Life Course Research and Social Policies 17

Sandra V. Constantin

A Life Course Perspective on Chinese Youths

From the Transformation of Social Policies to the Individualization of the Transition to Adulthood

OPEN ACCESS

Life Course Research and Social Policies

Volume 17

Series Editors
Flavia Fossati, Bâtiment IDHEAP, Quartier UNIL-Mouline, Lausanne, Switzerland
Andreas Ihle, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland
Jean-Marie Le Goff, LIVES, Batiment Geopolis, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland
Núria Sánchez-Mira, Institute of Sociology, University of Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel, Switzerland
Matthias Studer, NCCR Lives, University of Geneva, Genève, Geneve, Switzerland

The book series puts the spotlight on life course research. The series publishes monographs and edited volumes presenting theoretical, methodological, and empirical advances in the study of the life course, thereby elaborating on possible implications for society and social policies applications. Topics appropriate for the series include, among others, the following:

Life Course Research and Social Policies

- Life course transitions and trajectories in the domains of education, employment, family, health, and migration
- The dynamic of stress and resources over the life course
- Accumulation of (dis)advantages and social inequalities
- Social and individual vulnerabilities
- Social networks development and change
- Personality and identity development
- Ageing
- Longitudinal methods of analysis
- Social policies' regulation of the life course

Books commissioned for the series aim to encourage debates on life course research in various countries and regions across the world. Volumes in this series will be of interest to researchers, professionals and policy makers in social sciences and related fields.

The series is edited by a team of scholars affiliated to the Swiss LIVES Centre: Flavia Fossati (UNIL), Andreas Ihle (UNIGE), Jean-Marie Le Goff (UNIL), Núria Sánchez-Mira (UNIL) and Matthias Studer (UNIGE).

If you are interested in filling a gap in coverage, providing a focus on a certain area, or contributing a new perspective or approach, we would be delighted to receive a book proposal from you. The book proposal should include a description of the proposed book, Table of Contents, unique or special features compared to competing titles, anticipated completion date, and CV with brief biography. The book proposal can be sent to the publisher, Evelien Bakker, at evelien.bakker@springer.com.

Sandra V. Constantin

A Life Course Perspective on Chinese Youths

From the Transformation of Social Policies to the Individualization of the Transition to Adulthood

Sandra V. Constantin
Institute of Sociological Research (ISR)
University of Geneva
Geneva, Switzerland

ISSN 2211-7776 ISSN 2211-7784 (electronic)
Life Course Research and Social Policies
ISBN 978-3-031-57215-9 ISBN 978-3-031-57216-6 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57216-6

This work was supported by Schweizerischer Nationalfonds zur Förderung der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2024. This book is an open access publication.
Open Access This book is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.
The images or other third party material in this book are included in the book's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the book's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.
The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.
The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

If disposing of this product, please recycle the paper.

Preface

This book explores whether and how trends in individualization have shaped the transition to adulthood of two cohorts of Chinese living in Beijing in the 2010s, the first one born between 1950 and 1959, in the aftermath of the foundation of the PRC, and the second one constituted by their children, born between 1980 and 1989. It revisits individualization in China through the prism of the transition to adulthood. A major contribution of this book, which is based on a Ph.D. thesis in Sociology defended at the University of Geneva in 2017, is that it proposes new insights based on original data, both qualitative and quantitative, on what it might mean to make the transition to adulthood in China, a context that has experienced major social, political and economical shifts during the last 50 years, with potential consequences for life chances of distinct cohorts. This issue has sadly been largely neglected by previous research based on the life-course paradigm. The quantitative approach presented in the book uses an original convenience sample collected by the author as part of her doctoral fieldwork. It is coupled with several qualitative data collections, such as in-depth interviews and analysis of television series, also part of the doctoral research.

The book provides a number of interesting findings, some of which I wish to highlight in this preface. The first thing that stands out in my view is the high degree of standardization in educational pathways and family formation in the two cohorts studied. In both cohorts, a small number of types of life course are sufficient to account for the variety of life courses available to individuals. Indeed, we find ample evidence in the book that the cohorts under consideration show a high degree of homogeneity. This standardization of actual life trajectories goes hand in hand with a strong standardization of biographisation, i.e. the way actors define their life projects, with a massive focus on educational and occupational success and further upward social mobility. The importance of being seen by others as a 'quality person' is well described and explained in the book. Overall, individuals belonging to the two cohorts on which Dr Constantin's research focuses are anchored in highly standardized projects and life trajectories. The book provides a breadth of information and analysis about such individual standardized life courses that makes it relevant to

scholars seeking to understand the shaping of life trajectories by individualization trends outside Europe and North America.

This standardization remains, the book reveals, under the crucial influence of inherited social statuses, through the 'hukou' (household register, residence permit), and parental social background (as revealed by parental educational attainment). Far from freeing individuals from the grip of their family group or class destiny, changes in Chinese society over the past 50 years seem to have reinforced the impact of inherited rather than achieved social statuses. The book thus provides crucial evidence about the limits and peculiarities of individualization trends in urban China, showing the maintenance of classical logics of social reproduction in shaping life trajectories. According to Dr Constantin's research, such trajectories remain under massive normative control by the State through a variety of institutional instruments, such as TV series, the imposition of the notion of the 'quality person', the residence permit, access control to higher education and the Communist Party, laws on marriage and family and so on. Such institutions, the book shows, in most cases do not open up biographical possibilities but, on the contrary, contribute to the formation of an elite consisting mainly of university graduates who follow a standard life course.

These are important contributions to the understanding of China as a national context that is still largely neglected by life-course studies, as the book rightly points out. Moreover, they provide us with some clues as to how individualization processes may have been constructed in countries that have followed different historical trajectories than Europe or North America, the regions from which the bulk of life-course studies have been drawn.

These are important contributions to the understanding of a national context that is still largely neglected by life-course studies, as the book points out. They are also important because they give us a better understanding of how individualization processes may have been constructed in countries that have not followed the same historical courses as Europe and North America, the regions from which the bulk of life-course studies to date have been drawn.

Department of Sociology
University of Geneva
Geneva, Switzerland

Eric D. Widmer

Acknowledgements

This book is the fruit of many fascinating encounters, enriching collaborations and stimulating scientific discussions.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to all the people in Beijing who agreed to share the intimacy of their life stories with me. I hope I have lived up to their expectations, providing as accurate a picture as possible of their paths towards adulthood. I would also like to thank Tong Xing for welcoming me so warmly and integrating me into the Department of Sociology at Peking University and for the theoretical discussions we had on the issue of individualization during my stay in Beijing. The discussions I was able to have with my PhD comrades and Master's students at Peking University greatly enriched my analyses. I would like to thank Zhou Lüjun for his insight, sound advice and availability, as well as all the interviewers who helped me collect quantitative data in the field; without their enthusiasm, this research would not have been possible.

Numerous scientific exchanges upstream and downstream of the field research also enriched my research. In particular, I would like to thank my colleagues from the NCCR LIVES, in particular Jean-Marie Le Goff and Eric Widmer, for their insights on the life-course theory and the construction of biographical analysis models. I would like to thank Glen Elder for taking the time to write to me and call me while I was in Beijing to advise me on drawing up the data collection protocol. I also wish to thank Laura Bernardi for giving me the opportunity to publish my PhD thesis in the form of this book.

Many thanks to Evelien Bakker and Bernadette Deelen-Mans from Springer for their patience and encouragements all along the way. Synthesizing 700 pages of analysis into a single book was not an easy game!

I would like to thank Marylène Lieber, Isabelle Attané, Isabelle Thireau, Olivier Galland, Nicolas Zufferey, Michel Bonnin and Nadia Sartoretti for their comments on earlier versions of the manuscript.

I wish to thank the members of the Demography, gender and society unit at the French Institute for Demographic Studies (INED), the members of the Centre d'études sur la Chine moderne et contemporaine, Laura Downs from the European University Institute in Florence and Mary Daly from the Department of Social

Policy and Intervention at the University of Oxford for their warm welcome during my scientific peregrinations. They all contributed in one way or another in the final outcome.

This book would not have been possible without funding from the University of Geneva, the Ernst and Lucie Schmidheiny Foundation, the Geneva-Asia Association, Peking University and the Swiss National Science Foundation.

Last but not least, my heartfelt thanks go to Yvan, who has supported me every step of the way, and to Maria who proofread this manuscript.

Contents

1 Introduction 1

Part I Revisiting Individualization in China Through the Prism of the Transition to Adulthood

2 Institutionalized Individualism in Post-collectivist China 7

3 *Suzhi* Discourse as a Structural Component of Institutionalized Individualism in Post-Maoist China 25

4 A Life-Course Perspective on the Individualization Process in Post-collectivist China 37

Part II Coming of Age in Uncertain Times

5 Exploring Pathways to Adulthood 63

6 The Rise of New Social Risks in Post-collectivist China 81

Part III The Rise of Neo-familialism

7 The Postponement of Family Formation Due to Employment Instability 101

8 Young Adults' Aspiration for Intimacy in Post-collectivist China 117

9 What Does the Individualization Process Do to Intergenerational Solidarities? 133

10 Conclusion 145

Appendices 153

Bibliography 167

Chapter 1
Introduction

Contents

Bibliography.. 3

> *"Like in a night, the members of the post-80 generation have become "old". First, they are nostalgic. They sing "the old boy", they nostalgically remember the summers when they wore striped T-shirts and leather sandals, read comics, and chased after girls. They sigh that they are old. Some who have become parents seem to still be children, facing their children younger than them they sigh "we have become old", "the tired heart, with the feeling of not being able to love again" ... ".*
>
> The author of the article continues: *"What makes a young generation full of vigor and vitality become lethargic? [...]".*

This article, untitled "Do not let youth become apathetic" [1], was published on May 14, 2013, in the "opinions" section of the People's daily (*Renmin ribao*). At the time it sparked strong reactions[2]. Why these harsh judgments on this generation, which was the first one since the decollectivization and the country's opening-up to market economy to grow up and move towards adulthood?

[1] People's Daily, May 14, 2013, *Don't let youth be tainted with the air of twilight (Mò ràng qīngchūn rǎn mùqì).* http://opinion.people.com.cn/n/2013/0514/c1003-21470995.html. Retrieved on May 15, 2013. "It seems that overnight, the post-80s generation has collectively become 'old'. First, there is nostalgia. They sing 'Old Boys', lamenting the summers of wearing sea soul shirts and leather sandals that have faded in memory, reminiscing about the comic books they have read, and the girls they chased together in those years. Then, there is the sigh of aging. A group of post-80s who are still children in their parents' eyes, sigh 'I'm old', 'My heart is so tired, I feel like I can't love anymore' in front of children younger than themselves... What is it that makes the young generation, who should be full of vitality, become so gloomy?".

[2] Other press articles qualify young adults born in the 1980s as the "tragic generation (杯具的一代, *bei ju de yi dai*)". This last expression refers to a popular saying ("life is a cup, it's up to you to decide if it's a cup for drinking or a cup for brushing your teeth"). It is composed of several puns: In Chinese the word cup (杯子， *beizi*) is a homophone for the word life (辈子, *beizi*). The word cup for drinking (杯具 ， *beiju*) is a homophone of the word tragedy (悲剧, *beiju*). Finally, the word cup for brushing your teeth (洗具, *xiju*) is a homophone of the word comedy (戏剧 ， *xiju*).

© The Author(s) 2024

S. V. Constantin, *A Life Course Perspective on Chinese Youths*, Life Course Research and Social Policies 17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57216-6_1

In this new socioeconomic context, social risks are no longer assumed by the collective, as was the case for their parents who were socialized in Maoist China. These risks have become more and more individualized. For instance, young adults are increasingly enjoined to seek solutions by themselves to respond to new social risks such as: unemployment, precariousness, increased competition in the labor market, as well as the disintegration of the social security system and, at the same time, they are enjoined to fulfill the obligation – not only customary but also legal – to provide moral and/or financial support to their aging parents.

These socioeconomic and institutional transformations that have marked China over the past 30 years have been extensively studied by Chinese and Western researchers. However, very few have considered these developments as part of a process of individualization (Delman & Yin, 2008; Hansen & Pang, 2008, 2010; Hansen & Svarverud, 2010; Li, 2010; Mühlhahn, 2010; Rolandsen & H., 2008; Svarverud, 2010; Thogersen & Ni, 2008; Wedell-Wedellsborg, 2010; Yan, 2009). Among the scientific literature that adopts this theoretical approach, the analysis presented focuses only on a specific dimension of this process. Moreover, the findings are based mostly on qualitative data collected either in urban or rural areas.

In this landscape, the present research, that aims to capture the dynamics of individualization in post-collectivist China, is unique because it is based on longitudinal data – qualitative and quantitative – collected among both urban and rural populations. It also has the interest of focusing on an aspect that has been left in the shadows by Chinese and Western researchers: the life-course of young adults. To my knowledge, no research mobilizes a life-course approach and, more specifically, the study of the transition to adulthood to analyze this process. Shaped by various institutional regulations, the life-course is a privileged site of observation to grasp the different forms taken by the individualization process.

The analyses presented in this book focus on the life-courses of two emblematic birth cohorts at the crossroad between two eras: collectivist and post-collectivist China. It took the Chinese only 40 years to live through two such dissimilar eras. These ideological, economic, social and institutional transformations, condensed in time and without equivalent, are embodied in the life-course of two birth cohorts. On the one hand, there is the "generation of the new China (*xin zhongguo de yidai*)", born between 1950 and 1959, in the aftermath of the foundation of the PRC. This birth cohort grew up and experienced its transition to adulthood in Maoist China. On the other hand, their children, the "generation of reforms (*zhuanxing de yidai)* ", born between 1980 and 1989 and whose members – now adults – have lived their entire lives in the era of reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping.

This book is structured around three parts. The first part, entitled revisiting individualization in China through the prism of the transition to adulthood, consists of three chapters. The first chapter traces the path followed by the individualization process in China from the pre-revolutionary period to today and highlights its characteristics. The second chapter questions this path in the light of two governability instruments: the discourse on the quality of the population (*renkou suzhi*) and the residence booklet system (*hukou*). This chapter considers television series as a privileged place of observation of the norms and values carried by the Party-State. The

third chapter details the theoretical framework and the methodological design elaborated to examine the impact of the dismantling of the collectivist social security system on the dynamics of (in)equality over the life-course. It explains why I have chosen to analyze the path to adulthood of two emblematic birth cohorts as a period of observation. It also details how quantitative and qualitative methods were articulated, and how the two birth cohorts' life-course were reconstructed and analyzed.

The second part of the book opens with a fifth chapter that examines the paths to adulthood. Along with the presentation of quantitative analysis, it reveals the meaning given by young adults to each transition to adulthood. It shows that the paths to adulthood tend to stretch over time due to the emergence of a new social time in the life-course of young adults: higher education. In this chapter, qualitative analyses also highlight that, unlike Western young people who emphasize individualistic criteria, the respondents underline the centrality of family roles and responsibilities in the meaning they give to the transition to adulthood. A sixth chapter sheds light on new social risks that result from decollectivization and the process of individualization of the social security system, as well as their impact on young adults' professional paths. Data not only show that young adults' work life is becoming more fragile and precarious, but also that they are unequal in facing the challenges they must overcome. The supports they can expect vary according to their anchoring into the social stratification.

The third part of the book questions the impact of decollectivization and the rise of uncertainties on the dynamics of family transitions. The three chapters around which this last part is articulated reveal the emergence of neo-familialism. It is showed in a seventh chapter that young adults tend to postpone the formation of a family, notably because of the precariousness of the labor market. The eighth chapter reveals that they also aspire to have more intimacy, in comparison to their parents' generation. The ninth and final chapter reveals that if the failures of the welfare state place a number of socio-economic risks on young adults and their families' shoulders, family solidarities are transforming: these solidarities tend to become elective and to concentrate on the nuclear family.

Bibliography

Delman, J., & Yin, X. (2008). Individualisation and politics in China: The political identity and Agency of Private Business People. *European Journal of East Asian Studies, 7*, 39–73.

Hansen, M. H., & Pang, C. (2008). Me and my family: Perceptions of individual and collective among young rural Chinese. *European Journal of East Asian Studies, 7*, 75–99.

Hansen, M. H., & Pang, C. (2010). Idealizing individual choice: Work, love and family in the eyes of young, rural Chinese. In M. H. Hansen & R. Svarverud (Eds.), *iChina. The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).

Hansen, M. H., & Svarverud, R. (2010). *IChina: The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. NIAS Press.

Li, M. (2010). Collective symbols and individual options: Life on a state farm for returned overseas Chinese after decollectivization. In M. H. Hansen & R. Svarverud (Eds.), *iChina. The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).

