I have discussed my participants' everyday practices and emotions in three empirical chapters, which respectively focus on everyday experiences of work, everyday life beyond the workplace and everyday intimate relationships.

Chapter IV interrogated my participants' everyday experiences of job-hunting and work after they moved to Shanghai. On the one hand, their overseas education experience had a notable impact on their job-hunting, work habits and colleague relationships, but the impacts varied between participants and further evoked different emotions. On the other hand, the changing landscape of the local labour market, their previous domestic education and other localised social circumstances (such as talent policies and personal/familial social networks) in Shanghai also strongly shaped their everyday experiences of work. In addition to the struggles to take advantage of overseas education as well as develop their local experience, Chapter IV also argues that overseas returned students encountered unexpected difficulties when they transferred from dependent students to independent fully-employed adults. The transition of life stages was intertwined with their backward movement to China, which hinted at the transtemporal nature of (returned) international student mobilities.

Chapter V investigated several aspects of my participants' everyday life beyond the workplace, namely food, residence and transportation. Participants' everyday practices and emotions in these aspects suggested that it was not only the backward movement from overseas to homeland that influenced their everyday life after return, but also migrants' lived experiences before moving overseas and future life plans. The discussion in this chapter also indicates that multiple geographical scales were simultaneously engaged with as part of overseas returned students' everyday experiences, resulting in different emotional responses to their backward movements from overseas. Moreover, this chapter illuminates why overseas returned students' everyday lives were work-centred. Even though the experiences and emotions discussed in this chapter were not occurring in workplaces or in the scope of daily work duties, there existed strong relevance with their everyday experiences of work, which blurred the boundaries between paid work and everyday leisure.

Chapter VI examined intimate relationships with partners and parents in overseas returned students' everyday lives, which were performed through a series of mundane practices and were accompanied with a mix of emotions. As

intimate relationships were greatly interwoven into my participants' return journey, this chapter considered the relationality of return migration. More importantly, the exploration of everyday intimate relationships showed how their transnational journeys made a difference to everyday intimate relationships, which further shaped relevant practices and emotions, and how the transition of life stages and the experiences of return migration were intertwined. The discussion about overseas returned students' everyday intimacy contributes to the debates on return migration from a life course perspective.

The three empirical chapters are interconnected and simultaneously help to realise the research aim of this thesis. In this section, I interweave the three empirical chapters, summarise empirical findings in a thematic way and respond to the research questions laid out in the introductory chapter.

7.2.1 Everyday practices and emotions of overseas returned students
1) More than work

My participants' everyday lived experiences in Shanghai echoed a fundamental argument in literature on the everyday, that everyday life is in the nature of being ordinary and is constituted by a wide range of repetitive, banal, mundane and seemingly unremarkable events and practices (Highmore, 2002, 2010; Horton & Kraftl, 2013). In the empirical chapters, I have discussed a variety of my participants' everyday practices in Shanghai, including how they participated in the local labour market, took up job positions, fulfilled job duties, hunted for accommodation, lived alone or with flatmates/partner/family, made their domestic space as home, consumed food and commuted. However, given the prevalence and diversity of everyday practices, it is nearly impossible to enumerate all the practices I have observed in this research.

While most existing literature on returned students emphasises their experiences of job-hunting and work in their homeland, my findings expand the research scope of related scholarship as the thesis has brought my participants' everyday experiences beyond offices and career fair as well as everyday intimate

relationships into discussion. While returned international students have often been seen as a kind of highly-skilled migration, the extended research scope could be seen as a response to Yeoh and Huang's (2011) call for more attention to be paid to skilled migrants as ordinary human beings instead of merely a part of a wider socio-cultural system. The examination of both work and leisure everyday experiences reveals the multiple identities of overseas returned students, such as skilled workers, partners, children and urban citizens, and indicates the entwinement between various realms of everyday experiences (Ho & Hatfield, 2011). Further, the multiple identities and entwined realms could display how overseas returned students coordinated a wide range of embodied practices and material encounters involving different social contacts after they moved back. Their emotional reflections on all the different material experiences not only provide a vivid illustration of their everyday life, but also benefit the conceptualisation of return migration as an on-going complex process.

The "more-than-work" analysis also speaks to existing literature on labour geographies. As analysed in empirical chapters, work had been blended with many other aspects of overseas return students' everyday life. On the one hand, the central role of work in my participants' everyday lives echoed labour geographies work which emphasises the embeddedness of individual workers' agency in the wider socio-economic system (Coe, 2012; Strauss, 2017). On the other hand, the insight into everyday life hints at a porous boundary of work from both spatial and temporal perspectives. In this thesis, many participants took a series of "informal" actions outside working hours and workplaces to serve their work and improve their careers, like collecting industrial information in *fan ju* and selecting residence for the convenience of everyday work. The blurring boundary of work opens new research possibilities for future labour geographies.

My participants' everyday practices in Shanghai matched their return motivations. While all participants were working or hoping to work as full-time employees, participants who moved to Shanghai primarily for the reunion with partners/families would spend more time with their intimate ones and appeared

less ambitious in their career prospects. Moreover, individualised everyday practices also hinted at participants' past and potential transnational and/or translocal journeys. Overseas returned students tended to insist on some everyday habits established overseas or in other Chinese places and chose their present actions according to long-term life plans. The distinct transnational and/or translocal movements in the past and future endorsed obvious personal features on present daily lives. In this light, my participants' everyday practices displayed a connection between different time periods and between a series of places.

2) A complex of emotions

In contrast to much work on migrants' emotions which focus on specific emotions or subjectivities deriving from certain events in their migration journeys (e.g., Bilecen, 2017; Peled, 2017), this thesis has examined emotions from the perspective of everydayness. Given the wide range and great diversity of everyday material experiences I observed over the thesis, my participants had perceived and expressed different kinds of emotions while participating in this research. While emotions and subjectivities discussed in existing transnationalism literature usually appear strong in migrants' narratives, such as sense of belonging, guilt towards left-behind families and anger towards social exclusion in host places (e.g., Christou, 2011; De Silva, 2017a, 2017b; Garvey, 2005), emotions expressed by my participants varied in their levels of intensity, with both strong and gentle emotions indicating my participants' perceptions towards their past, present and future lived experiences.