Mühlhahn, K. (2010). "Friendly pressure": Law and the individual in modern China. In M. H. Hansen & R. Svarverud (Eds.), *iChina. The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).
Rolandsen, U. M. H. (2008). A collective of their own: Young volunteers at the fringes of the party realm. *European Journal of East Asian Studies, 7*, 101–129.
Svarverud, R. (2010). Individual self-discipline and collective freedom in the minds of Chinese intellectuals. In M. H. Hansen & R. Svarverud (Eds.), *iChina. The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).
Thogersen, S., & Ni, A. (2008). "He is he, and I am I": Individual and collective among China's rural elderly. *European Journal of East Asian Studies, 7*, 11–37.
Wedell-Wedellsborg, A. (2010). Between self and community: The individual in contemporary Chinese intellectuals. In M. H. Hansen & R. Svarverud (Eds.), *iChina. The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).
Yan, Y. (2009). *The individualization of Chinese society*. Berg.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

Part I
Revisiting Individualization in China Through the Prism of the Transition to Adulthood

Nowadays in China, neoliberal thought is highly influential in the economic and social spheres, as well as in the formation of public policies. Neoliberalism encourages individuals to become autonomous and reflexive. In other words, it incites people to become self-critical and to take responsibility for the successes and failures over their life-course, while inscribing their actions within the framework of existing norms (Cosmo, 2007). According to this meaning, neoliberal thought produces a form of individualization.

According to Elias, this social process results from the transition from "traditional societies" to "modern societies" (Elias, 1991). If in so-called "traditional" societies, the functions of control and protection of individuals were ensured by the community of origin (the clan, the village, the lord, the corporation or the class), in the societies described by Elias as "modern" because they are highly urbanized, it is state organizations and institutions that fulfill these functions. In the latter, individuals that become more mobile gradually break away from the limits of the community of origin. As a result, their dependence and identification with these groups tends to decrease, they tend to become autonomous and to differentiate themselves.

In this first part, after having examined in a first chapter the transformations of the relationship between Individual-Society-State from the pre-revolutionary period to the present day, I will present in a second chapter the discourse on the quality of the population. We will see that this discourse can be understood as an instrument mobilized by the Party-State to support the socio-economic development of the country while, at the same time, reinforcing the dynamics of individualization. A third chapter will present the methodological design developed to capture the Chinese characteristics of this process and its impact on the life-course of young adults. This chapter will also reveal the advantages of a life-course approach for analyzing, not only, the biographical structuring of the events and transitions experienced by individuals, but also, the resources mobilized, and the roles held by them over their life while capturing the role played by the sociohistorical context to shape their life-course. The approach developed in this book is innovative. It links three

sociological fields: sociology of China, sociology of youth and sociology of life-course that have, to my knowledge, never been held together in French-speaking research and, barely in English and Chinese-speaking research.

Bibliography

Cosmo, H. (2007). *Contested individualization. Debates about contemporary personhood*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Elias, N. (1991). *La Société Des Individus*. Fayard.

Chapter 2
Institutionalized Individualism in Post-collectivist China

Contents

2.1 Varieties of Individualization 8
2.2 The Individual and the Shadow of Ancestors in Pre-Maoist China 9
2.3 The Individual and the Collective in Maoist China 12
2.4 The Rise of Individualism in Post-Maoist China 18
Bibliography 22

Abstract This second chapter explores the dynamics of individualization in China across time to unravel the complexities of the individualization process in a rapidly transforming society.

The pre-Maoist period, often mischaracterized as solely group-oriented, is reevaluated through the lens of Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong. It not only reveals a society rooted in individual autonomy within a network of personal relationships, but it also sheds light on how the transformative intellectual movements of the early twentieth century sought to redefine the "Chinese national character" to modernize the country, challenging traditional family structures and promoting individual autonomy. The May 4th movement marked a peak in this reformist wave, introducing elements of individualism that clashed with Confucian morals.

Furthermore, the chapter reveals that during the Maoist period, despite a shift towards collectivism, Maoist policies contributed to a partial disembedding of individuals from traditional solidarities, particularly for women.

In a last movement, the chapter shed light on the subsequent economic reforms from the late 1970s and how it marked a new phase. While the Party-State maintains strong political and economic control, it enjoins individuals to take responsibility for their life-course. It supports individualization in the labor market while rejuvenating family obligations and solidarities.

Keywords Individualization process · Complexity · Traditional solidarities · Mao · Collectivization · Reforms

© The Author(s) 2024

S. V. Constantin, *A Life Course Perspective on Chinese Youths*, Life Course Research and Social Policies 17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57216-6_2

2.1 Varieties of Individualization

Individualism is a polysemic concept, which took shape at the beginning of the nineteenth century to characterize the first European modernity (Elias, 1991; Le Bart, 2008). Although authors differentiate several forms of individualism[1], in the collective imagination, this concept remains negatively connoted. It is often associated with economic neoliberalism and competition between individuals, which can lead to individuals becoming withdrawn, selfish, and indifferent to others (Singly (de), 2011). However, individualism also refers notably to the dignity and sanctity of the person, to autonomy and the ability to act sovereignly, to respect for private intimacy and self-development (Corcuff, 2003; Giddens, 2015; Le Bart, 2008; Singly (de), 2011).

According to proponents of the theory of individualization, under the effect of globalization[2], traditional social anchors are crumbling and dissolving. Individuals are gradually detached from the family, tradition, and the collective, which prescribed their ways of acting and their behaviors. This disembedding[3] of individual life paths from the traditional social fabric has the consequence of affecting the relationship that the individual maintains with the social. While individuals have gained control over their life-course by freeing themselves from some social determinisms, they have also become responsible for the successes and failures encountered during their biographical trajectories. Similarly, the individual autonomy gained in relation to the family and the collective, thanks to the development of the European welfare state, has the corollary of a greater dependence of individuals on institutions (schools, social insurances, etc.). These institutions contribute to the (re)structuring of life-course by imposing new constraints and requirements, sometimes contradicting each other. Individualization constitutes, in this sense, a complex process of socialization because it sometimes relies on contradictory injunctions (Bauman, 2001; Beck, 2008; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2011; Giddens, 2007).

[1] Bourgeois individualism, capitalist individualism (Le Bart, 2008:91–92), market individualism (Aron, 2002; Le Bart, 2008:93), authoritarian individualism, possessive individualism, romantic individualism (Le Bart, 2008:66–97), citizen individualism (Singly (de), 2011), creative individualism, individualism of otherness or dissimilarity (Le Bart, 2008:100–104), anomic individualism (Lash, 2011) or even modern individualism (Le Bart, 2008:116).

[2] Beck prefers the notion of *cosmopolitanization* to that of *globalization*. The *cosmopolitanization* refers according to him to a concrete multidimensional process, characterized by interdependencies, cultural mixtures and a common destiny that binds humanity (Beck & Grande, 2010). For Beck, the *globalization* is an ambivalent notion, which is generally apprehended from an economic point of view.

[3] The notions of embedding and disembedding refer respectively to the dependence and independence that individuals maintain in relation to various aspects of the social world (institutions, politics, economy, etc.), which constitute for them both resources and constraints: "Embedding is a process of increasing dependencies and [disembedding] decoupling is a process of empowerment, of strengthening specificity, of emergence" (Grossetti, 2015:8).

In Europe, as elsewhere in the world, this historical process of socialization does not result from the free choice of individuals but from the transformation of societies. European welfare states and the benefits delivered by these tend to punctuate and standardize the temporality of biographical trajectories (Kohli, 2007; Mayer & Schoepflin, 2009). However, since the 1970s, this "social compromise" is gradually being undermined. The rise of unemployment and the precariousness of working conditions compel workers to be flexible. Therefore, individuals are called upon to become reflexive. This is the promotion of the "biographical model" or "biographization" (Beck, 2008; Martuccelli & de Singly, 2010). In other words, individuals must become the "entrepreneurs of their own lives" by making the necessary choices and sometimes reconversions in their careers, their hobbies or even their emotional lives (Ehrenberg, 1995). This form of freedom is "precarious" since individuals are both constrained to navigate in a context determined by socioeconomic and political structures and they have no certainty about the expected effects of their choices. Moreover, not everyone is equally armed to deal with the demand for reflexivity (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Some are better endowed than others with objective resources (economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital) on which they can rely to make their decisions. Consequently, this contributes to maintaining, or even reinforcing, social inequalities which become less visible, as the process of individualization tends to give individual colorations to systemic social problems.

In China, the process of individualization is also present (Hansen & Svarverud, 2010; Yan, 2009). As will be developed in the following sections, contrary to the received idea that in pre-Maoist China the individual was subject to the group and according to which collective interests predominated over individual interests, there were already forms of individualization at this time, even if the interdependencies between individuals remained strong and exerted tight control over them[4]. Similarly, in Maoist China, despite collectivist economic and social policies, some policies paradoxically contributed to individualization. These social fields that had been individualized would, to some extent, serve the post-collectivist project three decades later.

2.2 The Individual and the Shadow of Ancestors in Pre-Maoist China

The pre-Maoist period is understood in this book as a historical stage that extends from the end of the two Opium Wars, which preceded the fall of the Manchu dynasty in 1911 and the proclamation of the Republic of China on January 1st 1912, to the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC), on October 1st 1949.

[4] The social fields covered here: the family field, the religious field and the administrative field.

According to the Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong, pre-Maoist China was never solely group-oriented. It was, he explains, traditionally centered on the individual and woven from networks created from personal relationships (*guanxi*) linking the individual to other individuals in multiple directions and placing in each relational context individual and specific moral obligations (Fei, 1992). Individuals were interdependent and they retained a form of autonomy. Apart from the father-son relationship for which social relations were prescribed by a fixed status and responsibilities, individuals had the freedom to choose whether or not to enter a social relationship and to define their own roles and those of others, as well as the boundaries of the groups around which they revolved.

In this societal organization, the individuals evolved in a network of social relations, where they were emotionally attached to the obligations defined by these relations. This embedding of social relations was intended to maintain and guarantee social stability (Fei, 1992). This organization of social ties is found in the thought of Confucius, who describes five fundamental relationships: son/daughter, husband/wife, father/mother, brother/sister, and friends. The individual is therefore led to define himself more in terms of his relationships with others than by himself. If forms of individualism could exist at this time, they were strongly internalized and could not be directly expressed socially.

During the pre-Maoist period, large families were an ideal (Hsu, 1971). Therefore, nuclear-type families were not considered as independent units[5] (Fei, 1992:83). Social stability was ensured by the institutionalization of interdependent social networks. In other words, social stability was safeguarded through legitimate patriarchal authority in the family sphere, the authority of the elders in the villages, and social control exercised by the notables. In the system of norms and values of the time, the relationship between father and son was fundamental for the perpetuation of the family lineage. It served as a link between the (paternal) ancestors and the descendants of the same family lineage. The organization of this system was fundamentally unequal, as it was legitimately admitted that husbands had a higher status than their wives and brothers than their sisters. Romantic love had very little place. Marriages were indeed generally arranged by parents. In these arrangements, The wife's role was to perpetuate the family lineage (on the paternal side) (Hsu, 1971:240–41).

It was in opposition to this organization of society that, from the 1910s, the notion of the "ideal man" emerged in Chinese intellectual thought. According to the intellectuals of this time, the modernization of the country had to go through fundamental changes in the "national character" (Cheng, 2009). The two Opium Wars (1842 and 1860), which marked the beginning of foreign presence in China, indeed highlighted the socio-economic backwardness of the Middle Kingdom compared to the newly industrialized Western powers (Bergère et al., 1989; Fairbank, 1989).

[5] "[w]e cannot say that the nuclear family household does not exist, but we should never think of it as an independent unit."

Following these wars, a feeling of humiliation, crisis, and national disintegration spread among the population.

Part of the intelligentsia then turned to Europe and Japan to find solutions to quickly modernize the country. The "Chinese national character", characterized by political indifference, resignation to destiny and power, a lack of individual initiative and resistance to social change, was denounced[6] (Cheng, 2009:51). The writings of Liang Qichao marked the reformist movement of the time. He supported the idea that a new type of individual/citizen (*xinmin*) had to be born to allow the country to modernize (Cheng, 1997, 2009; Schell & Delury, 2013; Svarverud, 2010). This new Chinese citizen had to be characterized by "a strong sense of nationalism and patriotism, a spirit of adventure, awareness of personal rights and freedom, a sense of autonomy, self-esteem, the ability to form a cohesive community, persistence, a sense of responsibility, a militaristic mentality, a public ethic, and a private morality" (Huang, 1972:63). The "abolition" of the traditional family model and traditional social ties inherited from Confucian thought were then seen as one of the conditions for modernizing the country (King, 1996). In an editorial in the journal *The China Progress*, Liang notably claimed "gender equality, the opening of schools for women, and the abolition of foot binding" (Cheng, 1997:624).

This reformist movement gradually gained influence and it posed in China "in an unusually acute and persistent way" the problem of the individual's autonomy in relation to the state (Fairbank & Goldman, 2010:376). A partial form of individualism then gradually crept into society. As an illustration, Chen Duxiu, the founder of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), launched the magazine *New Youth* (*xin qingnian*) in 1915. Intellectuals began to gather in study groups, clubs, or societies in order to better disseminate their ideas within society. The most famous organization was the one founded by Mao Zedong and Cai Hesen in 1918, "the study group of the new Chinese Man" (*xinmin xuehui*) (Cheng, 2009).

The May 4th, 1919 movement (*siwu yundong*) brought this reformist movement to its climax. The leaders were mostly intellectuals trained in Japan, permeable to the ideas of Enlightenment thinkers and, for some, to Marxist ideology. Full of nationalism[7], they defended their ideas on science and democracy, while denouncing Confucian thought and the ties imposed by the traditional family system. They also defended "individual expression and even sexual freedom." According to historians Fairbank and Goldman, for the time, "[t]he romantic individualism and self-revelation at work in some pioneers, the act of carrying a narrative in the first person or expressing oneself in the style of a diary, all this was quite shocking in the face of strictly Confucian morals" (Fairbank & Goldman, 2010:390–91).

[6] "[a] political indifference, succumbing to fate with resignation, a slavish attitude toward authority, lack of individual initiative, and resistance to social change"

[7] In reaction to the Treaty of Versailles, the attribution of German concessions in China to Japan, and the latter's territorial claims in China.

2.3 The Individual and the Collective in Maoist China

Before the communists took power in China, Mao had formulated in three essays his idea of the revolutionary model and the ideal type of citizen that the PRC would need to build the new China (Mao, 2001).

He uses simple language and a vivid style that mobilizes the figure of model characters[8]. He thus describes the individuals that the CCP needs:

> *"We must educate a lot of people – the kind of people who are the vanguard of the revolution, who have political farsightedness, who are prepared for battle and sacrifice, who are frank, loyal, positive and upright; the kind of people who seek no self-interest, but only national and social emancipation and forwardness in the face of hardships; the kind of people who are neither undisciplined nor fond of limelight, but practical, with their feet firmly on the ground. If China possesses many men like this, the tasks of the Chinese revolution can easily be fulfilled." ((Chen, 1970) cited in (*Cheng*, 2009, p. 62)).*

He depicts in an equally vivid manner, from characters with "model" actions, the figure of the cadre of the CCP, the soldier and the peasant that the country needs to recover.

The Maoist period (1949–1976), characterized by the state's monopoly at the political, economic and social levels, is even more marked by the instrumentalization of model figures. These "reform of the thought" campaigns had two main objectives: on the one hand, to socialize individuals to Mao's political thought by erasing the ideological and cultural imprints of traditional China and replacing them with new ones. This political re-socialization was essential for the regime to control and mobilize the population in the implementation of new socio-economic policies. On the other hand, it was about promoting collectivism as a moral principle and as a guideline in the lives of individuals and uprooting individualism (Cheng, 2009).

The free labor market system was replaced by a state-controlled planned economic system, in which private companies were gradually eliminated. In urban areas, it became the state's responsibility to allocate everyone a job within a work unit, the *danwei*. The work unit regulated all aspects of individuals' lives: not only did it provide a lifetime job, housing, medical care, retirement allowance, but it also financed the education of its workers' children, monitored, and controlled the workers and their families through "the system of political files" (Bray, 2005; Lü & Perry, 1997). The education of individuals to collectivism was thus used by the central government "to subdue individual preference in seeking a career, even choosing a residence, subjecting people to the economic needs of the Party and the government" (Bray, 2005:74–75). The aim of such campaigns was to promote

[8] This pictorial style is the one that was mobilized by classical thinkers such as Confucius.

collectivist and socialist values in opposition to individualism and to place the interests of the Nation above individual preferences.

Social relations were trying to be reinvented. They should no longer be centered on the individuals and their family group, but on the relationship between individuals and the Party-State. Individuals were called to reinvent themselves to define themselves less by their family affiliation than by their citizenship and class status. As of 1952, the Party-State began to structure the population into classes. *Jieji* means "class" and *chengfen* "component element", each class status (*jieji chengfen*) was associated with particular rights and prestige. There were more than 60 designations and "[e]very Chinese knew his own. In all his papers and in all the files that concerned him, the mention of his class status was mandatory" (Billeter, 1987:143–44). Class statuses were heritable. They directly influenced the individuals' place in society, their relationship with the Party, the ambitions they could "legitimately harbor in the political or professional field [... and] the possibilities of social promotion of [their] children" (Billeter, 1987:144). This system, which prevailed in both urban and rural areas, had a deterministic power over individuals' life-course and all their social ties. By establishing the principle of the hereditary nature of class status, which was a determining factor in the allocation of political, social and economic resources, the Party-State nevertheless – contrary to its political ambition – contributed at the level of individual practices to maintain a link between the individual and his family group.

In rural areas, the dynamic was the same. People's communes were imposed in three stages to become *in fine* mandatory by the summer of 1958. A new collective social organization was gradually introduced: "many aspects of private life such as cooking and eating, rearing children, bathing, tailoring, and looking after the elderly were […] collectivized […]. The most conspicuous form of such collective life was the free meal in the public dining halls set up in every village" (Cheng, 2009:81). The goal of the Party-State was to substitute the family, traditional social organization, with the people's commune to eliminate the idea of private property in the minds of the rural population and to cultivate socialist and communist thought instead. Despite a strong political will, it is important to note that this project did not fully succeed in the sense that the family group remained an important social institution in the countryside.

During the Maoist period, the Party-State never stopped to mobilize and build different heroic figures and models to shape the "new Chinese woman" and the "new Chinese man". Xiang Xiuli (Fig. 2.1) and Lei Feng (Fig. 2.2) embody, for example, revolutionary virtues. They were exemplary comrades in their daily actions. Propaganda highlights their spirit of mutual aid, camaraderie, their devotion to Mao's thought, or even the frugality of their lifestyles. Propaganda posters show them ready to sacrifice their lives for the community and the revolutionary cause.

Xiang Xiuli was born 1933 into a poor working-class family in Guangzhou. She worked in a pharmaceutical factory. In December 1958, fire broke out in her work unit. Because of the presence of inflammable sodium, the blaze quickly spread. According to the Party narrative, she bravely fought the flames, suffering severe

Fig. 2.1 Xiang Xiuli (向秀丽) braved the fire and sacrificed her life to save the machines and textile production of her work unit in Guangzhou. (Source: BG E15/775, Landsberger collection, https://chineseposters.net/themes/xiangxiuli)

burns, to save her comrades and the factory. She died 33 days later (Min et al., 2003, p.162).

The authorities not only used posters to disseminate these "model" behaviors, but they also organized group meetings and mass rallies at which citizens of the new China were expected to learn from the behavior of these models and try to live and work like them. To serve this purpose the Party State exposed, for instance, posters showing Lei Feng, a soldier and driver in the People's Liberation Army (PLA), doing good deeds and inviting the population to do the same. Lei Feng was born in 1940 in a poor rural family in Hunan province. According to the Party narrative, he became an orphan at the age of 7. In the late 1950s, he became a tractor driver, a bulldozer driver and then a truck driver in a factory. Lei Feng died in August 1962 in an accident while performing a transportation task. On March 5, 1963 China's national newspapers published images and Mao's dedication: "Learn from Comrade Lei Feng" (Fig. 2.2, top right). Later on other slogans appeared, such as: "Learn from the exemplary culture of Lei Feng. Serve the People with all your heart", or "The life of individuals is limited but serving the People has no limit. For the good of the People, study all aspects of Lei Feng's behavior". Lei Feng would have compared his loyalty to the Party to a mother's love for her child: "I am like a toddler, and the party is like my mother, who helps me, leads me, teaches me to walk…My beloved Party, my loving mother, I am always your loyal son" (Lei Feng cited in (Cheng, 2009, pp. 93–94)).

Fig. 2.2 "Learn from Comrade Lei Feng". (Source: BG E13/428, Landsberger collection, https://chineseposters.net/themes/leifeng-3)

Along the mobilization of heroic figures, the Party-State created collective models. For example, the Dazhai production brigade, in Shanxi province, was promoted as a model of rural development. On one of the posters related to this brigade, we can read, written on the dam: "Farmers study [the model of] Dazhai" (Fig. 2.3).

Fig. 2.3 "Learn to move mountains from the example set by Dazhai". (Source: BG D25/30, Landsberger collection, https://chineseposters.net/posters/d25-30)

It is written in red ink on top of the barrage "Learn to move mountains to change China" because the People's commune achieved large harvests "despite a barren mountainous landscape and the most primitive living and farming conditions" (Min et al., 2003, p.164).

In 1964, Mao Zedong called upon the Nation "In agriculture, to learn from Dazhai !". The poster below says: "Unite and fight to learn from Dazhai, work hard and change to win the harvest" (Fig. 2.4).

In Maoist China, the Party-State created an "organized dependence" of individuals on the collective. Individuals were socio-economically dependent on the work unit or commune to which they belonged, politically dependent on the State organization, and personally dependent on the cadres of the CCP. The control exercised by the collective over the individual resulted in standardized biographical trajectories among people born in the 1950s, in other words, those who grew up in Maoist China. The Party-State's plan to transform the society deeply infiltrated into the family sphere. The "traditional" family organization, intergenerational solidarities, and Confucian ethics were condemned as feudal practices; while the freedom to choose a spouse in marriage, as well as gender equality, were advocated by the State (Yan, 2003a, b).

Fig. 2.4 Workers and peasants strive hand in hand for a good harvest. (Source: BG E15/537, Landsberger collection, https://chineseposters.net/posters/e15-537)

In Maoist China, on the surface, individuals were embedded in the collectivist society: "the individual almost entirely had lost her/his freedom and autonomy as she/he could not even choose where to work or to reside, much less to which social or political group she/he would belong"; however, paradoxically, the socialist campaign of "creating a new Chinese man" allowed to some extent, at a deeper level, the individual to free himself from traditional social ties (the family, the family group, the community), as well as from traditional patriarchal and Confucian norms and values. The impact of this emancipation was particularly strong for women who were socially dominated in the organization that prevailed in pre-Maoist China.

Maoist China is characterized by a profound modification of economic, social, and institutional structures. This period is imprinted by the strengthening of the welfare state since biographical trajectories and risks are taken care of by either the work unit or the commune. Yet social norms under this period encourage a relative emancipation of individuals from "traditional" roles and constraints thanks to the economic and social supports provided by the institutions. The intellectual project of creating "a new Chinese man" to modernize the country did not start in the Maoist period. However, until the foundation of the PRC, this project remained at

the idea stage. To realize it, the newly empowered Party-State did not hesitate to attack a central pillar of the social and economic organization of Chinese society: the family institution. By promulgating the marriage law in 1950, the CCP sought to eliminate past inequalities: "free women from the yoke of feudalism by establishing a new family regime on liberal bases. [...] the re-organization of the institution of marriage and the family attacks the foundations of traditional Chinese society, in which the all-powerful head of the family cell shields the Party's influence on individuals: their emancipation requires that traditional structures be broken first, and that mediating frameworks be eliminated" (Blayo, 1998:20). This law aims to free marriage from the family control by establishing the free choice of spouses, free consent to marriage, equal rights for men and women, and the right to divorce. Ultimately this law redefines marriage "as a social contract, instead of a pact between two families" (Blayo, 1998:21).

The agrarian reform law enacted the same year and, a few years later, the policy of collectivization and the work unit system also contributed to emancipate individuals from traditional social organization forms and to empower various social fields[9]. Interdependencies within the society remained nevertheless tight and exerted close control over the individual.

It should be noted that, while Maoist policies contributed to partially disembedding individuals from "traditional" solidarities, they simultaneously re-embedded them in new forms of social ties. Marriages, for example, freed from family control, were henceforth subject to the control of the Party, and the same goes for divorces, since Party officials had decision-making power over family affairs.

Communes and work units, relying on Maoist institutions, somewhat replaced "traditional" community solidarities. Through a political project to build a "collectivist" society, the Party-State imposed roles, norms, status, and identities on individuals. Likewise, it produced generic figures such as the worker or the student. *In fine* the bureaucracy borne of this political project was paradoxically both impersonal and individualizing.

2.4 The Rise of Individualism in Post-Maoist China

China's transition to a market economy has not only liberalized the economy, it has also gradually transformed – or even dissolved – certain social constraints that tied individuals to a specific lifestyle. This period of transition and reforms has also allowed to broaden the range of choices for individuals.

From the late 1970s, the old members of the Chinese Communist Party, who had experienced the Long March, in particular Deng Xiaoping, returned to power with

[9] By social fields we mean the family field, the political field, the administrative field, the economic field, etc.

the aim of transforming the country at the socio-economic level. To this end, they undertook to shape again a "new Chinese man", who would still be subject to the Party-State politically but emancipated at the economic and social levels. They had two important assets to achieve their ambitions and undertake the economic and social reform of society: a literate and healthy male and female population (resulting from the investments of the Maoist period in these areas) and individuals eager to express their individuality. This latter dimension is apparent in the historical path of the reforms.

According to the official historiography, the reforms started from the Chinese countryside. During the winter of 1978, for fear of the famine that threatened, and while the memory of the disaster following the Great Leap Forward was still fresh in their minds, 18 households in the village of Xiaogang in Anhui province decided, with the support of local officials, to freely dispose of their agricultural production, after having paid the tax due to the government and provided it with the legal grain quota. The following year, it seems that the agricultural production of this village increased, while elsewhere the trend was at best stagnation. Other villages in the county would have decided to follow the example (Kelliher, 1992; Oi, 1989; Roux, 2006). The central state would not only have turned a blind eye to such initiatives, but also, given their effectiveness at the local level, decided to apply them nationally in the 1980s by introducing the "household responsibility system". From then on, the Peasants no longer had to produce according to directives, they could freely decide on their agricultural production and sell the surplus on local markets or in cities. If decollectivization in the countryside began in the early 1980s, it was not until 1985 that the people's communes were completely dismantled and village life "deregulated" (*songbang*). These reforms allowed the countryside to gradually disembed individuals from the collective, in other words, from the people's commune. At the time, the primary sector represented the most dynamic sector of the economy. In the early 1980s, 80% of the Chinese population still lived in the countryside.

Deng Xiaoping and the reformers "crossed the river by feeling the stones"[10] Pragmatic, they cautiously extended the reforms to urban areas. Initially, the government turned a blind eye to the development of an informal economy in the cities, which was the result of both peasants living in the urban periphery and coming to sell part of their harvest in the city, and young urbanites not wanting to return to the countryside where they were supposed to be re-educated by the peasant masses (Bonnin, 2004; Peng, 2009). The Party-State had an ambivalent attitude towards the re-emergence of these activities (street vendors): "on the one hand, they represented a real threat to the socialist planned economy, but on the other hand, they also helped the party-state solve the problem of mounting unemployment and declining economic growth" (Yan, 2010:496). After a decade of

[10] 摸着石头过河, *mozhe shitou guohe*.

cultural revolution (1966–1976)[11], the country was paralyzed both economically and politically. The discontent of the urban population manifested itself through strikes, absenteeism, and the grouping of young people into gangs (De Beer & Rocca, 1995). The central government, fearing strong opposition from the urban population, deemed it preferable to wait until 1984 before applying the policy of reforms and opening-up to urban areas.

In a pragmatic approach aimed at maintaining as much stability as possible, the central government initially opened "pockets" in the planned economy system, in which individuals could slip in and exploit opportunities to increase their income. In this dual system (*shuangguizhi*) where planned economy and "free" market coexist, public enterprises gradually produced a part of their production "outside the plan". "Individual industrial and commercial households" (*geti gongshang hu*) emerged and, from 1988 private enterprises developed as well[12]. The country's streets saw the rebirth of small local businesses, street vendors and small crafts, to which the central government recognizes "an irreplaceable utility for improving the living conditions of the people" (Resolution adopted by the third plenum of the XII [e] congress of the CCP in 1984, cited in Monteil, 2010:104).

The country's opening to the market economy was not done in a linear way and without encountering opposition within the government. De Beer and Rocca attribute an "uneven, sinusoidal" character to the reform policy, and Marie-Claire Bergère speaks of zigzag policy (Bergère et al., 1990; De Beer & Rocca, 1995). These reforms – institutional, economic, and social changes – initiated by the central government, which allowed the re-introduction of a partly free labor market in China, also enjoined individuals to dis-embed themselves from the Maoist dependency system.

Starting from 1992, the reforms were relaunched and deepened. The main objective was the socio-economic development of the Nation. Deng Xiaoping's formula symbolizes the spirit of this period: "It doesn't matter whether the cat is white or black, as long as it catches mice it's a good cat"[13]. This second phase of reforms (1992–2023) was characterized by the brutal retreat of the welfare state in China and the increased exposure of individuals to socio-economic risks. The Party-State undertook a difficult task: the dismantling of state-owned enterprises. By the mid-1990s, 40% of workers were laid off (nearly 50 million people found

[11] There are two definitions of the cultural revolution. In the strict sense, it is the period from May 1966 to April 1969 during which Mao, through the armed wing of the Red Guards, restored his power within the CCP. In the broad sense (imposed by the CCP and retained by Chinese historians), the period of the cultural revolution extends from 1966 to 1976, this latter date marking the death of Mao and the fall of the Gang of Four.

[12] See the work of Barry Naughton for a detailed explanation of this mechanism (Naughton, 1995, 2007).

[13] 不管白猫黑猫 会捉老鼠就是好猫, *buguan bai mao hei mao, hui zhuo laoshu jiu shi hao mao.*

themselves without employment). The transition was overwhelming. These workers, then assured of a job for life (*tiefanwan*) and embedded in the system of protection and social relations of the work unit, were suddenly made responsible for their life-course. They were called upon to look for a job on their own, to change jobs if necessary, and to move to seek new professional opportunities. In 2003, 80% of the working population in China worked in the private sector, whereas 20 years earlier this sector was non-existent (Naughton, 2007).

This institutionalized disembedding of individuals, both from communes and work units, is part of a national project of "societization" which aims to give more autonomy to individuals. The reforms, by "emancipating" the economy and individuals from the tutelage of the socialist state, without a desire to re-embed individuals, had a unique impact on the dynamics of the individualization process in China. They created new opportunities and an increase in income for some, but a degradation of living conditions for others (Whyte, 2010). With the disappearance of popular communes and the dismantling of work units, the welfare state inherited from the Maoist period had been diluted. Individuals had no choice but to internalize the negative externalities of economic liberalization; namely, the liberalization of the labor market, the liberalization of prices in the health, education, housing and food sectors (sectors which were previously taken care of by the collective). Access to these resources has become the responsibility of individuals and highly competitive over the years.

Following these various social, economic, and institutional reforms, individuals have gradually been emancipated, at the social and economic levels but not at the political level, from the constraint of Maoist institutions that controlled and conditioned the stages of their life-course. Therefore, today, the process of individualization in China follows its own timeline and takes a particular form: it is "limited and controlled by the State" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2010). While maintaining strong control over the political and economic spheres, the Party-State urges individuals to become responsible for the successes and failures in their biographical trajectories. Through rhetorical efforts, individual actions and "do it yourself biographies" are promoted, which has the collateral effect of transferring risks responsibility onto individuals. In this book, individualization is understood as a complex process. Given that in China, the process remains partial, and because social policies and legal provisions produce different levels of individualization depending on the life-course's domains. Moreover, the discourse on the quality of the population (*suzhi renkou*) contributes to support individualization in the labor market, while also rejuvenating family obligations and solidarities rather than diluting them. It will be shown in the following chapters that these two dynamics concurrently unfold and interact together.

Bibliography

Aron, R. (2002). *Le Marxisme de Marx*. Editions de Fallois.

Bauman, Z. (2001). *The individualized society*. Polity Press/Blackwell Publishers.

Beck, U. (2008). *La Société du Risque. Sur la Voie d'une Autre Modernité*. Flammarion.

Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2010). Varieties of individualization. In M. H. Hansen & R. Svarverud (Eds.), *iChina. The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies.

Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2011). *Individualization. Institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences*. SAGE.

Beck, U., & Grande, E. (2010). Varieties of second modernity: The cosmopolitan turn in social and political theory and research. *The British Journal of Sociology, 61*, 409–443.

Bergère, M.-C., Bianco, L., & Domes, J. (Eds.). (1989). *La Chine Au XXe Siècle. D'une Révolution à l'autre, 1895–1949*. Fayard.

Bergère, M.-C., Bianco, L., & Domes, J. (Eds.). (1990). *La Chine Au XXe Siècle. De 1949 à Aujourd'hui*. Fayard.

Billeter, J.-F. (1987). Le Système Des "Statuts de Classe" En République Populaire de Chine. *Revue Européenne Des Sciences Sociales, 25*, 141–197.

Blayo, Y. (1998). *Des Politiques Démographiques En Chine*. Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques (INED).

Bonnin, M. (2004). *Lost Generation. The Movement of Sending Educated Youth to the Countryside in China, 1968–1980*. Editions of the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences.

Bray, D. (2005). Social space and governance in urban China. In *The Danwei system from origins to reform*. Stanford University Press.

Cheng, A. (1997). *Histoire de La Pensée Chinoise*. Editions du Seuil.

Cheng, Y. (2009). *Creating the 'new man'. From enlightenment ideals to socialist realities*. University of Hawaii Press.

Corcuff, P. (2003). *La Question Individualiste*. Editions Le Bord de l'Eau.

De Beer, P., & Rocca, J.-L. (1995). *La Chine à La Fin de l'ère Deng Xiaoping*. Le Monde-Editions.