Emotions highlight everyday experiences as a unity and help to make places of personal belongings. Unlike various kinds of material encounters which happened in different places, everyday emotions were more fluid and flexible across spatial borders. Emotions derived from one everyday aspect could influence my participants' emotional perception of other aspects. Further, the blend of emotions likely created an atmosphere full of love and familiarity and helpfully constructed a place of their own in everyday life (Neil, 2017). For instance, when participants expressed emotions towards food shared with beloved ones, the emotions towards their partner, food and a place where they

had good memories were closely interwoven together; the mixed emotions established a place of home in Shanghai, particularly if they had not lived in Shanghai previously.

The lens of emotions reminds researchers to take migrants' own experiences towards specific transnational journeys into consideration while conceptualising related technical terms. In the thesis, even though all participants had moved from overseas to Shanghai, which could be supposed as a kind of return migration as they were moving back to their homeland, my participants had different emotional judgements on whether they were returning to Shanghai. While participants who were Shanghainese or had lived in Shanghai usually attached a sense of familiarity and fondness to the city, other participants perceived strangeness towards the city, particularly in the initial period of their lives in Shanghai, and tended to see their movement to Shanghai as a kind of re-migration. The various emotional perceptions of the transnational journey could benefit further conceptualisation of return migration.

7.2.2 The spatiality of everyday experiences
1) Localisation of transnational experiences in present everyday life
The findings in this thesis resonate with previous literature on the everyday which argues that everyday life is deeply rooted in and shaped by wider socio-political settings (Highmore, 2002, 2010; Horton & Kraftl, 2013), and further suggests that returnees likely edited, instead of duplicated, their overseas everyday habits in Shanghai and the editing greatly depends on local social, cultural and physical settings. More specifically, overseas returned students' previous lived experiences which were emplaced in different locales were blended into localised circumstances of Shanghai in their present everyday life. The integrated emplacement unpacks the translocality of overseas returned students' post-study movements.

From the perspective of everyday work, overseas qualifications are no longer seen as inherently valuable compared to the 1990s and the early 2000s; only if overseas returned students met the demands of the contemporary local labour

market, could their overseas experiences be recognised by employers and wider society. The questioned value of overseas qualifications in local labour markets implied a gap between my participants' pre-return expectations and post-return reality in Shanghai, which caused some negative emotions, like stress, sadness and depression. In terms of everyday experiences beyond the workplace, my participants neither completely recreated their overseas experiences in Shanghai, nor strictly imitated the everyday life of non-migrant residents in Shanghai. Instead, I observed that participants usually engaged with a hybrid of cultural elements in their present everyday experiences, which were derived from a variety of places in and/or outside China. As migrants tend to recall their pleasant transnational/translocal memories in present everyday lives through insisting on some habits established elsewhere, they usually expressed yearning for places where they established these everyday habits. From this perspective, my participants' everyday experiences suggested the embeddedness in Shanghai, their current urban dwelling, as well as the rootedness in previous overseas places.

Notably, one important reason why my participants were able to maintain some overseas elements in their present everyday life was the internationalised characteristics of Shanghai. To put more specifically, my participants could access necessary objects or services which were crucial to recall, if not precisely duplicate, some moments of their previous experiences abroad. Also due to the long-standing multi-cultural environment of Shanghai, my participants' everyday life with overseas characteristics did not flag them as a minority population in the metropolis and enabled them to less suffer the problem of social adaptation which is widely experienced by many researched return groups (Alcalde, 2020; Chiang & Liao, 2005; Koh, 2015). For my participants, particularly those who had not lived in Shanghai previously, the comparatively friendly everyday circumstances in Shanghai developed their fondness for Shanghai and even stimulated a sense of belonging to the city.

2) Scalar dimensions of everyday life
While primarily focusing on Shanghai, the thesis suggests that overseas returned students' post-study everyday life involved various places of different

geographical scales, including country, city, neighbourhood and household. These geographical scales simultaneously engaged in my participants' post-study everyday practices. Taking garbage sorting as an example, the new policies were made by the municipal government and promoted by the residents' committee at the level of neighbourhood; my participants conducted the sorting in their household and the action of throwing sorted garbage was inspected by the residents' committee; although the national government was not directly involved in the everyday practices of garbage sorting, the designation of Shanghai as the only pilot city for the new garbage policy resulted from national decisions. The intertwinement of various geographical scales contributed to the unique nature of participants' everyday practices. Even in the same country, living in different cities, different neighbourhoods and/or different residences would make a distinct everyday experiences.

Each geographical scale had different emotional implications for my participants. In section 7.2.1, I mentioned that my participants had different perceptions of their movement from overseas to Shanghai, which could be explained further from the perspective of geographical scales. While my participants mostly expressed a sense of familiarity and belonging to China, they held divergent emotions towards places on smaller geographical levels and these diverse emotions were usually derived from their previous and present lived experiences. The various emotions attached to places at different geographical scales questions the argument that return migrants were moving back to their "home" place (Baas, 2015) and thus the lens of emotion could help researchers to further interrogate the nature of return migration.

7.2.3 The temporality of everyday experiences
1) Past, present and future
Given that migration has been conceptualised as a transtemporal process (Bass & Yeoh, 2018; Coe, 2014), the thesis further examines the transtemporality of return migration. In sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2, I concluded that my participants' everyday life in Shanghai was influenced by their past transnational and/or translocal lived experiences. Such influence reveals the rootedness of everyday

embodied practices in multiple places which migrants had experienced, while existing scholarship has suggested belonging and other migrant subjectivities "are not only sited in a particular space and time, but also extend across sites and traverse scales" (Robertson & Ho, 2016, p.2270).

The rootedness of my participants' everyday experiences in contemporary contexts was rather visible as well. In the empirical chapters, I highlighted how my participants' everyday experiences were rooted in the macro socio-economic contexts in the years of 2018 and 2019. The on-going Sino-American trade war had brought increasing challenges and disadvantages to my participants' job-hunting if they were still looking for a job, everyday work if they had taken up a formal position and long-term career prospects in the Chinese labour market. The latest talent policy of China, which expressed more interest in high-end professional returnees rather than fresh graduates, and some municipal regulations, such as the *hukou* policy in Shanghai, also imposed significant impacts on my participants' present everyday life and future life plans (for example, whether to move back to their hometown or persist in living in Shanghai). Given this, temporal factors not only constituted a part of the general social background where my participants were living, but also shaped their everyday encounters and practices. However, as many participants had not anticipated these factors when they planned their return migration and settlement in Shanghai, emotions expressed towards these issues were generally negative.