Ehrenberg, A. (1995). *L'individu Incertain*. Calmann – Lévy.

Elias, N. (1991). *La Société Des Individus*. Fayard.

Fairbank, J. K. (1989). *La Grande Révolution Chinoise. 1800–1989*. Flammarion.

Fairbank, J. K., & Goldman, M. (2010). *Histoire de La Chine. Des Origines à Nos Jours*. Editions Tallandier.

Fei, X. (费孝通). (1992). *From the soil. The foundations of Chinese society* . University of California Press.

Furlong, A., & Cartmel, F. (2007). *Young people and social change. New perspectives*. Open University Press.

Giddens, A. (2007). Living in a post-traditional society. In U. Beck, A. Giddens, & S. Lash (Eds.), *Reflexive modernization. Politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order*. Polity Press.

Giddens, A. (2015). *The consequences of modernity*. Polity Press.

Grossetti, M. (2015). Note Sur La Notion d'encastrement. *Sociologies*, 1–11.

Hansen, M. H., & Svarverud, R. (2010). *IChina: The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. NIAS Press.

Hsu, F. L. K. (1971). *Under the ancestors' shadow. Kinship, personality & social mobility in China*. Stanford University Press.

Huang, P. C. (1972). *Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and modern Chinese liberalism*. University of Washington Press.

Kelliher, D. (1992). Peasant power in China. In *The era of rural reform, 1979–1989*. Yale University Press.
King, A. Y. C. (1996). The individual and group in confucianism: A relational perspective. In D. Munro (Ed.), *Individualism and holism: Studies in confucian and taoist values*. Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan.
Kohli, M. (2007). The institutionalization of the life-course: Looking back to look ahead. *Research in Human Development, 4*, 253–271.
Lash, S. (2011). Individualization in a non-linear mode. In U. Beck & E. Beck-Gernsheim (Eds.), *Individualization*. SAGE.
Le Bart, C. (2008). *L'individualisation*. Presses de la fondation national des sciences politiques.
Lü, X., & Perry, E. J. (1997). *Danwei. The changing Chinese workplace in historical and comparative perspective*. M.E Sharpe.
Mao, Z. (2001). *Selected works of Mao Tse-Tung*. University Press of the Pacific.
Martuccelli, D., & de Singly, F. (2010). *Les Sociologies de l'individu*. Armand Colin.
Mayer, K. U., & Schoepflin, U. (2009). The state and the life-course. In W. R. Heinz, J. Huinink, & A. Weymann (Eds.), *The life-course reader. Individuals and societies across time* (pp. 121–138). Campus Verlag.
Min, A., Duo, D., & Landberger, S. R. (2003). *Chinese propaganda posters*. Taschen.
Monteil, A. (2010). *Emploi Informel et Gestion Des Inégalités Sociales En Chine Urbaine. Les Politiques de Promotion de "l'emploi Communautaire" Parmi Les "Groupes Vulnérables" à Chengdu (2006–2009)*. Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales.
Naughton, B. (1995). *Growing out of the plan: Chinese economic reform (1978–1993)*. Cambridge University Press.
Naughton, B. (2007). *The Chinese economy. Transitions and growth*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
Oi, J. C. (1989). *State and peasant in contemporary China. The political economy of village government*. University of California Press.
Peng, X. (彭希哲). (2009). *2006 China's informal employment development report: A reexamination of the labor market*. Chongqing Publishing House.
Roux, A. (2006). *China in the 20th century*. Armand Colin.
Schell, O., & Delury, J. (2013). *Wealth and power. China's long march to the twenty-first century*. Random House.
Singly (de), François. (2011). *L'individualisme Est Un Humanisme*. Editons de l'Aube.
Svarverud, R. (2010). Individual self-discipline and collective freedom in the minds of Chinese intellectuals. In M. H. Hansen & R. Svarverud (Eds.), *iChina. The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).
Whyte, M. K. (2010). *One country, two societies. Rural-urban inequality in contemporary China*. Harvard University Press.
Yan, H. (2003a). Neoliberal governmentality and Neohumanism: Organizing Suzhi/value flow through labor recruitment networks. *Cultural Anthropology, 18*, 493–523.
Yan, Y. (2003b). *Private life under socialism*. Stanford University Press.
Yan, Y. (2009). *The individualization of Chinese society*. Berg.
Yan, Y. (2010). The Chinese path to individualization. *The British Journal of Sociology, 61*, 489–512.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

Chapter 3
Suzhi Discourse as a Structural Component of Institutionalized Individualism in Post-Maoist China

Contents

3.1 Engineering "Quality Citizens" ... 26
3.2 *Suzhi* Discourse and *Hukou* as Instruments of Governmentality ... 29
3.3 Chinese TV Drama as a Vector of Institutionalization ... 31
Bibliography ... 35

Abstract This third chapter sheds light on how the State's discourse on population "quality" (*suzhi*) represents a sophisticated means of governance from afar.

Initially emerging in the 1980s, the concept focused on population control. Eugenic slogans promoting "fewer births, better births" reflected a belief that both genetic and environmental factors shape quality. This approach aimed to cultivate a vibrant, competitive youth capable of propelling China onto the global stage.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the discourse gained prominence and underwent a shift. It ultimately encompasses moral, intellectual, psychological, ideological and physical characteristics. Zhang Weiqing's 2007 speech highlights the Party-State's push for an ideal of quality that would produce competent workers and citizens.

The concept is infused through various organizations, including TV dramas. The chapter argues that the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television controlling their content shown in, TV series act as powerful vehicles for norm dissemination. They actively participate in the socialization of the population. The chapter examine five TV dramas and how they depict the transition to adulthood through the prism of this discourse.

Keywords *Suzhi* discourse · Population "quality" · TV dramas · TV series · Transition to adulthood · Narrative

© The Author(s) 2024

S. V. Constantin, *A Life Course Perspective on Chinese Youths*, Life Course Research and Social Policies 17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57216-6_3

3.1 Engineering "Quality Citizens"

At the beginning of the 1980s, the concept *suzhi* was somewhat unheard of in public discourse and often used interchangeably with *zhiliang* (质量). From 1986 and throughout the 1990s, *suzhi* began to impose itself in official rhetoric to assess the quality level of the population[1] (Fig. 3.1). The concept refers to the intrinsic quality of a person as well as their conduct. It encompasses moral, intellectual, psychological, ideological, and physical qualities[2] (Jacka, 2009; Kipnis, 2006; Murphy, 2004).

From then on, relying on propaganda posters, the Party-State has conveyed a message about the "quality" of the population, valuing people with a high level of quality. In other words, people who comply with the norms and values disseminated by the Party-State and the agencies directly and indirectly associated with it.

At the end of 1980s, Chinese officials no longer only aimed at containing the country's demographic growth, but also at "producing" a population of "quality". Chinese scientists then judged the country's population too numerous, too rural and too uneducated compared to the populations of major world powers. The discourse on *suzhi* was therefore used to transform the country's citizens by acting on both their appearance and their way of thinking to allow the country to become competitive on the international stage (Greenhalgh, 2010). Slogans, such as "fewer births, better births, to invigorate the Chinese Nation" (*shaosheng yousheng zhenxing zhonghua*) appeared (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005). At this time, the discourse on the "quality" of the population was eugenic. The word " *yousheng* " (优生) mobilized in the slogans, which means "better births", referred to the idea that genetic characteristics was not the only factor to influence the quality of human beings.

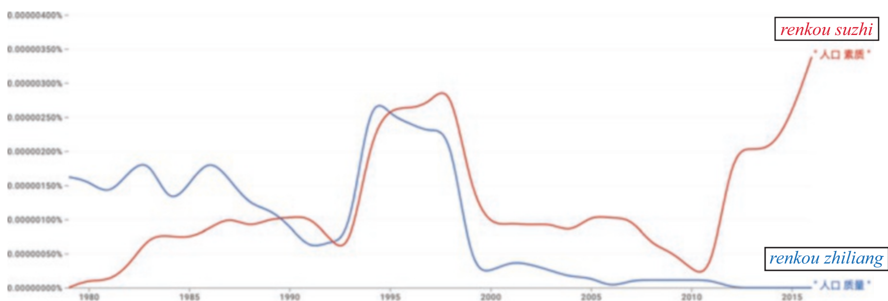


Fig. 3.1 Occurrence of *renkou suzhi* and *renkou zhiliang* in Google books written in simplified Chinese, 1979–2015. (Source: Google books Ngram Viewer)

[1] *Zhiliang* is henceforth used to designate the quality of a thing or an institution.

[2] Jie Sizhong, in a book dedicated to the analysis of the problem of "quality" in contemporary China, identifies eight different categories of " *suzhi* ": personality, spirit, morality, culture, science, health, profession, and Aestheticism (Jie, 1997, cited in Friedman, 2010:234).

The environment in which they grew up and the education they receive were also among the factors not to be overlooked. In other words, acting on these factors could shape individuals who met the needs of the Nation. Such slogans also encouraged healthy couples to give birth and raise a vibrant youth capable of competing with those who have grown up in countries that are among the great economic and political powers (Greenhalgh, 2010).

Then, during the 1990s and 2000s, following the drastic drop in fertility levels, the discourse on the "quality" of the population moved towards a more encompassing notion. The notion of "quantity" is henceforth secondary and the word " *suzhi* " (素质) replaces " *yousheng* " (Greenhalgh, 2011). The idea of "quality" covered by this concept is broad: it includes education, health, patriotism, skills, ethics, civics, and cosmopolitanism. As illustrated at the beginning of 2007 by the speech given by Zhang Weiqing, Minister of the National Commission for Population and Family Planning, all social actors were encouraged to strive towards this ideal that will produce quality workers and citizens (see box below).

[…] The Decision is a programmatic document guiding population and family planning program in the new era. Its promulgation represents an important measure for implementing the concept of scientific development and the strategic thinking of building a harmonious socialist society, and marks the entry of China's population and family planning program into a new stage of stabilizing the low fertility level, addressing population issues in a comprehensive way and promoting all-round human development.

The Decision adheres to the scientific development concept as a general guiding principle, regards all-round human development as its central focus and stresses upon comprehensive solution to population issues as the main theme.

[…] The plan and the program, as a component of the six special programs for China's national economic and social development, have recently been approved by the State Council for implementation. The plan and the program state the national strategic thinking and objectives for population development and put forward major tasks for population development during the 11th Five-Year Plan Period. (1) Stabilize the current fertility policy, and implement socioeconomic development policies in an integrated way, so as to maintain the total fertility rate at around 1.8 and ensure realization of the quantitative population objective; (2) Upgrade general health of newborn population, comprehensively address unbalanced sex ratio at birth and proactively respond to population ageing; (3) Prioritize development of education and fully develop human resources; (4) Take coordinated development of urban and rural areas and of different geographic regions into overall consideration and guide orderly movement and rational distribution of population; (5) Develop the undertakings for public health, women and children, social welfare, and promote social harmony and equity.

(continued)

Source: Excerpts from the speech of Zhang Weiqing, Minister of the National Commission for Population and Family Planning, January 23, 2007[3].

Zhang's speech reveals that, in the eyes of the Party-State, in order to build a society of small prosperity, many contradictions still need to be resolved. This includes maintaining control of the number of births within households. However, unlike the strict fertility limitation practiced in the 1980s, since 2007 couples where both the husband and wife are only children can have a second child. This provision of the law implies that the problem of excessive fertility is concentrated on the rural population. It is also striking to note that this law, which legislates not only on birth control issues but also on various aspects related to the "quality" of the population, initially only allowed city dwellers to have two children. This law, imbued with the discourse on the "quality" of the population, emerges in the wake of neoliberal ideology. It shows that, in the eyes of the Party-State, it is young urbanites who are seen as the standard-bearers of the national project to produce "quality" individuals who are "self-entrepreneurs" (reflexive).

At the end of the 1980s, while the use of this umbrella concept spread within society, its meaning remained vague in the minds of Chinese researchers. At the end of a conference convened to define this concept, the only consensus found was this: *"suzhi [however defined] is for the most part higher in the city than in the countryside, higher in Han areas than in minority areas, higher in the economically advanced areas than in backward areas. And generally, the quality level of the Chinese population is too low"* (Li, 1988:60). According to Kipnis, the use of the concept *suzhi* at the beginning of the twentieth century stems from the desire of Chinese intellectuals to ensure that efforts to improve the quality of the population were not only aimed at eugenics, but served the national project more broadly by increasing both the level of education and its physical, psychological, and moral qualities (Kipnis, 2006).

Subsequently, the concept was subject to several reappropriations. During the launch of the five-year plan in 1991, the country's economic backwardness was attributed to the low-quality level of the rural population (Anagnost, 2004). The concept was then used to get the population to adhere to socioeconomic reforms initiated since the mid-1980s, the dissemination of this concept and its reappropriation by the Party-State was probably facilitated by the fact that it existed in the thought of Confucius (Cheng, 1997:67–68).

Since 2010, the concept *suzhi* has been mobilized by a multitude of actors: governmental organization such as family planning, the CCP urging its members and citizens to improve their moral and political level, business leaders who complain about the low level of "quality" of their employees, parents who try to improve the quality level of their children by providing them with the best care, food and

[3] The full version of the speech can be consulted at the following address: http://china.org.cn/e-news/news070123-1.htm . Retrieved on January 5, 2017.

education, the urban population who complain about the low level of quality of migrant workers, etc. (Fig. 3.1).

As the interviews I conducted illustrate, *suzhi* not only has a normative character, it also refers to a social value. The definition proposed by the respondents refers to both the moral value of a person (*daode suzhi*), as well as their physical (*shenti suzhi*), psychological (*xinli suzhi*), or even intellectual qualities. A respondent named Han formulates it this way: *"if the rural population and the urban population do not have the same level of education and the same values, it is because they do not have the same quality level"* (born in 1989, rural, Jilin *hukou* at birth, Bachelor).

The use of this concept allows young people to distance themselves from certain people and assert their difference and their open-mindedness (*kaifang*), which is characteristic of cosmopolitan youth. In other words, its use allows to differentiate and hierarchize individuals: urban and rural population, rural and urban migrants, planned and unplanned person[4], etc. (Anagnost, 2004; Greenhalgh, 2003). The use of the discourse on "quality", mobilized by the Chinese government, while aiming to form autonomous young adults, capable of leading China towards its historical destiny, namely the construction of a rich, powerful and respected Nation on the international stage, tends, at the same time, to essentialize and legitimize the socio-economic inequalities that are deepening in post-collectivist China[5] (Sigley, 2009; Woronov, 2009; Yan, 2003a, b).

3.2 *Suzhi* Discourse and *Hukou* as Instruments of Governmentality

The construction and mobilization of the discourse on the "quality" of the population by the State and its institutions can be analyzed as a means of governance from afar (Ong & Zhang, 2008). If the Party-State exercised firm control over the individual during the Maoist period, by the end of the twentieth century, its influence had loosened and become less direct. The discourse on "quality" allowed the Party-State to define and instill "indirectly" in the public new norms and values in health and education, via a multitude of relays within public administration (laws, public policies, school, etc.), businesses, associations, families and individuals themselves.

Under the Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao administration, the problem of population growth was stated as a question of social, economic, and human development. The goal was to transition from an economy reliant on cheap labor to a knowledge economy benefiting from skills of highly qualified workers. However, in 2008, officials

[4] In other words, people born within the legally imposed quotas by birth planning policies and people born outside these quotas.

[5] Between 1980 and 2010, the Gini coefficient, which measures income disparities, went from 0.25 to 0.50. Chinese society thus went from being one of the least unequal to one of the most unequal in the world during this period (Jacka et al., 2013:220–21).

from the National Commission for Population and Family Planning estimated that the quality of the workforce at the time was detrimental to social development and harmony, efficient resource use, and the country's competitiveness. The solution found to solve this problem was to link birth control policies to the improvement of care and education systems in cities. In other words, in order to assert itself on the international stage, the country needed educated, well-bred, patriotic, highly skilled young adults who are ready to learn throughout their life-course (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005:244). State investments to develop human resources, combined with efforts to shape young people ready to become self-entrepreneurs is therefore, a cornerstone on which the Chinese dream rests: regaining the country's past greatness.

Young adults whose level of "quality" is deemed "high" are reflexive, meaning they are able to choose their lifestyle, their identity and they are responsible for their life-course. Young adults belonging to the urban middle class[6] symbolize the government's success in forming a politically docile youth, but eager to contribute to the ethical and moral elevation of their community, for instance in the name of consumers' rights, social stability, or virtue (Tomba, 2009). The continuous improvement of their individual "quality" level and that of their family becomes both a personal aspiration and a social injunction.

The residence booklet system (*hukou*) is another instrument of governance established by the Party-State. It institutionalizes forms of discrimination and exclusion between different population groups, making it more difficult for people from the provinces or the countryside to conform to the ideal of "high quality". The *hukou* (*jumin hukou bu*) was introduced by the Party-State in the 1950s[7] to control population flows within the country (Cai, 2011; Liu, 2005; Wang, 2005). To this day, it serves individuals to prove their identity, since it records information on the type of *hukou* (collective household[8] or family household[9]) and on the different members of the household: the name, date and place of birth, the relationship with the head of household, sex, ethnicity, children under 16 are also mentioned along with the address, paternal grandfather's address, religion, identity card number, education level, marital status, height, blood group, profession and workplace. A copy of this document is kept by the public security office. Two indications with significant

[6] The concept of "middle class" (中产阶级, *zhongchan jieji*) emerged in China in the late 1980s, but it was at the turn of the 2000s that it became established within the Chinese scientific community. In the early research on the subject, researchers used either the term "middle stratum" (中间层, *zhongjian ceng*), or "middle income stratum" (中间收入阶层, *zhongjian shouru jieceng*) or "middle income group" (中等收入群体, *zhongdeng shouru qunti*) (C. (李成) Li 2013).

[7] Initial measures were introduced in 1951, but freedom of movement was still in place. Moreover, in June 1955 a directive was signed to introduce a residence booklet system (户籍制度, *huji zhidu*). The law was promulgated in 1958 by the Standing Committee of the National People's Assembly (NPA) (Chan & Li, 1999).

[8] Collective household, *jiti hu.* People living in the dormitories of a company (collective or not), a school, a temple, etc.

[9] Family household, *jiating hu*. People living under the same roof or alone.

implications are also included in the residence booklet: the type of *hukou, hukou leibie* (agricultural, *nongye hukou* or non-agricultural, *feinongye hukou*)[10] and its place of registration, *hukou suozaidi* (Hukou, 1958).

The combination of these two criteria leads to a "complex categorization of individuals", dividing the population in two ways (Froissart, 2008). On the one hand, by distinguishing between rural and urban populations, and assigning them unequal rights; and on the other hand, by establishing a social hierarchy between the local population and the population coming from outside. Individuals are attached to a locality, whether it is rural or urban, and their rights and duties are dependent on the economic and social resources of this locality. The Maoist organization, which favored the economic and social development of major urban centers, resulted in a spatial hierarchy in which villages are located at the bottom of the scale, followed by county capitals, district capitals, municipalities, provincial capitals, autonomous municipalities and Beijing, country's capital at the top. As a result, people at the top of the pyramid receive and benefit comparatively more from social investments than residents of villages, towns, or even small and medium-sized cities.

3.3 Chinese TV Drama as a Vector of Institutionalization

The discourse on the "quality" of the population is widely present in the media and in TV drama, which are channels for disseminating the norms and values the Party-State considers important. They can be envisaged as a means to govern "from afar" (Ong & Zhang, 2008).

The content of TV drama is very interesting to study from a sociological point of view. Since in China it is the State administration of the press, publication, radio, film and television (SARFT)[11] that controls – from conception to broadcast – the content of television production, TV drama reflect norms and values endorsed by the Party-State. Scripts have to be submitted for approval to the SARFT before they can be produced by a television unit registered with the administration. It should be noted, that the final script must go before the censorship commission of the SARFT, or its local affiliated office, to receive a license that officially validates its distribution/production[12] (Zhu, 2008; Zhu et al., 2008). The regulations issued by the SARFT produce a powerful instrument of self-censorship for scriptwriters.

[10] Also referred to as *hukou* rural (乡村户口, *xiangcun hukou*) and *hukou* urban (城市户口, *chengshi hukou*).) (Chan & Li, 1999:821–22).

[11] SARFT, State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China, http://www.sarft.gov.cn. Retrieved on 24.03.2023.

[12] According to Zhu, retired officials who are loyal to the CCP doctrine are sometimes called upon to carry out the political and ideological control of television series after viewing, because this task is very time-consuming.

Especially since broadcast authorization does not necessarily mean that the television series will be broadcast in its entirety. Through the SARFT, the Party-State can at any time decide to suspend the broadcast or even demand modifications in the script. While television production in China is subject to political influences, it also responds to market influences such as financial profitability.

During the conduct of the interviews with the respondents, they frequently referred to TV drama to illustrate their accounts, so it felt necessary to me to "take television series seriously" (Laugier, 2022). Especially since they reach a very large audience given that the entire population in China has access to television (directly or indirectly through the Internet). Chinese viewers watch an average of 52 min of TV drama per day (Sartoretti, 2014:37). As producers of norms and values approved by the Party-State, television series can be considered as actively participating in the socialization of the population (Laugier, 2023; Widder, 2004). In this sense, they constitute a relevant window through which to observe the coexistence and mixing of norms and values borrowing from both classical cultural elements (pre-Maoist period), elements dating from the collectivist China (Maoist period) and others revealing a China open to the world (the contemporary period). The reconfiguration of these past and present, national and transnational elements, as well as their reappropriation and reinterpretation by the viewers contribute ultimately to the production of shared representations, which spread in daily conversations. Located at the interface between public and private spheres, we will see that there is a very strong convergence between the paths to adulthood valued in the corpus of TV dramas I analyzed and the representations that young Chinese have of a successful path to life.

As part of this research, five television series were examined in detail: "Beijing Youth" (*beijing qingnian*), "Ants' Struggle" (*yizu de fendou*), "Rules Before Divorce" (*lihun qian guize*), "The Era of Naked Marriage" (*luohun shidai*) and "Struggle" (*fendou*). All were produced in mainland China. Each episode lasts on average 45 min and is available for free online on the Internet in Chinese and subtitled in Chinese. I chose these five television series in particular because they were often mentioned by the respondents during the conduct of the field research. The first three TV dramas had just been released on screens and were very popular at the time. The other two series are a bit older.

"Beijing Youth" was broadcast during the summer of 2012. Through its 36 episodes, the spectator can follow the transition to adulthood of four cousins (on the paternal side) from Beijing: Hedong, Hexi, Henan and Hebei whose social origin, character and aspirations differ. The series "Ants' Struggle", which was first broadcast in 2012, consists of 33 episodes. It tells the hopes and disappointments of young University graduates who are not originally from Beijing. They studied in this city, but once they graduated, they only found low paid jobs that barely allow them to rent a tiny room together. Their strained financial situation makes it difficult for them to fulfill their desire to get married. "Rules Before Divorce" was also first broadcast in 2012. The TV drama takes place in Beijing. It features, in over 40

episodes, the marital trajectories of three young adults couples. There are, on the one hand, Wang Mingxuan and Jiang Xinyao who are freshly graduated from University and they defy Mingxuan's parents' opposition to their marriage. On the other hand, Zhao Yatong, a girl from a good family, marries Wen Hao, a young freelance photographer, in a rush. Finally, Li Xin, a second-generation rich young man, gets married with Zhang Xiaofan, whose parents are ordinary blue collars workers, to cover up the birth of their child out of wedlock. Once married, the young couples quarrel daily over trivial matters.

These first three television series, which had just been released on the screens, were very popular at the time of the conduct of the field research. The following two series are a bit older, but they were also recommended to me several times by the respondents. "The Era of Naked Marriage" was broadcast in 2011 and consists of 30 episodes. The two main characters have been dating for 10 years and have reached a point in their relationship where they want to get married. However, they do not own a home, they do not have a car, they have no savings, no means to buy an engagement ring or even afford a wedding ceremony. They decide to get married anyway because the young woman is pregnant. Without individual housing, they decide to cohabit under the same roof as the groom's parents. However, they eventually divorce because of the difficult intergenerational cohabitation.

Last but not least, the TV drama "Struggle" was broadcast in 2007. It takes place in Beijing. The 32 episodes depict the aspirations of young university graduates, as well as their difficulties of living their love stories in a changing society that values personal achievement.

In the five TV dramas, the transition to adulthood is characterized by four main dimensions: the end of studies, access to a first stable job, the first marriage, which is sometimes associated with the birth of a child, and access to individual housing. These dimensions are associated with another central value: cosmopolitanism, which is associated with a level of high "quality". By depicting several paths to adulthood, these TV dramas convey a dual message to young people: it is "normal" to desire and they show what is "normal" to desire in post-collectivist China. The same construction processes are used. Relying on counter-models and symbols, they display the same model of pathways. They function as a place where different norms and values coexist, while producing meaning through their reappropriation and reinterpretation by the audience (Rofel, 2007). They stage young people who share the same desire to become accomplished cosmopolitan urban adults on professional and emotional levels. We see them relentlessly seeking to brave the vicissitudes of life. Life is shown as difficult, although the moral is always optimistic: with perseverance and patience the future is brighter. Young people ultimately manage to achieve their objectives in terms of professional or family trajectories provided they accept to take charge of their life-course and they are able to make choices for themselves. While this evokes characteristics of the individualization, the TV dramas also remind us that private initiatives,

personal expression, the quest for material gain and personal fulfillment must be carried out within the political limits set by the Party-State. In these TV series, the transition to adulthood is completely depoliticized. They never show young people committed to a cause.

The five TV dramas take place in a cosmopolitan city: Beijing. They stage the city and its infrastructures through a choice of scenic shots that value less its role as a capital, than the image of a cosmopolitan, clean city, open to the globalized world, technologically and economically developed.

The urban environment occupies an important place in each sequence. The city's cosmopolitan character is highlighted through references to the 2008 Olympic Games, which testify to the city's ties with major international powers, with references to the Sanlitun district where embassies, modern shopping centers, and a portion of the foreign population are concentrated, or by shooting scenes of the symbolic buildings of the capital, such as the tower of the national television network CCTV and the immense expressways on which dense traffic circulates and the new guarded residential districts with tall buildings.

Beijing embodies "the" Chinese city *par excellence* in the TV dramas. It portrays the life of middle-class Chinese. Its name appears directly in four of the series. It is only in "Struggle" (*fendou*) that Beijing is referred to indirectly. This narrative creates a myth of the cosmopolitan city, bustling with activities and with modern architecture (Sartoretti, 2014). Beijing embodies dreams, desires, difficulties, and fears of cosmopolitan emerging adults, but not all of them are equally successful on their path to adulthood. The image of the cosmopolitan city is also chosen to stage and promote lifestyles associated with the middle and upper classes. In creating a sense of belonging (Bourdieu, 2007), consumption is presented as a means to achieve social distinction and affirmation of a cosmopolitan identity. Tingting, a young Shanghainese, declared during a discussion in which I asked him to describe his impressions of contemporary China:

> *To me, modernity is urbanization. It's also a way of life. Some foreigners think that we still dress in a Chinese way, but we dress in a Western way..*

By staging young adults born in the 1980s–1990s who have a Sino-Western lifestyle or who appreciate it, TV dramas act as a powerful means to convey and promote norms and values associated with a high level of *suzhi*. Cosmopolitanism thus appears as a central concept for understanding the process of individualization in China. The images broadcast show individual and State desires that converge in the formation of a same project: reassert China's power on the international stage by forming high-quality citizens. In other words, citizens with a high level of education, healthy, cosmopolitan, and faithful to ethical and civic values. The government project aims to create a "high quality" workforce, competitive and citizens able to navigate at ease in a globalized world. Therefore, individualization is the consequence of the development strategy carried out by the Party-State.

Bibliography

Anagnost, A. (2004). The corporeal politics of quality (Suzhi). *Public Culture, 16*, 189–208.

Bourdieu, P. (2007). *La Distinction. Critique Sociale Du Jugement*. Les Editions de Minuit.

Cai, F. (2011). The Hukou reform and unification of rural-urban social welfare. *China & World Economy, 19*, 33–48.

Chan, K. W., & Li, Z. (1999). The Hukou system and rural-urban migration in China: Processes and changes. *The China Quarterly, 160*, 818–855.

Cheng, A. (1997). *Histoire de La Pensée Chinoise*. Editions du Seuil.

Friedman, S. L. (2010). Women, marriage and the state in contemporary China. In E. J. Perry & M. Selden (Eds.), *Chinese society. Change, conflict and resistance*. Routledge.

Froissart, C. (2008). *Le Système Du Hukou: Pilier de La Croissance Chinoise et Du Maintien Du PCC Au Pouvoir* (Vol. 149). Centre d'études et de recherches internationales, Sciences Po.

Greenhalgh, S. (2003). Science, modernity, and the making of China's one-child policy. *Population and Development Review, 29*, 163–196.

Greenhalgh, S. (2010). *Cultivating global citizens. Population in the rise of China*. Harvard University Press.

Greenhalgh, S. (2011). Governing Chinese life. From sovereignty to biopolitical governance. In E. Zhang, A. Kleinman, & W. Tu (Eds.), *Governance of life in Chinese moral experience. The quest for an adequate life* (pp. 146–162).

Greenhalgh, S., & Winckler, E. A. (2005). *Governing China's population. From Leninist to neoliberal biopolitics*. Stanford University Press.

Hukou. (1958). *People's Republic of China household registration regulations (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Hukou Dengji Tiaoli, regulations on the household registration system in the PRC)*.

Jacka, T. (2009). 'Cultivating citizens: Suzhi (quality) discourse in PRC. In *Positions: East Asia cultures critique* (Vol. 17, pp. 523–535).

Jacka, T., Kipnis, A., & Sargeson, S. (2013). *Contemporary China. Society and social change*. Cambridge University Press.

Kipnis, A. (2006). Suzhi: A keyword approach. *The China Quarterly, 186*, 295–313.

Laugier, S. (2022). Taking TV series seriously. *Open Philosophy, 5*, 250–253.

Laugier, S. (Ed.). (2023). *Les Séries: Laboratoires d'éveil Politique*. CNRS Editions.

Li, S. (1988). A review of the study of the quality of the rural population (Nongcun Renkou Suzhi Yanjiu Gaishu). *Population Studies (Renkou Yanjiu), 2*, 59–61.

Liu, Z. (2005). Institution and inequality: The Hukou system in China. *Journal of Comparative Economics, 33*, 133–157.

Murphy, R. (2004). *Turning peasants into modern Chinese citizens: "population quality" discourse* (p. 177). Demographic Transition and Primary Education'. The China Quarterly.

Ong, A., & Zhang, L. (2008). *Privatizing China. Socialism from Afar*. Cornell University Press.

Rofel, L. (2007). *Desiring China. Experiments in neoliberalism, sexuality, and public culture*. Duke University Press.

Sartoretti, N. (2014). *Mediating power: The self in Chinese and Indian popular media*. Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID).

Sigley, G. (2009). Suzhi, the body, and the fortunes of Technoscientific reasoning in contemporary China. *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique, 17*, 537–566.

Tomba, L. (2009). Of quality, harmony, and community: Civilization and the middle class in urban China. *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique, 17*, 592–616.

Wang, F. (2005). *Organizing through division and exclusion. China's Hukou System*. Stanford University Press.

Widder, N. (2004). Foucault and power revisited. *European Journal of Political Theory, 3*, 411–432.

Woronov, T. E. (2009). Governing China's children: Governmentality and "education for quality". *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique, 17*, 567–589.
Yan, H. (2003a). Neoliberal governmentality and Neohumanism: Organizing Suzhi/value flow through labor recruitment networks. *Cultural Anthropology, 18*, 493–523.
Yan, Y. (2003b). *Private life under socialism*. Stanford University Press.
Zhu, Y. (2008). *Television in Post-Reform China. Serial dramas, Confucian leadership and the global television market*. Routledge.
Zhu, Y., Keane, M., & Bai, R. (2008). *TV Drama in China*. Hong Kong University Press.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

Chapter 4
A Life-Course Perspective on the Individualization Process in Post-collectivist China

Contents

4.1 The Transition to Adulthood as a Period of Observation 38
4.2 A Place and Two Birth Cohorts Emblematic of the People's Republic of China's History: Beijing, the Post-1950s and Post-1980s Generations 41
4.3 A Mixed Methods Research Design to Reconstruct the Transition to Adulthood 44
4.3.1 Quantitative Data Collection 45
4.3.2 Qualitative Data Collection 48
4.3.3 Data Analysis 50
Bibliography 52

Abstract After an introduction to the life-course perspective, this fourth chapter gives an overview of the research design. It details the reasons behind the choice of the birth-cohorts under study: the "generation of new China" and the "generation of reforms" that encapsulate the profound transformations from Maoist collectivism to Deng Xiaoping's era of economic reforms.

Furthermore, the chapter reveals how the mixed methods research design was built and it gives insights into the sample composition. The qualitative strand of the research captures variations in the transition to adulthood experienced by 45 individuals born between 1978 and 1993. It unveils lived experiences, challenges, and authentic voices. The quantitative strand reveals the journey to adulthood of 615 young people born between 1980 and 1985, and of 301 people born between 1950 and 1959. The quantitative data are retrospective longitudinal data. They were collected using a life-course matrix (calendar) to provide complete information on individuals' biographical paths and their temporality.

In the initial phase of the research, qualitative and quantitative data were separately analyzed to address specific dimensions of the research question. The chapter explains that subsequent step involved triangulation, facilitating the integration of insights from both data types.