In addition to macro socio-economic contexts, some micro temporal factors also influenced my participants' everyday practices. For example, I observed that some participants tended to dine in canteens which were advertised by their idols or Internet celebrities. Some temporary demands, like preparing for changing jobs, drove my participants to take appropriate actions (like study or attending training class) in their everyday life; once their demands had been satisfied, these actions would be suspended. These micro temporal factors could contribute to an in-depth understanding of migrant everyday life.

For participants in this thesis, both their movements to Shanghai and future potential migration to elsewhere are based on their aspiration, which "is deeply temporal in forming imaginations of the future outcomes of mobility" (Robertson & Ho, 2016, p.2267). Their aspiration for future career, family and wider life also had an impact on their embodied material practices in present everyday life. For example, if participants had determined to leave Shanghai and re-migrate to other cities in the foreseeable future, they would be less likely to take much time and effort to make their domestic space in Shanghai a kind of home space and reluctantly invested many emotions in the place of Shanghai.

2) Specific life stages

In addition to specific time periods, overseas returned students' everyday life and emotions were temporally rooted in life stages which they were undergoing. My participants' everyday practices were largely changing due to the transfer between life stages and related negotiation with self-identities (Ho, 2021). In the chapter on everyday work, I indicated that job-hunting was actually a transfer process from dependent students to independent full-time workers, in which attending career fairs, submitting online applications and conducting internships were the most common practices. In the limbo status of uncertainty, participants waited for not only secured jobs, but also full adulthood in the sense of Chinese culture. Afterwards, their everyday practices became largely work-centred which shared little in common with their previous studying and job-hunting experiences. Beyond career perspectives, the change of intimate relationships often represented significant transfers of life stages and resulted in the shifts of everyday practices. For example, marriage usually meant that my participants needed to carefully make a work-family balance and take up more domestic responsibilities in everyday life.

The lens of emotions reveals more details about how my participants underwent and handled life stage transitions. Many participants' everyday experiences of work have suggested that they suffered pressure and distress when their move from being students to working adults did not progress smoothly. In the domestic sphere, while the establishment of romantic relationships and marriage evoked love, happiness, caringness and other emotions, my

participants also encountered sorrow in changes of intimate relationships, such as bereavement and illness of loved ones. While the (un)pleasant changes of life stages were not totally unexpected given my participants' age, it was still difficult for my participants to make plans in advance and they had to practically and emotionally adapt their everyday life once these life events happened.

7.3 Empirical and theoretical significance

Following the summarised findings of the thesis, in this section I now further deliberate on how these findings could be generalised and inspire future scholarship on return migration. Through unravelling the everyday life and emotions of overseas returned students in Shanghai, the thesis fills the gap in existing transnationalism literature where the everyday experiences of return migrants have remained largely underexamined. Empirically, the thesis particularly contributes to existing knowledge of return migration to China; theoretically, the thesis rethinks the existing conceptualisation of return migration, which I have criticised as too simple, and further helps researchers to consider how meaningful and useful the categorisation of transnational migration is (for example, student migration, highly-skilled migration, return migration and many other kinds of migration).

7.3.1 Empirical contribution

Through in-depth exploration of my participants' everyday life in Shanghai, this thesis contributes to the knowledge of overseas returned students, or so-called "*hai gui*" in Mandarin, which goes beyond the socio-economic activities and contributions they make in work places through indicating multiple identities and diverse aspects of their everyday life. Given the gaps of socio-economic development and higher education between China and overseas developed countries, returned students have been highlighted as a part of brain circulation and an important source of skilled labour force; most academic discussions have focused on returnees' socio-economic contribution, career prospects and other experience in the Chinese labour market (e.g., Huang & Kuah-Pearcee, 2015; Zweig & Wang, 2013; Zweig *et al.*, 2020). The thesis is not going to deny the potential value of overseas returned students as skilled migrants, but suggests

that they are not just full-time workers, but possess multiple identities (such as friend, partner, parent, *hukou* holders) contemporaneously and the multiple identities further situate them in various relationships with intimate ones, (non)migrant social contacts and (non)governmental organisations. The emotions they expressed towards everyday lives in and beyond the workplace further suggested that returned students may not attach an absolute priority to career over other everyday prospects in their lived experiences, particularly like family moments. Thus, even though work is a critically important part of their everyday life, Chinese returnees' experiences outside workplaces and labour markets deserves more attention and interrogation either in future academic examination or in policy making.

The thesis also unpacks the meaning of China in migration studies through interrogating how overseas returned students adapted themselves into local everyday circumstances and emotionally perceived their transnational and translocal journeys. On the one hand, China as a place represents a set of cultural norms, linguistic environment, social/physical landscapes, social networks, governance systems, economic structures and, more personally, individual growing-up experiences. In this context, even after serval years of overseas stay, overseas returned students still perceive some familiarity with China and, at least in this research, they seldom encounter significant cultural tensions and confusions regarding their cultural identities. Thus, in future interrogation on return migration, no matter whether it is related to China, it is unwise for researchers to take a post-return cultural shock for granted.

On the other hand, China is not a homogeneous place, but contains a range of places at smaller geographical scales which likely imply great strangeness for some overseas returned students. The strangeness means a lack of previous lived experiences, finite social networks and weak emotional attachment. These findings mean that my thesis challenges some existing literature which take an inappropriate equivalence between the country of China and certain places in China, and calls for more attention to how places at various geographical scales in one country differentiate return migrants' everyday life and possibly other extraordinary experiences.

7.3.2 Theoretical advancement

The conceptualisation of return migration could be specified from five perspectives, namely who, why, when, where and impact (Baas, 2015). Based on empirical findings regarding everyday life and emotions of overseas returned students, the thesis contributes to the conceptualisation of return migration from the perspective of who, why, when and where.

'Who returns' is actually how researchers think about the identity of return migrants. The thesis reveals the multiplicity and fluidity of migrant identities. Returnees likely possess a complex of identities concurrently, such as student, employee, spouse/partner and daughter/son. The overemphasis on one identity, which is often witnessed in existing scholarship of return migration, possibly causes neglect of a complex of identities possessed by returnees. Moreover, the identity of migrants may change alongside the progress of their transnational journey. A full acknowledgement of returnees' identities could deepen academic understanding of return migration.

In terms of "why return", the thesis suggests that each individual in the same group of return migrants may have different primary return motivations. Although overseas returned students were thought of as skilled workers by academia and wider society, some participants moved to Shanghai not primarily for a bright career prospect, but for a reunion with family/partner. Their motivations varied upon their personal aspirations for their present and future life and reflections on self-identities. The diversity of return motivations reminds researchers to pay attention to individualised and emotional elements while conceptualising return migration.

From the perspective of "when to return", the thesis takes a further step towards unpacking the trans-temporality of return migration. Given the rapid development of Chinese society, the changing landscapes in Shanghai and the transitions of life stages experienced by overseas returned students, the thesis illustrates return migration as an on-going process full of temporal dynamics.

In this respect, the interrogation of return migration should consider how migrants and places have changed over time periods.

Regarding "return to where", the thesis refuses the equivalence between return destination and migrants' place of origins/birth and raises the importance of geographical scales while comprehending return migration. In my research, movement to China was regarded by my participants as a return migration to their homeland, while movement to places on smaller geographical scales was often supposed as a kind of re-migration to a less familiar city due to the lack of previous lived experiences and the recent changes of Shanghai. To put simply, migrants may comprehend the same migration journey differently on different geographical scales. Bearing this in mind, researchers need to better clarify the geographical scales when they conduct any empirical or theoretical research on return migration; moreover, it would be unwise to simply suppose the destination place of return migration as migrants' place of home, which requires careful interrogation of migrants' own emotional perception.

Based on the above discussion on who, why, when and where, the following question is whether there exists a definite theoretical boundary between return migration and other kinds of migration. The findings from this thesis would suggest a negative answer, as a complex of identities, multiple motivations, the temporal embeddedness and the various geographical scales prevail among almost all kinds of transnational migration, rather than being unique to return migration. However, this is not to suggest that return migration and outwards migration are one and the same, but that there is a blurring boundary. The emotions of migrants could help to distinguish return migration from other kinds of migration. The thesis suggests that if participants perceive their post-study movement to China/Shanghai/neighbourhood/household as return, they usually had lived experiences here and attached a sense of home and/or belonging to the place. Hence, past lived experiences and sense of home/belonging become the most significant difference between return migration and other migration. While existing literature has noted the overlap between return migration and other categories of migration through interrogating citizenship issues (Ho, 2016), this thesis further unpacks how the

boundary between return migration and other kinds of migration become blurring in returnee's lived experiences constituted by material encounters and emotions.

7.4 Potential limits and future directions

In the above sections, I have reviewed the findings from the empirical chapters, and indicated the empirical and theoretical contributions made by the thesis to current transnationalism scholarship. Despite the findings and contributions, this PhD research still has some limits. In this section, I critically reflect on the limits of the thesis and provide some recommendations for future research.

Empirically the thesis is contributing to a holistic knowledge of return migration based on the data derived from post-study everyday experiences of overseas returned students in Shanghai. However, overseas returned students were not the only partakers in their everyday experiences, which also involved their colleagues, friends, parents, partners and even strangers as the empirical chapters have suggested. Thus, it would potentially provide fresh insights into existing discussions of post-return everyday experiences if the viewpoints of other participants were included in empirical exploration. Through connecting and comparing the opinions and experiences of different actors, the everyday life of return migrants could be illustrated in greater depth and these details would be vital to unpack the meaning of socio-cultural circumstances encountered by return migrants.

Regarding the conceptualisation of return migration, the thesis has made contributions from the perspectives of who, why, when and where, but lacks empirical investigation into the impacts of return migration and theoretically deliberates how the impacts on society and individuals inspire further conceptualisation of return migration. Existing literature which explores the impact of return migration on either societies or individuals has rarely adopted everyday life and emotions as research lenses (*e.g.*, X. Hao *et al.* 2017; Le Bail & Shen, 2008). Given that the thesis has recognised the significant usefulness of everyday life and emotions in migration studies, researchers should consider

further unpacking the impact of return migration through examining post-return everyday experiences of migrants. Particularly, the everyday perspective perhaps efficiently discloses how the impacts are embedded spatially and temporally in everyday life and how migrants reflect on and handle these impacts for the sake of themselves and/or their families.

While the example of overseas returned students in Shanghai could enrich the current debates around return migration, there are still many other kinds of return migrant groups across nations/regions. Each migrant group has its unique social profiles and is situated in specific spatial, social and temporal settings. In this regard, it would be worthwhile to extend the discussion of post-return everyday life and emotions to other groups of return migrants. The specific spatiality and temporality of different return migration likely provide fresh insights into the whole scholarship of transnational migration.

7.5 Concluding remarks

Given the research objective that is to shed light on the conceptualisation of return migration, the thesis has presented the research context, literature basis, methodology, empirical findings and theoretical arguments derived from my investigation into everyday life and emotions of overseas returned students in Shanghai. This thesis addresses the research gap regarding the insufficient engagement between return migration and everyday experience in existing literature. Based on the demonstration of overseas returned students' everyday lived experiences and emotions, the thesis reflects on the conceptualisation of return migration and suggests a blurring rather than definite boundary between return migration and various kinds of outward migration.

There are four take-home points to summarise the thesis. First, studying everyday can effectively unpack the macro social, economic and cultural environment regarding return migration. Existing literature has argued that ordinary everyday life could deliver extraordinary meanings, as these seemingly unmarkable details entail social structures, social norms, social networks and various institutions in more general sense (Highmore, 2002, 2010; Horton &

Kraftl, 2013). In this thesis, participants' experiences of job-hunting, work, dwelling in communities, dietary experiences and other aspects demonstrate that return experiences are not only underpinned by transnational journeys and (im)migration regulations, but also shaped by localised governmental regimes, social norms and commercial infrastructures. The discussion in this thesis has displayed how return migrants' everyday life is operationalised by the wider social structure of their living place and emphasised the situatedness of return migration in both transnational contexts and local circumstances.