Keywords Biographical analysis · Mixed methods · Life-course matrix · Young adults · China

© The Author(s) 2024

S. V. Constantin, *A Life Course Perspective on Chinese Youths*, Life Course Research and Social Policies 17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57216-6_4

4.1 The Transition to Adulthood as a Period of Observation

To understand the forms taken in China by the process of individualization and its impact on the life-course, I have chosen the transition to adulthood as a period of observation. The journey to adulthood is indeed conditioned by a multitude of opportunities and constraints influenced both by social and institutional structures (legislation, public policies, etc.) and by the socio-economic and political contexts (educational systems, labor market, forms of citizenship, etc.), as well as by cultural systems (emergence of new values, new intergenerational relationships, etc.). The life-course perspective[1] allows to examine over a long period of time to what extent structural changes shape the individual trajectories (Mills, 2006).

While Cain was the first sociologist to propose a definition of the concept (Cain Jr., 1964), it was not until Riley that the influence of socioeconomic and political contexts on life-courses was conceptualized. The author also notes that the influence played by socio-historical changes varies according to birth cohorts and that these cohorts in turn can be producers of social change (Riley, 1979). Neugarten, on the other hand, highlights the influence of age in determining social behaviors, as each society has specific expectations regarding the behavior that individuals should adopt according to their age (Neugarten et al., 1965). Following these works, Elder identified four founding principles of the life-course theory (Elder, 1999; Giele & Elder, 1998): (1) Life-courses are embedded in a given socio-historical context (Location in time and place); (2) Individual lives are embedded in a network of social interdependencies, which can vary according to socio-historical transformations (Linked lives); (3) Individuals have a relative capacity to act on their life-course. It should be noted that the extent of their capacity for action depends on the opportunities and social, economic, institutional, and historical constraints to which they are subjected (Human agency); (4) The effects of events and transitions experienced by individuals during their lives vary according to their temporality, sequence, and their alignment with social expectations (Timing of lives). In more recent literature, a fifth principle, which was implicit in Elder's work, is mentioned: (5) Human development and aging are lifelong processes (Marshall & Mueller, 2003). Only longitudinal studies make it possible to analyze the transformation of the life-course over time. They enable us to capture "a pattern of socially defined age-graded events and roles which is subject to historical change in culture and social structure" (Elder, 1999:302). The ability to seize opportunities or face constraints indeed depends on individuals' personal history and their differentiated anchoring in the social structure (Bidart, 2006; Heinz, 2009).

[1]Excellent literature reviews on this concept have been carried out by French-speaking and English-speaking researchers: see notably (Elder et al., 2003; Giele & Elder, 1998; Heinz et al., 2009; Heinz & Marshall, 2003; Kohli, 2009; d'Epinay et al., 2005; Marshall & Mueller, 2003; Mayer, 2001, 2004; Sapin et al., 2007). Contributions from the field of developmental psychology, which are part of a sociological perspective, are not presented in this book.

It should be mentioned that Chinese sociologists recognize the interest of the theoretical perspective of the life-course as well to explain major transformations undergone in recent decades by China and their impact on individuals' lives (Bao, 2005; Li et al., 1999). Glen Elder's seminal work was translated into Chinese (Elder, 2002) at the same time as research in this perspective began to spread (Bao, 2012; Guo & Chang, 2006; Lin, 2013; Meng & Gregory, 2002; Zhou, 2004; Zhou & Hou, 1999).

Analyzing the transition to adulthood in terms of pathway and transition enable to move away from an essentialist definition of young people and adults in terms of age class or unified group. By allowing young people to be conceived as both actors and subjects of their history, it offers a nuanced and dynamic vision of this stage of the life-course (Baudelot & Establet, 2000; Furstenberg et al., 2008; Settersten et al., 2008). These concepts also refer to the temporality and duration of the transitions experienced, which depend not only on individuals' place in the social stratification but also on their social characteristics. The path followed can be more or less long and winding. It can change over time, although its initial imprint strongly encourages individuals to follow it (Hogan & Astone, 1986). In studies that fall within the field of sociology of youth and sociology of ages, five thresholds are generally retained to analyze the transition to adulthood: the end of studies; leaving the parental home; access to stable employment; cohabitation; and the birth of a first child (Furstenberg et al., 2008; Galland, 2009; Liefbroer & Toulemon, 2010; Shanahan, 2000). Based on research conducted in the United States, Arnett (2000, 2004) also identified three individualistic characters, mentioned indiscriminately according to gender: accepting responsibility for oneself; making independent decisions; and becoming financially independent.

An increasing number of studies suggest that, since the 1980s, a new model of transition to adulthood has emerged in Western Europe and the United States. This transition has become individualized. The paths to adulthood are both longer and de-standardized[2] (Billari & Liefbroer, 2010; Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011; Liefbroer & Toulemon, 2010; Shanahan, 2000). Young people stay in school longer. They delay marriage, childbearing, and have out-of-wedlock births (Brückner & Mayer, 2005; Cherlin, 2004). A weakening of the links between family, school, and professional trajectories has also been observed in the path to adulthood of Western youth. Entry into adult life is becoming more diverse, uncertain, gradual, complex, and less uniform. In other words, the timing and sequence of transitions are less predictable, more prolonged over time, more diversified, and more disordered (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Berlin et al., 2010; Booth et al., 1999; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Furstenberg, 2010; Galland, 2000; Modell et al., 1976; Settersten & Ray, 2010).

Longer periods of study, later entry to the labor market and more precarious career paths have on average led to an extension of the period of economic dependence of young people on their families or, in the case of Scandinavian countries for instance, on welfare states (Schoeni & Ross, 2008; Van de Velde, 2008).

[2] Standardization refers to the relative uniformity of the timing and sequence of transitions in a population, while destandardization refers to the relative heterogeneity of timing and sequence.

Young adults respond to the uncertainties of neoliberal societies with what researchers call "biographical tinkering", "yo-yo transitions", or "boomerang transitions" consisting of back-and-forths between periods of financial independence and periods of precariousness, which sometimes require a return to the parents' home for some time (Cavalli & Galland, 1993; Du Bois-Reymond & Blasco, 2003; Mitchell, 2006). There are multilayered raisons for this: the restructuring of labor markets, the demand from companies for skilled and flexible workers, and the loosening of welfare states are among them. These social and economic transformations affect the ability of Western youth to establish themselves as independent young adults (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Furstenberg et al., 2008; Heinz, 2009). While young adults can afford to live more diverse life experiences, this should not overshadow to the determinist role played by social markers, such as gender and social background, in shaping their pathways to adulthood.

Since the 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe, and East Asia as well, the transition to adulthood has also been delayed and become more uncertain (Lesthaeghe, 2010). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, in Central and Eastern European countries, marriage and childbearing have been significantly postponed, and the proportion of out-of-wedlock births has soared (Kohler et al., 2002; Perelli-Harris, 2008; Thorton & Philipov, 2008). Since the 1990s in East Asia, marriage and childbearing have also been postponed (Jones et al., 2011; Jones & Yeung, 2014). In Asian societies, studies focusing on the transition to adulthood are surprisingly few given that 60% of the world's youth live in the Asia-Pacific region (Fukuda, 2013; Huang, 2013; Ishida, 2013; Ji, 2013; Nahar et al., 2013; Park, 2013; Utomo et al., 2013; Xenos et al., 2007; Yeung & Alipio, 2013). Research on the transition to adulthood based on Chinese data is, to my knowledge, still relatively rare (Badger et al., 2006; Bao, 2012; Fulda et al., 2019; Hannum & Liu, 2005; Kane & Li, 2021; Li, 2013a, b; Lin, 2013; Nelson & Chen, 2007; Tian, 2016; Yeung & Alipio, 2013; Yeung & Hu, 2013; Zhang, 2004; Zhong & Arnett, 2014). Moreover, the different stages of the transition to adulthood are most often examined independently. While these studies focus on the transitions mobilized by Western researchers, namely: leaving school and entering the labor market, getting married and becoming a parent, they do not analyze the sequence of these events. Except for the work of Kane and Li (2021), leaving the parental home is generally not considered as a constitutive stage of the transition to adulthood.[3] Hannum and Liu reveal, as has been observed elsewhere, a postponement of the milestones characterizes the transition to adulthood. Young people tend to complete their studies later, to enter the job market later, to get married later, and to give birth to a first child later in life. Their work reveals however, that young adults from rural backgrounds tend to enter the labor market more swiflty and complete the characteristic stages of the transition to adulthood earlier (Hannum & Liu, 2005). For Yeung and Hu (2013), the transition

[3] However, it should be noted that Chen Feinian, Zhang Qian Forrest, Chai Yanwei and Zhao Zhongwei and Chen Wei have studied separately and from a life-course perspective the evolution of residential trajectories since China's opening to the market economy (Chai, 2009; Chen, 2005; Chen and Korinek, 2010; Zhang, 2004; Zhao and Chen, 2008).

to adulthood in China reflects the consequences of the complex interrelation between drastic political interventions, and socio-economic and ideological transformations on the family. Several studies highlight the importance of the family's place in the transition to adulthood. According to these surveys, family responsibilities (marriage, the birth of children within wedlock and filial piety) constitute structuring norms shaping young people's paths to adulthood (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004; Hwang, 1999; Nelson & Chen, 2007; Oyserman et al., 2002). The importance of role transitions given by young people in the definition of adulthood is sometimes interpreted as indicative of the role played by family obligations in their lives. For instance, the completion of school and access to a first job are envisioned as means to support the family. Marriage and the birth of a child are envisaged as means to ensure the posterity and well-being of the family group (Badger et al., 2006). Zhong and Arnett (2014) reveal that accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and financial independence are less substantial attributes of the transition to adulthood for migrant women than family responsibilities towards their spouse, children, and parents. The current state of research, however, does not allow us to know whether these values, which refer to the Confucian value of filial piety and collectivism, are specific to young migrants. Available scholarships barely examine the variations in the conception of adulthood according to social origin (urban/rural) and gender.

The present study will shed a bright light on this issue. It will also examine whether the transition to adulthood in post-socialist China tends to converge with the dynamics observed in Western societies, and to what extent the paths are specific; a largely unexplored area in the literature. Because the country has undergone the fastest socio-economic transformations over the past four decades, and is home to the world's largest youth population, China is an important informative case for assessing and testing the regularities in the transformations observed elsewhere. To my knowledge, so far, no study on the subject, which mobilizes the theory of individualization as a theoretical framework, is based on quantitative data. All the research undertaken is based on qualitative data collected in the city or in the countryside. This book proposes to fill this gap. It will examine how individualization manifests itself in the paths to adulthood, using a research design that combines quantitative and qualitative methods.

4.2 A Place and Two Birth Cohorts Emblematic of the People's Republic of China's History: Beijing, the Post-1950s and Post-1980s Generations

I chose to conduct the field research in Beijing because this metropolis is not only the political and administrative center of the country, but also its scientific, cultural, and economic center[4] . *Zhongnanhai*, located in the heart of Beijing, a stone's throw

[4] Website of the municipality of Beijing (http://www.beijing.gov.cn. Retrieved on 7.02.23).

from the Forbidden City, is the seat of Chinese power.[5] The country's most prestigious universities are located in the capital, which also houses national research centers, such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, or the National Bureau of Statistics. The Chinese capital is also the leading economic center in Northeast China, with the second-highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in China (behind Shanghai).[6] The tertiary sector is dynamic (76.9%) thanks to financial activities, information and technology services, and sales and trading (BMBS, 2022).[7] Beijing has the status of a municipality (*zhixiashi*), which places the city directly under the control of the central state (Cabestan, 2014).

The Chinese population is unevenly distributed across the territory. It is concentrated on the coast, where the country's most dynamic economic zones are located (BNS, 2019). Beijing is the third most populous municipality in the country after Chongqing and Shanghai (BNS, 2019). At the time of conducting the field research, more than 19,000 million people had their residence booklets registered in Beijing for more than 6 months. More than 90% of the inhabitants then lived in urban districts (peripheral and downtown), and nearly 60% of them were established in the city center and hypercenter (BNS, 2012). For this reason, I decided to conduct this research in the eight urban districts that form the center of the city: Dongcheng (including Xuanwu), Xicheng (including Chongwen), Chaoyang, Haidian, Shijingshan, and Fengtai (see appendix). Despite the extent of the territory, this choice was made because these eight districts, which are located inside the five peripheral roads that surround the metropolis, are very well served, both by car, taxi, and by public transports (subways and bus). It takes about an hour with the subway to reach Fengtai from Haidian. This mobility was further encouraged by the low cost of transport tickets: a bus ticket then cost 0.40 *renminbi* (0.06 CHF) or 1 yuan (0.15 CHF) for a person without a transport card, while a metro ticket cost 2 *renminbi* (CHF). The decision to conduct the research across all these districts, which form the city center, was also motivated by my desire to diversify the profile of the respondents as much as possible, beyond the stratification criteria defined for the constitution of the sample.

During my research in the Chinese capital, young adults born between 1978 and 1993 were distributed as follows: About 60% did not have a Beijing *hukou*, and among them, nearly 50% had an urban residence booklet. About 40% had a Beijing *hukou*, and among them, 9% had an agricultural residence booklet (BNS, 2012). Producing and asserting statuses into statistical registers reflects the symbolic power held by the Party-State. General data indeed conceal a multitude of situations, which are the product of social class, gender and the residence booklet system. Statistical

[5] For a comprehensive presentation of the organization of the Chinese political system, see notably the works of J.P. Cabestan (Cabestan, 1994, 2014).

[6] http://www.china.org.cn/business/2023-02/16/content_85110076.htm. Retrieved on 7.02.23.

[7] The composition of Beijing's GNP is as follows: primary sector, 0.3%; secondary sector, 18%; and tertiary sector, 81.7%, https://nj.tjj.beijing.gov.cn/nj/main/2022-tjnj/zk/indexeh.htm. Retrieved on 7.02.2023.

records distinguish four population groups[8]: firstly, the population with an urban *hukou* from Beijing; secondly, the population with a rural *hukou* from Beijing; thirdly, the population with an urban *hukou* but who is not registered in Beijing; fourthly, the population with a rural *hukou* registered in a town or village outside the municipality of Beijing . Within these groups, gender and social class constitute invisible sub-demarcations. One should add a fifth population group to these four groups: those who migrate informally to Beijing to work and live, without having obtained a temporary or permanent residence permit.

Two birth cohorts perfectly embody all the economic, social, and institutional changes that have shaken China over the past seven decades. These are, on the one hand, the "generation of the new China (*xin zhongguo de yidai*)", born between 1950 and 1959, in the aftermath of the foundation of the PRC. This birth cohort grew up and experienced its transition to adult life in Maoist China. And on the other hand, their children, the "generation of reforms (*zhuanxing de yidai)* ", born between 1980 and 1989 and whose members – today's adults – have lived their entire lives in the era of reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping.

During the last decades, the socio-economic transformations have drastically undermined the institutional organization set up under Mao Zedong (1949–1976). The country's opening to neoliberal economic ideology concurrent with the maintenance of a single political party in power has given rise to new institutional arrangements. These transformations have had a differentiated impact on the population's life-course depending on the position of individuals in social structures and their affiliations (Bian & Logan, 1996; Wu & Xie, 2003; Xie & Hannum, 1996; Zhou, 2004; Zhou et al., 1997). Young adults have been confronted with new opportunities during their transition to adulthood. Self-realization, personal fulfillment, and the development of individual capacities, which were not encouraged during the collectivist period, are now valued. Since the 1980s, there are also more opportunities to pursue higher education and in terms of employment in various geographical locations (Connelly & Zheng, 2007). Young adults no longer need to wait for the State to assign them a job. They can directly apply for the desired job in the labor market.

Over half (57%) of China's population lives in the countryside, and less than 20% of Chinese attend university after high school (BNS, 2012). Young adults born in rural areas who, in the past, had almost no opportunity to settle in urban areas, can now migrate to cities with fewer constraints (Wang, 2005). The downside is that lifetime jobs have given way to precarious jobs (Constantin, 2016, 2018). Many employment-related benefits such as affordable housing, cheap medical care, generous retirement pensions, and childcare subsidies have disappeared (Lü & Perry, 1997). In today's China, young adults must carefully plan each transition over their life-course. For example, if housing is an essential prerequisite for family

[8] The statistical registers of the population censuses distinguish, in addition to the four aforementioned groups, people who have their *hukou* registered in Beijing but who have gone to study or work abroad for a defined duration, and *hukou* agricultural (农业户口， *nongye hukou*) from *hukou* non-agricultural (非农业户口， *fei nongye hukou*).

formation, the rising house prices do not always allow young adults and their families to own their own home (Constantin, 2021). Especially as social and economic inequalities have widened since the country opening-up to market economy (Zhou & Moen, 2001).

4.3 A Mixed Methods Research Design to Reconstruct the Transition to Adulthood

To capture the experience of the transition to adulthood objectively and subjectively in the face of the transition to market economy, I developed a survey design based on mixed methods. Qualitative data are used to interpret and contextualize quantitative findings. Data collection was part of my doctoral thesis. The field research took place in Beijing between 2012 and 2014. The interviews were conducted in Chinese (Mandarin).