The probe into everyday emotions further illuminates everyday material experiences and relevant general socio-cultural issues (Hall, 2019; Ho, 2009, 2014; Walsh, 2011, 2018). For example, different emotions were witnessed in tensions with different social contacts. Anger, annoyance and rage were expressed during my participants' conflicts with colleagues in work places while love and care were usual in their tensions with parents. These emotions illustrate the causes of different tensions, which were rooted in social networks and cultural habits. To some extent, everyday emotions are returnees' subjective reflection on the wider society, which takes a further step towards connecting individuals to broader socio-cultural processes (Ho, 2009).

Second, geographical scales provide critical insights into the conceptualisation of return migration. While many existing literatures suppose that return migration occurs between places at the same scale, like countries or cities (*e.g.*, Hagan & Wassink, 2020; Xiang, 2014a, 2014b), my thesis indicates that there existed an intertwinement of different geographical scales in my participants' movement to China. Different geographical scales likely have distinct implications for the conceptualisation of return migration. To put more precisely, while nearly all overseas returned students regarded their movement to China as return migration, only participants who had lived in Shanghai would have perceived their journey to Shanghai as a kind of return. The issue of geographical scales takes a further step towards unpacking the complexity of return migration.

Third, the interrogation of life course offers insights into comprehending the intersection of the literature on return migration and on international student mobilities. Return migrants in particular age groups are more likely to experience return accompanied by life stage transition, such as retiree return migration (Walsh, 2018). However, the scholarship on international student migrants, who potentially shift their identities from dependants to mature adults, has not fully recognised the force of life course in shaping students' migration and post-migration experiences (*e.g.*, Collins, 2017; Findlay *et al.*, 2015; Ho, 2021). Through bringing life course into research scope, the thesis highlights the temporal nature of returned student migration given the concurrence of life stages transitions and movement between places. Moreover, the findings in the thesis suggest how experiences in specific life stages are shaped by place-specific culture and social norms. For example, while all single participants were expected by their parents and wider society to marry, females usually encountered greater pressure and often encountered discrimination in work places, towards which they expressed rage and helplessness.

Finally, as a vital part of everyday lived experiences, work needs to be understood more flexibly. In the context of labour geographies, work usually refers to paid employment and activities which directly result in socio-economic output and personal development; these activities researched by labour geographies mostly occur in various office places and other places regarding labour market, such as job fairs. (e.g., Castree, 2007; Coe, 2012; Strauss, 2018). Recent labour geographers have called for more attention to be paid to non-waged or non-capitalist aspects of people's working life (Buckley *et al.*, 2017). In this respect, this thesis has recorded a range of activities beyond work places and working hours which had strong relevance with participants' daily work and long-term career ambitions. In such a work-centred everyday life, my participants associate their non-work identities and recreation activities with the demands of their career, which hints at a porous boundary between work and leisure. Further. combined with the interrogation of life course, this thesis demonstrates how obligation, social relationships and personal well-being in specific life stages structure peoples' emotions towards encounters in work and their practices of work-life balance.

Initially, the research idea of the thesis was triggered by my curiosity about my future everyday life in China after completing overseas education; from this initial seed, the thesis has developed to illustrate the everyday experiences of overseas returned students, a rapidly growing group in China, and contribute to the wider transnationalism scholarship. The whole progress of my PhD research echoes the argument that the everyday is ordinary as well as extraordinary (Lefebvre, 1987) and further highlights the significance and usefulness of everydayness in future research in transnationalism and geography. Everyday life is an important source of inspiration for scholars. With great passion and (non)academic curiosity for everyday life, I sincerely appreciate this journey of PhD research and look forward to more brilliant research on everyday life and migration.

Appendix I: Details of Participants

Participants[1]	Gender	Age group	Social Strata	Local Shanghainese	Shanghainese *hukou*[2]	Overseas country	Year of leaving	Year of return	Industry	Marital status[3]
Bao	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	Y	Y	France	2014	2017	Bank	Single
Chen	Male	31-35	professional or managerial	N	Y	Singapore	2004	2014	Bank	Married
Cheng	Female	21-25	manual worker	Y	Y	Canada	2016	2019	High Education	Relationship
Dong	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	N	Y	US	2011	2017	Business	Relationship
Fang	Female	36-40	professional or managerial	Y	Y	Germany	2004	2010	Bank	Married, 1 child
Helen	Female	21-25	professional or managerial	Y	Y	US	2015	2018	Law	Single
Jiang	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	N	Y	US	2014	2017	Urban design	Single
Liu	Male	26-30	professional or managerial	Y	Y	US	2014	2017	Business	Married
Ma	Male	26-30	professional or managerial	Y	Y	Singapore	2012	2017	IT	Relationship
Qi	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	N	Y	Hong Kong	2014	2016	High Education	Single
Shen	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	Y	Y	Singapore	2014	2016	Bank	Relationship
Shu	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	N	Y	US	2014	2017	Business	Relationship

Song	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	N	Y	US	2012	2015	Hotel	Single
Sun	Female	21-25	professional or managerial	N	N	UK	2014	2018	Business	Single
Tang	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	Y	Y	Denmark	2015	2018	Embassy	Single
Tian	Male	31-35	professional or managerial	N	N	UK	2002	2010	Education	Single
Wang	Male	26-30	professional or managerial	N	Pending	UK	2016	2017	IT	Single
Wen	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	N	Y	Singapore	2015	2017	Finance	Relationship
Weng	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	N	Y	UK	2014	2015	Bank	Single
Xia	Female	21-25	professional or managerial	N	N	UK	2017	2018	Bank	Relationship
Xiao	Female	31-35	professional or managerial	N	N	Germany	2011	2014	Biological research	Single
Xin	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	N	Y	US	2014	2017	Urban design	Married
Xiong	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	N	Y	US	2014	2017	Business	Single
Xu	Male	26-30	professional or managerial	Y	Y	US	2013	2016	Finance	Married
Xue	Male	26-30	professional or managerial	N	Y	Germany	2013	2017	Urban design	Single
Yao	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	N	N	UK	2016	2017	Business	Married, 1 child
Yu	Male	36-40	manual worker	Y	Y	Japan	2016	2018	Law	Single

Yun	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	N	N	US	2014	2018	Business	Married
Zhang	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	N	Y	US	2014	2016	Business	Married
Zhao	Female	31-35	manual worker	N	Y	France	2015	2019	High Education	Single
Zhou	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	N	Pending	UK	2017	2018	Business	Single
Zhu	Female	26-30	professional or managerial	N	Y	Singapore	2015	2017	Finance	Relationship
Zi	Male	21-25	professional or managerial	N	N	Germany	2014	2018	High Education	Relationship

Notes: 1. All information was updated in August 2019 when my fieldwork was completed.

2. Pending means that a participant has submitted an application for a Shanghai *hukou*, but had not received it by August 2019. Some participants received their Shanghai *hukou* while participating this project.

3. Some participants changed their marital status while participating in this project, such as breaking up and getting married. The data are based on their marital status in August 2019. The changes of marital status will be discussed in qualitative analysis later.

Appendix II: The different methods that each participant was involved in

Participants	Participant Observation	Semi-structured interviews[*]	Online Ethnography	Photo-diary	Emotional Diagram
Bao		√	√	√	√
Chen		√	√	√	
Cheng		√		√	
Dong	√	√	√		
Fang	√	√	√	√	√
Helen		√		√	
Jiang	√	√	√		
Liu	√	√			
Ma	√	√	√	√	√
Qi	√	√	√	√	√
Shen	√	√	√	√	
Shu	√	√		√	
Song	√	√	√	√	√
Sun	√		√		
Tang	√	√	√	√	√
Tian		√	√		
Wang	√	√	√	√	
Wen	√	√	√	√	
Weng	√	√	√		
Xia	√	√	√		
Xiao	√	√	√	√	
Xin	√	√	√	√	
Xiong	√	√	√	√	
Xu	√	√			
Xue	√	√	√	√	
Yao	√	√		√	
Yu	√	√			

Yun	√	√			√
Zhang	√	√	√	√	
Zhao	√	√		√	
Zhou	√	√	√		
Zhu	√	√	√	√	
Zi	√	√			

Notes: * Here semi-structured interviews refer to walk-along interviews and object interviews. All participants accepted interviews as initial talks and closing talks.

Appendix III: Participant Information Sheets

Participant Information Sheet
* Applicable for individual participants

1. **Project title**

   Understanding the Everyday life of Overseas Returned Students to Shanghai, China

2. **Principal investigator with the contact details**

   Ms. QI Yunting

   PhD student, Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London

   Contact Number: +86 18801966796, +44 (0)7410391307

   Email: Yunting.Qi.2017@live.rhul.ac.uk

3. **What is the purpose of this research?**

   You are invited to participate in a research study. This information sheet provides you with information about the research. The Principal Investigator (the person in charge of this research, hereafter the PI) will also describe this research to you and answer all of your questions. Read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether to take part.

   The study is the PhD research project of the PI, funded by China Scholarship Council. The PI hopes to understand your everyday life, that is the ordinary and regular practices that you engage in day in and day out, from the perspective of geography. The PI is also interested to learn how your experiences of overseas study and return influences your everyday life after return. This project will help researchers and even wider society to gain a better knowledge of the group of overseas returned students and further inspire future policy-making.

4. **Who can participate in the research? What is the expected duration of my participation? What is the duration of this research?**

The whole research project began in September 2017 and is planned to reach completion in September 2020. Fieldwork, that is the data-collection process, will last from September 2018 to September 2019. If necessary, supplementary fieldwork will be conducted afterwards. During fieldwork, the PI will appreciate your permission and cooperation if you can help the PI to conduct some interviews and participant observations.

Participants in this research should meet following criteria: 1) Subjects completed their bachelor degree in China; 2) the highest degree of subjects should be Master's degrees conferred by overseas educational institutions; 3) overseas study was not less than one year; 4) overseas work was less than three years; 5) subjects should be doing or looking for professional jobs in Shanghai while research is being conducted; 6) there are no specific requirements for age, gender, marital status, hometown, *hukou* and citizenship.

Participants may be contacted by the PI regularly during the period September 2018 and September 2019 and are expected to have (in)formal meetings, online communications, phone call and other kinds of communications with the PI. Thus, the duration of participation for each participant will be no more than one year and the time length of each meeting will be upon the meeting purpose and the willingness of participants.

5. **What is the approximate number of participants involved?**

The PI is going to recruit 20-30 eligible participants in this project.

6. **What will be done if I take part in this research?**

If you are invited to participate in this project, the research will be explained in a preliminary meeting with the PI, or via other communications if you would prefer, before participation. You will also receive a copy of Consent Form. You can give either verbal consent or a formal signature to

acknowledge your consent to take part in this research. Once your consent is given, the PI will arrange following interviews and other kinds of contacts with you. The forms of interviews may include but are not limited to standard interviews, object interviews and walk-along interviews. You have the right to choose the meeting time and venues. There will not be predetermined topics for most interviews and contacts, but just related to everyday life and migration experiences. Other kinds of contacts may include but are not limited to online chats, entertainment activities and other creative methods. Additionally, the PI may hope to access your online posts on social media (e.g., WeChat, Weibo, Facebook, etc.) and conduct online ethnography, which will require your extra consent. The PI will remind you and seek your permission before she decides to start data-collection or records any data and you have the right to approve or refuse any data-recording actions. If you feel distressed or tired during the research process, you can choose to choose move on to the next question/section or terminate the interview/observation/ other activity at any point of time. You may be asked for 2-3 names to help the PI to find more potential respondents for her PhD project.

7. **How will my privacy and the confidentiality of my research records be protected?**

   Only the PI has your identifiable information (e.g. names and contact information) and this will not be released to any other person. Identifiable information will never be used in a publication or presentation. All your identifiable information and research data will be coded (i.e. only identified with a code number) at the earliest possible stage of the research.