The quantitative data are retrospective longitudinal data. They aim to reconstruct the respondents' paths to adulthood. They were collected using a life calendar, which I developed on a computer. This methodological tool not only provides complete information on individuals' biographical paths but also reconstructs their temporality (Belli et al., 2009; Lelièvre, 2005). The life calendar associates temporality, events, and domains of the life-course. They function as cues to help respondents structure their autobiographical memory and to support them in recalling their past. The interviews carried out for the collection of quantitative data were organized around a comprehensive discussion. This extensive exchange had the advantage of reducing the risk of obtaining responses intended to "satisfy" the researcher. During the interviews, conducted with the help of about 20 students, the life calendar was displayed on our computer screens. The respondents could thus visualize at the same time the questions concerning the different areas of their life-course (professional, educational, family, etc.) and the temporality (years and age). Calendar years were used as a unit. With life calendars I not only collected quantitative data (N = 916), but I also used them as a support for conducting semi-structured interviews (N = 45). The convenience sample was stratified by age, sex, place of origin, *hukou* (urban/rural), and educational achievement. For each stratification criterion, based on the 2010 Beijing's population census, I computed quotas. The quantitative data reveal the journey to adulthood of 615 young people born between 1980 and 1985 (F = 290 and M = 325), and of 301 people born between 1950 and 1959 (F = 151 and M = 150).[9] At the beginning of the data collection, I accompanied each of the students and, throughout the process, we held meetings every week to check the quality of the data collected. These sessions also served as a forum for exchanging best survey practices.

[9] For reasons of survey feasibility, for the cohort born between 1950 and 1959, interviews were conducted only among the urban population.

Regarding the qualitative part of the research, I collected the data alone. I tried to submerge myself as much as possible in the daily life as it is experienced by young adults by placing myself in a situation of prolonged interaction (close to the respondents and in their environment). I stayed for over a year in Beijing and lived for several months in cohabitation with some of the respondents. I also conducted in-depth interviews to bring out (until theoretical saturation was reached) a variation of positions and points of view. The interviews, which were anonymized, were conducted in different neighborhoods of Beijing. I interviewed 45 urban and rural young people born between 1978 and 1993, and aged 19 to 36 years old (F = 25 and M = 20) at the time of the survey. They had been living in Beijing for at least 6 months at the time of the survey. Each interview began with a discussion about the transition to adulthood, with the life calendar as support. This first part of the interview lasted on average 2 h. Then, we agreed on a second meeting to discuss a specific topic defined in the interview canvas (becoming an adult, marriage, family, employment, values, social pressure, and consumption). This second part, depending on the respondent's interest in the research, could end after one meeting or continue, with regular meetings over a year. Twenty respondents agreed with the latter option. I found it more difficult to establish contact with rural men. Therefore, the content of these interviews is more superficial. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allowed me to grasp the individual and social representations attached to the thresholds of the transition to adulthood by testing the different categorizations.

4.3.1 Quantitative Data Collection

Thanks to the financial support of the Ernst and Lucie Schmidheiny Foundation and the Geneva-Asia Association, I was able to form a team of investigators to help me collect the quantitative data. Once in the field, the first challenge was to find the right balance in the number of investigators to recruit. It was necessary not only to consider the fact that a significant number of investigators would stop their mission during the research, but also to respond to the risk of interaction bias between the investigator and the respondent. Indeed, the responses of the latter can be biased by their perception of the expectations of the investigator or, unconsciously, the investigator can influence to some extent the responses by the way he/she formulates the questions. Therefore, the more interviews conducted by an investigator, the greater the risk of bias. To reduce the likelihood of this risk, it appears preferable to recruit a large number of investigators and have them each conduct a small number of interviews. However, this poses the problem of recruiting investigators trained in quantitative data collection. The number of investigators I ultimately recruited resulted from the arbitration between these specific constraints.

I posted, with the help of Chinese colleagues, a small ad on the Internet BBS sites of Peking University, People's University, and Beijing Normal University. In the ad, I did not mention the remuneration, as I wanted to make sure that I would

recruit social science students who were motivated by the project. To motivate the investigators, I had planned a relatively high remuneration: 50 RMB (or 8 CHF) per valid interview.[10] Indeed, the work of reconstructing biographical paths is difficult: the interviews are long, lasting between 1 h and 1 h 30, and it is not easy to find respondents who meet the sampling criteria and have the time and motivation to participate in the survey. Initially, I made appointments with all the people who had applied. Among these, some did not show up. I then met a total of 35. In a second step, I invited 23 of them to participate in a two-day training. Again, some did not show up, while others after the first half-day came to the conclusion that the work did not suit them and withdrew. At the end of the training, the team consisted of 5 male investigators and 15 female investigators including myself. Half of them were students from Peking University, the others were enrolled at People's University, only one person came from Beijing Normal University.

As pointed out in the scientific literature, I very quickly encountered a problem of attrition in the team of interviewers. During the first semester, two people dropped out and I had to ask two others to stop due to significant methodological problems in conducting the surveys that led me to invalidate and reject all their interviews. To strengthen the team, I decided to organize a second recruitment campaign after the Chinese New Year holidays. Following this campaign, I recruited four people (among the 15 people met). I again organized a two-day training for these three new female investigators and one new male investigator. At the end of the training, these people worked for 2 weeks in pairs with me. An investigator, who was among the best in the team, supported me by playing this role with a new investigator as well. But very quickly, 2 weeks after the training, one of the new female interviewers dropped out. Then, during the semester five people gradually stopped. *In fine* 16 people collected the quantitative data during the spring. Then, as summer approached, we were 13 people to complete the data collection. Aware from the start of the risk of attrition, I continuously sought to motivate the team through encouragement during follow-up meetings that took place every 2 weeks, or by inviting them in the "best" campus restaurant on the eve of the Chinese New Year holidays and before everyone went back to their family for a month to celebrate.

To gain the trust of the respondents and encourage them to participate in the survey, I gave it a name: Beijing Youth (*beijing qingnian*). On the advice of the investigators, I printed a small brochure. It presented the research and was distributed to each respondent when we contacted them. At this occasion we also stated our identity and affiliations. Then, we explained that we were conducting a sociological survey (*shehui diaocha*), which has a positive connotation in China. It is associated with the academic environment and State efforts to reform the country. Then, we briefly presented the objectives of the research as well as the type of interview we wished to conduct and its duration. If the person was not immediately available, we agreed on an appointment to meet them later in a quiet place, without

[10] in Beijing, the average wage was 6688 RMB per month in 2015.

any third party present who could negatively infer the quality of the information gathered during the interview.

Because the supervision of investigators and the control of data being two key variables for collecting reliable data, I developed a strict monitoring and control system. During the first 2 weeks, I individually accompanied each investigator in the field to help them get a good handle on the life calendar device. It was also an opportunity to advise them on their self-introduction to respondents, as well as to provide technical support. Following this, I organized weekly follow-up meetings. The investigators were invited to send me in advance all the life calendars collected, so that I could check them and discuss with them the difficulties encountered, as well as the recurring errors identified during the verification of the matrices. These sessions also aimed to serve as a place for exchange and advice on best practices to adopt. At the end of each session, I individually met with the investigators to discuss the inconsistencies found in their life calendars. After 3 months of fieldwork, I realized that all the investigators had mastered the matrix. Consequently, I changed the format of the meetings to one-on-one to discuss the life calendars individually. In situations where minor errors were identified, we could correct them by getting back in touch with the respondents since we asked for their contact details in the first part of the interview. However, in cases where we could not recontact the respondents to verify certain inconsistencies or complete missing data, the matrices were considered as invalid and, therefore, rejected (Appendix 7).

To track the progress of the fieldwork and the work of each investigator, I developed two Excel files: a general tracking file and an investigator-specific tracking file. The first file allowed me to visualize using graphical representations, on the one hand, the overall progress of data collection according to the different stratification criteria of the sample and, on the other hand, to compare the number of interviews collected by the investigators by looking more closely at how many life calendars each one collected for each of the stratification criteria of the sample. The second tracking file was designed to individually follow the investigators. For each meeting and for each person, I printed the graphical illustration of the summary of their work, as well as a sheet compiling all of my remarks on the matrices. This monitoring work allowed me to ensure the proper distribution of the sample during the data collection process, by continuously reevaluating the number of matrices to collect for each stratification criterion. Despite this methodological caution, the final sample shows a slight underrepresentation of respondents born between 1980 and 1985 with a middle school education level (*chuzhong*). They represent 27% of the sample while according to calculations based on the population census, this category should have reached 35%. Perhaps the reasons for this underrepresentation are to be found in the social distance between the young university investigators and the respondents. Or in the form of symbolic violence that any survey carries. Faced with students enrolled in the country's top universities, respondents may have felt a "symbolic loss", in the sense that they may have felt reminded of their own difficulties and disappointments. This explanation seems plausible since the final sample shows an overrepresentation of people with a master's degree or higher. Their share is 13%, while the quota to reach was established at 7%, according to the population

census. This is a recurring problem regardless of the respondents' gender, even though the breakdown of the sample according to sex is in line with the quotas calculated based on this census. Finally, while it was difficult at the beginning to find within this birth cohort and in the eight districts that form the downtown of Beijing respondents with a Beijing but rural (agricultural) residence booklet, in Spring 2013 I organized a daytrip in the district of Miyun. This district, located in the outskirt of the city, is mainly rural. 65% of the population has a Beijing agricultural residence booklet. Thanks to this expedition, at the end of the day, we managed to meet our data collection targets. While the total ratio of women and men in the sample meet the quotas, it should be noted that regardless of sex, the sample shows an underrepresentation of two point of percentage in the number of men and women with an urban *hukou* registered in the capital. We indeed had a lot of difficulties in meeting native Beijingers. There is also a three-percentage point overrepresentation of the number of people with a rural residence booklet registered outside of Beijing.

Regarding the cohort born in the 1950s, it was difficult to meet women with a primary school level of education. They constitute 14% of the respondents while they should have represented 18% of the women of this cohort. The sample also shows an underrepresentation of men with a middle school level of education (47% instead of 49%). For the high school level of education, there is an overrepresentation of women since 24.5% of the women of this birth cohort have this level of education in the sample, while according to the Beijing population census their share should have been 19%. Women with a specialized university level of education (short-cycle tertiary education) are also underrepresented by two percentage points compared to data from the national statistics bureau. While men who have reached this level of education are overrepresented by three points. Finally, the collected sample shows a slight underrepresentation of men who have completed a bachelor's degree, and an overrepresentation of men and women who have reached a level of education higher than bachelor. Apart from these points of vigilance, it should be emphasized that the distribution of the sample according to the residence booklet and sex is excellent. The sample is fairly representative of the two populations. Nevertheless, the inferences cannot be generalized to the entire population belonging to the two birth cohorts. The mode of recruitment of the respondents may have induced a bias in the constitution of the sample.

4.3.2 Qualitative Data Collection

Since the early 1980s, the People's Republic of China has widely opened its doors to social science researchers. Access to the Chinese field has a significant entry cost, as it requires prior learning of the Chinese language and knowledge of Chinese culture. I negotiated my entry into the field by seeking an institutional affiliation within Peking University. Throughout the duration of the field survey, I was a student at this University. From June to August 2012, I took intensive Chinese courses to refresh my oral language skills. Then, from September 2012 to August 2013, I

was an invited doctoral researcher within the department of sociology. In addition to the interviews conducted with young adults, this prolonged exposure in the field allowed me to grasp a relative authenticity in the behavior of young adults and thus to collect relatively spontaneous analysis material (Quivy & Van Campenhoudt, 1995). On campus, I tried to obtain authorization to live in the same building as the Chinese doctoral students in order to get as close as possible to the daily life of my peers and to interact constantly with them, but the housing officials refused my request arguing that I was better housed in the building reserved for foreign students. While I had no difficulty being accepted by the students and professors, I felt a certain frustration being referred by the school authorities to my foreign status and segregated in terms of housing. The main problem encountered during participant observation was that of taking notes on the spot in my field journal. During classes, I could discreetly complete it, but during daily interactions or during moments of confidence, note-taking was not desirable because it would have ended these privileged moments. It would have had the effect of changing my status from comrade to researcher and from then on, I would have taken the risk that my pairs, feeling observed, would change their behavior. The difficulty for me was to immerse myself in these conversations and then transcribe their substance in my notebook out of sight of my comrades.

In parallel with participant observation, I practiced indirect observation by seizing every opportunity to walk around the city or participate in activities (visits with friends, discovery of religious practices on invitation, etc.). I was thus able to easily expand my network of acquaintances, outside of the university community. Moreover, apart from those who worked in the service sector, it was more difficult for me to socialize with young men of rural origin who resided in Beijing.

Regarding the conduct of the interviews, I mobilized two strategies to capture the representations and points of view of the respondents: semi-structured interviews and the constitution of a focus group. For the semi-structured interviews, I favored direct access to the respondents by approaching people and explaining my research to them. For the constitution of the focus group, I contacted several professors from the French department at Peking University via email offering their students free tandems. Only one professor responded to my offer. He invited me to his class to introduce me and present my project. Following this, several students contacted me, including five who were diligent throughout the year. These are the people born in 1993 in the sample. Given that all the participants had a good level of French, the support courses could take the form of informal exchanges around the interview canvas themes to start the discussion. At the end of the session, I would go over grammar or vocabulary points with them. The group was relatively homogeneous socially, although more frequented by young men. The exchanges, which took place every 2 weeks, lasted on average 2 h 30.

I chose to conduct all the interviews in public, neutral spaces, such as cafes. Creating a convivial moment around a cup of coffee or tea helped to reduce the social distance between me and the respondents. All the interviews were recorded using the Audacity software. As a safeguard, I also took notes in a field notebook. This precaution proved particularly useful because on two occasions the sound was

cut off during the recording. Thanks to the notes taken, when transcribing them into the MAXQDA software I was able to complete them. The public space chosen to conduct the interviews had the merit of approaching a situation of ordinary interaction, namely conversation, and thus it helped the respondents forget the presence of the recording.

While estimating an optimal sample size is possible for the collection of quantitative data, conversely, there are no strict sampling rules for qualitative research. At the beginning of the survey each new interview brings new information that contributes to the development of models, which become clearer and more stable as the research progresses. When saturation is reached, the latest information collected almost no longer teaches anything (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As "no category of actors holds all the objective knowledge alone, but that each one's vision contains its share of truth" (Bertaux, 2013:27), I sought respondents with diverse positions and points of view to gradually build the sample and avoid the monographic compartmentalization of a certain type of population. To obtain a unit of analysis, I sought to avoid extreme cases in the construction of the sample. To balance the different sampling criteria and contrast individuals and situations as much as possible according to these variables, I chose to conduct the interviews in various districts of the city: in Haidian, which is located in the northwest; in Dongcheng, which is in the hypercenter; and in Chaoyang, which is located in the eastern part of the capital. The interviews were conducted in three languages according to the wishes of the respondents: in Chinese, French, and English-Chinese. Some interlocutors agreed to participate in the survey for a year by meeting me every 2 weeks, because they saw it as a way to practice a foreign language. Although I would have preferred to conduct all the interviews in Chinese, I was not able to impose this. The risk of losing the enthusiasm of the participants was too great. In situations where the respondents preferred to practice a foreign language, they made great efforts to answer the questions in detail.

I also felt that my status as a foreigner was an advantage, in the sense that some respondents felt that they could easily confide in me since I was outside their network of relationships, and they knew that eventually I would return to Switzerland. The guarantee of preserving their anonymity and our frequent meetings allowed me to collect real confidences from some of them; sometimes even asking me for advice. In the various interactions with the interviewees, belonging to the same birth cohort as I, I often found myself in the position of a sympathetic friend. This attitude was reinforced by the fact that the topics discussed were, from the respondents' point of view, real daily concerns.

4.3.3 Data Analysis

In a first step, quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately to answer each of the dimensions of the research question to which they related. This separation between quantitative and qualitative analyses is obviously not "pure". Given

that the different analyses were made by the same person, the results obtained on one side influenced my reading of the results obtained on the other side. This process is referred to as "cross-talk" between the different phases of the analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In a second step, the triangulation of the results allowed me to make inferences. The iterative process of triangulation between statistical and thematic analyses enabled me, on the one hand, to identify trends and recurrences in the quantitative and qualitative data, and on the other hand, to make links between the different levels of analysis.

Regarding the quantitative strand of the research, the analyses rely on biographical analysis. To examine the sequence of transitions over the life-course and their variations, I used the R software and the package TraMineR. These longitudinal analyses consider as a unit of analysis the entire sequences of successive states occupied by the individuals during a given period. It makes it possible to highlight continuities and changes over the life-course in one specific trajectory, or in several at once. This latter method, which allows to analyze several trajectories simultaneously, is called "multichannel sequence analysis (MCSA)" (Gauthier et al., 2010). From these analyses, I sought to obtain a typology using Optimal Matching (Gabadinho et al., 2011). I also constructed logistic regression models on SPSS in order to measure the association between the occurrence of an event and the factors likely to explain it. Using a "generalized linear model" I also sought to estimate the risk of occurrence of a given event by evaluating the effect of explanatory variables on the transitions examined (Mills, 2011).[11]

In general, the quality of inferences is determined by the validity of the results produced. Statistical tests allow to verify the validity of the models, or if the relationships found between dependent and independent variables are reliable. The intensity of the conclusions produced is then proportional to the level of significance of the results found in the statistical analyses. Regarding the qualitative strand of the research, the quality of inferences depends on the position of the researcher and the interviewees at the time of conducting the interviews. The position of the researcher is not neutral. Hence extensive and detailed descriptions of the context and the conduct of the research enable the researcher to adopt a reflexive stance in relation to the process of data collection, their analysis, and the production of findings. It is a question of distancing oneself, of situating the respondents' answers in relation to the context, their social condition, and their specific situation with regard to the issues addressed (Fielding, 2008; Schatzmann & Strauss, 1973). Regarding focus groups and observation, the relative positions of the participants need to be taken into account in order to identify potential biases in the respondents' answers and in the researcher's preliminary interpretations (Bertaux, 2013).