   Any data-collection and the selected ways to record data (e.g., audio records, photos, hand-written field notes) will be under the permission of participants. Procedures for data storage will conform to the Data Protection Act 2018 of UK and related laws of the People's Republic of China. The collected electronic data (including audio records of interviews, interview transcripts, digital photographs of participant observation and other electronic documents related to this research) will be stored in the PI's laptop protected

by passcode. To back up the data, a mobile hard drive with password will also be used. The mobile hard drive will be kept behind key and lock in the PI's residence. Personal identity of respondents will be removed from original documents and be kept in a separate file with an accessing passcode. Hard copies of fieldwork notes will be locked in the PI's residence. All hard copies of collected data will be locked in the PI's private residence or office. The PI will destroy all anonymised data 10 years after the official submission of PhD thesis.

8. **What are the possible discomforts and risks for participants?**

   There are no more than minimal risks for participants in this research. Your rights will not be affected, as the participation is voluntary. However, you may suffer from emotional pressures when discussing your migration and life experiences. Or you may feel tired while the research continues. In such cases, you remain the rights to skip any questions you feel uncomfortable, to pause or terminate the ongoing research activity, or even to withdraw from the project. Meanwhile the PI will take every possible action to ensure your well-being and will decide what to do in your meetings and/or whether to continue the ongoing activity or even the following activities upon your comfort level.

9. **Will there be reimbursement for participation?**

   There is no reimbursement for participation, but the PI will pay for refreshments and other incidental expenses during interviews and other research activities.

10. **What are the possible benefits to me and to others?**

    There are no direct benefits to respondents if they participate in this project. However, knowledge produced by this research may improve the well-being overseas returned students to China through disclosing their hardship and problems they encountered after return and may inspired related talent policies and immigration regulation.

11. **Can I refuse to participate in this research?**

Yes, you can. Your decision to participate in this research is voluntary and completely up to you. You can also withdraw from the research at any time without giving any reasons, by informing the principal investigator. If you decide to quit participation, you also have the rights to decide to withdraw all data collected from you or authorise the PI to continue keeping these data.

12. **Whom should I call if I have any questions or Problems?**

Please contact the Principal Investigator Ms. QI Yunting at mobile +86 18801966796 or +44 (0)7410391307 and email Yunting.Qi.2017@live.rhul.ac.uk for all research-related matters.

For an independent opinion regarding the research and the rights of research participants, you may contact Prof. Katie Willis (Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London) at email Katie.Willis@rhul.ac.uk and telephone +44 (0)1784 443643 OR the secretary to the Research Ethics Committee of Royal Holloway, University of London at email ethics@rhul.ac.uk and telephone +44 (0)1784 414930.

Participant Information Sheet
* Applicable for organisers of observed events

1. **Project title**

   Understanding the Everyday life of Overseas Returned Students to Shanghai, China

2. **Principal investigator with the contact details**

   Ms. QI Yunting

   PhD student, Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London

   Contact Number: +86 18801966796, +44 (0)7410391307

   Email: Yunting.Qi.2017@live.rhul.ac.uk

3. **What is the purpose of this research?**

   The Principal Investigator (the person in charge of this research, hereafter the PI) hopes to observe the event your organised as a part of the whole research project. This information sheet provides you with information about the research. The PI will also describe this research to you and answer all of your questions. Read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether to allow the PI observe your event.

   The study is the PhD research project of the PI, funded by China Scholarship Council. The PI hopes to understand the everyday life of overseas returned students, that is the ordinary and regular practices that they engage in day in and day out, from the perspective of geography. The PI is also interested to learn how the experiences of overseas study and return influences their everyday life after return. This project will help researchers and even wider society to gain a better knowledge of the group of overseas returned students and further inspire future policy-making.

4. **Why does the PI want to observe your event? What is the expected duration of one observation? What is the duration of this research?**

The whole research project began in September 2017 and is planned to reach completion in September 2020. Fieldwork, that is the data-collection process, will last from September 2018 to September 2019. If necessary, supplementary fieldwork will be conducted afterwards. During fieldwork, the PI wishes to attend some social events which primarily involve overseas returned students to gain an overall understanding of the everyday life of overseas returned students. The duration of each participant observation will depend on the time length of community event.

5. **What will be done if I take part in this research?**

If the PI wishes to observe your event, she will explain the research in a preliminary meeting to you, or via other communications if you would prefer, before participation. If the event is not for public and you are one of the organisers or key gatekeepers, you will need to sign the consent form to acknowledge that you have agreed the PI to attend the event. Specifically you need to indicate whether you approve the PI to use photo-taking during participant observations in Consent Form and whether you intend to show or to pixelate their faces in these photos if you approve photo-taking. If you do not wish to be shot, field notes will be taken during participant observations. The PI may seek your help to obtain other attendees' permission for the PI's presence in the event. Most of the time the PI will be acting as a participant in the event. If possible, the PI may talk with you and other attendees about the event and their migration experiences. Any data recording about these talks will seek extra permissions from you or respective attendees.

6. **How will the PI keep research data collected from my event confidential and secure?**

You can decide whether to require the PI to anonymise the event and your organisation. Only the PI has the identifiable information (e.g. names and contact information) of you and other attendees and this will not be released to any other person. Identifiable information of persons will never be used

in a publication or presentation and will be coded (i.e. only identified with a code number) at the earliest possible stage of the research.

Any data-collection and the selected ways to record data (e.g., audio records, photos, hand-written field notes) will be under the permission of you and respective attendees. Procedures for data storage will conform to the Data Protection Act 2018 of UK and related laws of the People's Republic of China. The collected electronic data (including audio records of interviews, interview transcripts, digital photographs of participant observation and other electronic documents related to this research) will be stored in the PI's laptop protected by passcode. To back up the data, a mobile hard drive with password will also be used. The mobile hard drive will be kept behind key and lock in the PI's residence. Personal identity of respondents will be removed from original documents and be kept in a separate file with an accessing passcode. Hard copies of fieldwork notes will be locked in the PI's residence. All hard copies of collected data will be locked in the PI's private residence or office. The PI will destroy all anonymised data 10 years after the official submission of PhD thesis.

7. **What are the possible discomforts and risks for participants?**
There are no more than minimal risks for you and other attendees in this research. Your rights will not be affected, as the participation is voluntary. During her observation, the PI will take every possible action to ensure the well-being of all attendees and will decide whether to continue the ongoing observation upon the actual situation of event.

8. **Will there be reimbursement for participation?**
There is no reimbursement to respondents or their organisations for participation.

9. **What are the possible benefits to me and to others?**
There are no direct benefits to respondents or their organisations if they participate in this project. However, knowledge produced by this research may improve the well-being overseas returned students to China through

disclosing their hardship and problems they encountered after return and may inspired related talent policies and immigration regulation.

10. Can I refuse to participate in this research?

Yes, you can. Your decision to allow the PI's observation is voluntary and completely up to you and your organisation. You can also withdraw from the research at any time without giving any reasons, by informing the PI. If you decide to quit participation, the PI will destroy all data collected from related events.

11. Whom should I call if I have any questions or Problems?

Please contact the Principal Investigator Ms. QI Yunting at mobile +86 18801966796 or +44 (0)7410391307 and email Yunting.Qi.2017@live.rhul.ac.uk for all research-related matters.

For an independent opinion regarding the research and the rights of research participants, you may contact Prof. Katie Willis (Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London) at email Katie.Willis@rhul.ac.uk and telephone +44 (0)1784 443643 OR the secretary to the Research Ethics Committee of Royal Holloway, University of London at email ethics@rhul.ac.uk and telephone +44 (0)1784 414930.

Appendix IV: Consent Forms

Consent Form

* Applicable for individual participants in offline fieldwork

Project title:

Understanding the Everyday life of Overseas Returned Students to Shanghai, China

Principal investigator (PI) with the contact details:

Ms. QI Yunting

PhD student, Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London

Contact Number: +86 18801966796, +44 (0)7410391307

Email: Yunting.Qi.2017@live.rhul.ac.uk

I hereby acknowledge that:

1. I have given my signature in this form to acknowledge that I have agreed to take part in the above research.

2. I have received a copy of the information sheet that explains the use of my data in this research. I understand its contents and agree to donate my data for the use of this research.

3. I can withdraw from the research at any point of time by informing the PI. If I request it, the information that I have provided up to that point will be destroyed; the observational data involving me will be removed as well.

4. I will not have any financial benefits that result from my participation in this project.

5. I understand that I will be anonymous in any publication or presentation relating to this research.

6. I understand that all data-collection and the forms of data recording will be with my permission. Otherwise, I have the rights to withdraw any data from the PI.

7. I *consent / do not consent** to have the coded data made available for future research conducted by the PI. I understand that future studies will be subject to an ethical review approval issued by the Ethics Review Committee of Royal Holloway, University of London OR by other institutional departments with similar functions.

** This research has been explained to me in English OR Chinese, which I understand, by Ms. QI Yunting (the PI) on _____ (date).

Name and Signature (Participant) _____ Date_____

Name and Signature (the PI) _____ Date_____

Consent Form

* Applicable for online ethnography

Project title:

Understanding the Everyday life of Overseas Returned Students to Shanghai, China

Principal investigator (PI) with the contact details:

Ms. QI Yunting

PhD student, Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London

Contact Number: +86 18801966796, +44 (0)7410391307

Email: Yunting.Qi.2017@live.rhul.ac.uk

I hereby acknowledge that:

1. I have given my signature in this form to acknowledge that I have agreed to take part in the part of online ethnography in the whole project.

2. I have permitted the PI to access to my online posts on following social media: ☐ WeChat / ☐ Weibo / ☐ Zhihu / ☐ Facebook / ☐ Twitter/ Instagram/ ☐ Others (please clarify _____) in the last ONE month (specific date: __(DD)/__(MM)/__(YY) - __(DD)/__(MM)/__(YY)).

3. I have received a copy of the information sheet that explains the use of my data regarding online posts in this research. I understand its contents and agree to donate my data for the use of this research.

4. I can withdraw from the section of online ethnography at any point of time by informing the PI. If I request it, the information about my online posts will be destroyed.

5. I will not have any financial benefits that result from my participation in this project.

6. I understand that I will be anonymous in any publication or presentation relating to this research.

7. I *consent / do not consent** to have the coded data made available for future research conducted by the PI. I understand that future studies will be subject to an ethical review approval issued by the Ethics Review Committee of Royal Holloway, University of London OR by other institutional departments with similar functions.

** The section of online ethnography in the whole project has been explained to me in English OR Chinese, which I understand, by Ms. QI Yunting (the PI) on _____ (date).

Name and Signature (Participant) _____ Date_____

Name and Signature (the PI) _____ Date_____

Consent Form

* Applicable for organisers of observed events

Project title:

Understanding the Everyday life of Overseas Returned Students to Shanghai, China

Principal investigator (PI) with the contact details:

Ms. QI Yunting

PhD student, Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London

Contact Number: +86 18801966796, +44 (0)7410391307

Email: Yunting.Qi.2017@live.rhul.ac.uk

I hereby acknowledge that:

1. I, on behalf of _____(organisation), have given my signature to acknowledge that I allow the PI to conduct participant observation in (event).

2. I have received a copy of Participant Information Sheet (applicable for participant information) that explains how the PI collects and uses the data of participant observation in this research. I understand its contents and agree to donate related data for the use of this research.

3. I and my organisation can withdraw from the research at any point of time by informing the PI. If I request it, the information related to the observed event will be destroyed.

4. I and my organisation will not have any financial benefits that result from the participation in this project.

5. I *agree / do not agree** to retain the name of my organisation and the name of event in any publication or presentation relating to this research.

6. I *consent / do not consent** that the PI can use photo-taking/audio-recording/video-taking during the event.

7. I understand that all attendees and organisers of the event will be anonymous in any publication or presentation relating to this research.

8. I understand that all data-collection and the forms of data recording will be upon the permission from me or respective attendees. Otherwise, I have the rights to withdraw all data from the PI.

9. I *consent / do not consent** to have the coded data made available for future research conducted by the PI. I understand that future studies will be subject to an ethical review approval issued by the Ethics Review Committee of Royal Holloway, University of London OR by other institutional departments with similar functions.

** This research has been explained to me in English OR Chinese, which I understand, by Ms. QI Yunting (the PI) on _____ (date).

Name and Signature (Participant) _____ Date_____

Name and Signature (the PI) _____ Date_____

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