To analyze the corpus of qualitative data, I looked for a thematic coherence between the interviews by transcribing and coding the segments that referred to shared topics. I relied on thematic analysis to reveal the respondents' practices and representations. Based on the initial hypotheses and the data, I identified the themes

[11] I warmly thank Jean-Marie Le Goff for guiding and advising me in the construction of this model.

and built the analytical framework. This is an iterative process between the hypotheses and the corpus (Blanchet & Gotman, 2007). The MAXQDA software enables to hierarchize the analysis grid into main themes and secondary themes to form units of meaning. This has the advantage of decomposing the information as much as possible, separating the factual elements and the elements of meaning, and thus minimizing uncontrolled interpretations. During this process, I made sure that the division into themes did not change the meaning of the isolated interview excerpts. Seeking to develop the knowledge as close as possible to reality, I supplemented this corpus with secondary data, such as statistics, reports, newspapers, literature, broadcasts, and TV series related to my subject of study. Although interviews are the only way of accessing people's experiences and point of view, secondary data can be used to contextualize them and relate them to facts. In particular, the analysis of TV dramas enabled me to bring out norms and values related to the transition to adulthood conveyed within society, with a particular attention paid to representations of femininity and masculinitiy. Therefore, the whole corpus of data (primary and secondary, qualitative, and quantitative) enabled me to look in different directions: from the inside, from the outside, from above, from below and from the side.

Bibliography

Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist, 55*, 469–480.

Arnett, J. J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood. The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*. Oxford University Press.

Arnett, J. J., & Tanner, J. L. (2006). *Emerging adults in America: Coming of age in the 21st century*. American Psychology Association.

Badger, S., Nelson, L. J., & Barry, C. M. N. (2006). Perceptions of the transition to adulthood among Chinese and American emerging adults. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 30*, 84–93.

Bao, L. (包蕾萍). (2005). 'Temporal exploration of the life-course theoretical perspective (Shengming Licheng Lilun de Shijianguan Tanxi)'. *Sociological Research,* 120–133.

Bao, L (包蕾萍). (2012). Life-course of China's only children: A view of the institutional choice on the family-state relationship (Zhongguo Dushengzinü Shengming Licheng: Jia Guo Shiyexia de Yizhong Zhiduhua Xuanze)'. *Social Science*, 90–101.

Baudelot, C., & Establet, R. (2000). *Avoir 30 ans en 1968 et en 1998*. Seuil.

Belli, R. F., Sherman, J. A., Van Hoewyk, J., & Alcser, K. H. (2009). The implementation of a computerized event history calendar questionnaire for research in life-course epidemiology. In R. F. Belli, F. P. Stafford, & D. F. Alwin (Eds.), *Calendar and time diary. Methods in life-course research*. SAGE.

Berlin, G., Furstenberg, F. F., & Waters, M. C. (2010). Introducing the issue. *The Future of Children, 20*, 3–18.

Bertaux, D. (2013). *The life story*. Armand Colin.

Bian, Y., & Logan, J. R. (1996). Market transition and the persistence of power: The changing stratification system in urban China. *American Sociological Review, 61*, 739–758.

Bidart, C. (2006). Les Transitions Vers l'âge Adulte: Différenciations Sociales et Culturelles. In C. Bidart (Ed.), *Devenir adulte aujourd'hui. Perspectives internationales* (pp. 9–20). L'Harmattan.

Billari, F. C., & Liefbroer, A. C. (2010). Towards a new pattern of transition to adulthood. *Advances in Life-course Research, 15*, 59–75.
Blanchet, A., & Gotman, A. (2007). *L'entretien*. Armand Colin.
BMBS, (Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics). (2022). *Beijing statistical yearbook*. Survey office of the National bureau of statistics in Beijing.
BNS, 国务院人口普查办公室，国家统计局人口和就业统计局司编 (State Council Population Census Office, National Bureau of Statistics Population and Employment Statistics Division). (2012). 中国*2010*年人口普查资料 *(China 2010 Population Census Data), Tabulation on the 2010 Population Census of the People's Republic of China* . Vol. 上册 (Volume I), Book I.
BNS, (National Bureau of Statistics). (2019). *China statistical yearbook*. China Statistics Press.
Booth, A., Crouter, A. C., & Shanahan, M. J. (1999). *Transitions to adulthood in a changing economy: No work, no family, no future?* Praeger.
Brückner, H., & Mayer, K. U. (2005). De-standardization of the life-course: What it might mean? And if it means anything, whether it actually took place? In R. Macmillan (Ed.), *The structure of the life-course: Standardized? Individualized? Differentiated?* (Advances in life-course research) (Vol. 9, pp. 27–53). Elsevier.
Buchmann, M., & Kriesi, I. (2011). Transition to adulthood in Europe. *Annual Review of Sociology, 37*(23), 1–23.
Cabestan, J.-P. (1994). *Le Système Politique de La Chine Populaire*. Presses Universitaires de France.
Cabestan, J.-P. (2014). *Le Système Politique Chinois. Un Nouvel Équilibre Autoritaire*. Presses de Sciences Po.
Cain, L. D., Jr. (1964). Life-course and social structure. In R. el Faris (Ed.), *Handbook of modern sociology*. Rand McNally.
Cavalli, A., & Galland, O. (1993). *L'allongement de La Jeunesse*. Actes Sud.
Chai, Y. (柴彦威). (2009). 中国城市单位居民的迁居：生命历程方法的解读 (Zhongguo chengshi danwei jumin de qianju: Shengminglicheng fangfa de jiedu. The Residential Mobility of Urban Danwei Residents: A Life Course Approach). 国际城市规划 (Guoji Chengshi Guihua, International City Planning), 24, 7–14.
Chen, F. (2005). Residential patterns of parents and their married children in contemporary China: A life course approach. *Population Research and Policy Review, 24*, 125–148.
Chen, F., & Korinek, K. (2010). Family life course transitions and rural household economy during China's market reform. *Demography, 47*, 963–987.
Cherlin, A. (2004). The deinstitutionalization of American marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66*, 848–861.
Connelly, R., & Zheng, Z. (2007). Educational access for China's post-cultural revolution generation: enrollment patterns in 1990. In E. Hannum & A. Park (Eds.), *Education and reform in China* (pp. 64–80). Routledge.
Constantin, S. V. (2016). Reforms, individualisation and informal employment in urban China. In S. Routh & V. Borghi (Eds.), *Workers and the global informal economy* (Interdisciplinary perspectives). Routledge.
Constantin, S. V. (2018). Increasing employment precariousness in post-socialist China: Everyone equal in a world of uncertainty? *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research, 26*(4), 278–294. https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2018.1534139
Constantin, S. V. (2021). Devenir Adulte Dans La Société Chinoise Postsocialiste. Une Quête de Sens Au Prisme Des Parcours de Vie de Jeunes Adultes Résidant à Beijing. *Revue Jeunes et Société, 6*(2), 54–78.
d'Epinay, L., Christian, J.-F. B., Cavalli, S., & Spini, D. (2005). Le Parcours de Vie: Émergence d'un Paradigme Interdisciplinaire. In J.-F. Guillaume (Ed.), *Parcours de vie. Regards croisés sur la construction des biographies contemporaines* (pp. 187–210). Les Editions de l'Université de Liège.
Du Bois-Reymond, M., & Blasco, A. L. (2003). Yo-Yo transitions and misleading trajectories: Toward integrated transition policies for young adults in Europe. In A. Lopez Blasco,

W. McNeish, & A. Walther (Eds.), *Young people and contradictions of inclusion* (Towards integrated transition policies in Europe). Policy Press.
Elder, G. H. (1999). *Children of the great depression. Social change in life experience*. Westview Press.
Elder, G. H. (埃尔德). (2002). *Children of the great depression (Daxiaotiao de Haizimen, children of the great depression)*. Lin Publishing House (lin chubanshe).
Elder, G. H., Johnson, M. K., & Crosnoe, R. (2003). The emergence and development of life-course theory. In J. T. Mortimer & M. J. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the life-course* (pp. 3–19). Kluwer.
Fielding, N. (2008). Analytic density, postmodernism and applied multiple method research. In M. M. Bergman (Ed.), *Advances in mixed methods research. Theories and applications*. SAGE.
Fukuda, S. (2013). The changing role of women's earnings in marriage formation in Japan. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 107–128.
Fulda, B. E., Nauck, B., & Ren, Q. (2019). The transition to adulthood in China, Germany and the US: Prevalence and timing in private and professional life. *Chinese Journal of Sociology, 5*(2), 193–213.
Fuligni, A., & Zhang, W. (2004). Attitudes toward family obligation among adolescents in contemporary urban and rural China. *Child Development, 75*, 180–192.
Furlong, A., & Cartmel, F. (2007). *Young people and social change. New perspectives*. Open University Press.
Furstenberg, F. F. (2010). On a new schedule: Transitions to adulthood and family change. *The Future of Children, 20*, 67–87.
Furstenberg, F. F., Rumbaut, R. G., & Settersten, R. (2008). On the frontier of adulthood. In R. Settersten, F. F. Furstenberg, & R. G. Rumbaut (Eds.), *On the frontier of adulthood. Theory, research, and public policy* (pp. 3–27). The University of Chicago Press.
Gabadinho, A., Ritschard, G., Müller, N. S., & Studer, M. (2011). Analyzing and visualizing state sequences in R with TraMineR. *Journal of Statistical Software, 40*, 1–37.
Galland, O. (2000). Entrer Dans La Vie Adulte: Des Étapes Toujours plus Tardives Mais Resserrées. *Economie et Statistique, 337–338*, 13–36.
Galland, O. (2009). *Les Jeunes*. La Découverte.
Gauthier, J.-A., Widmer, E., Bucher, P., & Notredame, C. (2010). Multichannel sequence analysis applied to social science data. *Sociological Methodology, 40*, 1–38.
Giele, J. Z., & Elder, G. H. (1998). *Methods of life-course research. Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. SAGE.
Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research* (Vol. 17, p. 364). Aldine.
Guo, Y., & Chang, A. (2006). Life cycle and social security: A sociological exploration of the life-course of laid - off workers. *Social Sciences in China, 27*, 19–33.
Hannum, E., & Liu, J. (2005). Adolescent transitions to adulthood in reform-era China. In C. B. Lloyd, J. R. Behrman, N. P. Stromquist, & B. Cohen (Eds.), *The changing transitions to adulthood in developing countries* (pp. 270–319). The National Academies Press.
Heinz, W. R. (2009). Youth transition in an age of uncertainty. In A. Furlong (Ed.), *Handbook of youth and young adulthood. New perspectives and agendas*. Routledge.
Heinz, W. R., & Marshall, V. W. (2003). *Social dynamics of the life-course. Transitions, institutions, and interrelations*. Walter de Gruyter.
Heinz, W. R., Huinink, J., & Weymann, A. (2009). *The life-course reader. Individuals and societies across time*. Campus Verlag.
Hogan, D. P., & Astone, N. M. (1986). The transition to adulthood. *Annual Review of Sociology, 12*, 109–130.
Huang, L.-W. W. (2013). The transition tempo and life-course orientation of young adults in Taiwan. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 69–85.
Hwang, K.-K. (1999). Filial piety and loyalty: Two types of social identification in Confucianism. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 2*, 163–183.

Ishida, H. (2013). The transition to adulthood among Japanese youths: Understanding courtship in Japan. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 86–106.
Ji, Y. (2013). Negotiating marriage and schooling: Nepalese Women's transition to adulthood. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 194–213.
Jones, G. W., & Yeung, W.-J. J. (2014). Marriage in Asia. *Journal of Family Issues, 35*, 1567–1583.
Jones, G. W., Hull, T. H., & Mohamad, M. (2011). *Changing marriage patterns in Southeast Asia. Economic and socio-cultural dimensions*. Routledge.
Kane, D., & Li, K. (2021). Gendering a new marker of adulthood: Home ownership in Southwest China. *Sociological Forum, 36*(3), 668–688.
Kohler, H.-P., Billari, F. C., & Ortega, J. A. (2002). The emergence of lowest-low fertility in Europe during the 1990s. *Population and Development Review, 28*(4), 641–680.
Kohli, M. (2009). The world we forgot: A historical review of the life-course. In W. R. Heinz, J. Huinink, & A. Weymann (Eds.), *The life-course reader. Individuals and societies across time* (pp. 64–90). Campus Verlag.
Lelièvre, E. (2005). Introduction à Une Approche Quantitative Des Parcours de Vie. Analyse et Collecte Des Données. In J.-F. Guillaume (Ed.), *Le parcours de vie: émergence d'un paradigme interdisciplinaire* (pp. 177–185). Les Editions de l'Université de Liège.
Lesthaeghe, R. (2010). The unfolding story of the second demographic transition. *Population and Development Review, 36*(2), 211–251.
Li, C. (李成). (2013a). The Rise of the Middle Class in China (Zhongguo Zhongchan Jieji de Xingqi). In C. (李成) Li (ed.), 'Middle Class' China: Beyond economic transformation, the emerging Chinese middle class (*'zhongchan' zhongguo: chaoyue jingji zhuanxing de xinxing zhongguo zhongchanjieji*). Shanghai Translation Publishing House (Shanghai yiwen chubanshe).
Li, C. (李春玲). (2013b). Experience, attitudes and social transition: A sociological study of the post-80's generation (*Jingyu, Taidu Yu Shehui Zhuanxing: 80 Hou Qingnian de Shehuixue Yanjiu*). Social Sciences Academic Press (shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe).
Li, Q. (李强), Deng, J. (邓建伟), & Xiao, Z. (晓筝). (1999). 'Social change and individual development: The paradigm of life-course research and its methods (Shehui Bianqian Yu Geren Fazhan: Shengming Licheng Yanjiu Yanjiu de Fanshi Yu Fangfa)'. Sociological Research (*Shehui Yanjiu*), 1–18.
Liefbroer, A. C., & Toulemon, L. (2010). Demographic perspectives on the transition to adulthood: An introduction. *Advances in Life-course Research, 15*, 53–58.
Lin, Q. (2013). Lost in transformation? The employment trajectories of China's cultural revolution cohort. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 172–193.
Lü, X., & Perry, E. J. (1997). *Danwei. The changing Chinese workplace in historical and comparative perspective*. M.E Sharpe.
Marshall, V. W., & Mueller, M. M. (2003). Theoretical roots of the life-course perspective. In W. R. Heinz & V. W. Marshall (Eds.), *Social dynamics of the life-course. Transitions, institutions, and interrelations*. Aldine De Gruyter.
Mayer, K. U. (2001). The paradox of global social change and national path dependencies. In A. Woodward & M. Kohli (Eds.), *Inclusions and exclusions in European societies* (pp. 89–110). Routledge.
Mayer, K. U. (2004). Whose lives? How history, societies, and institutions define and shape life-courses. *Research in Human Development, 1*, 161–187.
Meng, X., & Gregory, R. G. (2002). The impact of interrupted education on subsequent educational attainment: A cost of the Chinese cultural revolution. *Economic Development and Cultural Change, 50*, 935–959.
Mills, C. W. (2006). *L'imagination Sociologique*. Editions la Découverte.
Mills, M. (2011). *Introducing survival and event history analysis*. SAGE.
Mitchell, B. A. (2006). The boomerang age from childhood to adulthood: Emergent trends and issues for aging families. *Canadian Studies in Population, 33*, 155–178.

Modell, J., Furstenberg, F. F., & Hershberg, T. (1976). Social change and transitions to adulthood in historical perspective. *Journal of Family History, 1*, 7–32.

Nahar, Q., Xenos, P., & Abalos, J. (2013). The changing transition to adulthood across Southeast Asia: A census approach to cross-national comparisons*, 646*, 42–68.

Nelson, L. J., & Chen, X. (2007). Emerging adulthood in China: The role of social and cultural factors. *Child Development Perspectives, 1*, 86–91.

Neugarten, B. L., Moore, J. W., & Lowe, J. C. (1965). Age norms, age constraints, and adult socialization. *American Journal of Sociology, 70*, 710–717.

Oyserman, D., Coon, H. M., & Kemmelmeier, M. (2002). Rethinking individualism and collectivism: Evaluation of theoretical assumptions and meta-analyses. *Psychological Bulletin, 128*, 3–72.

Park, H. (2013). The transition to adulthood among Korean youths: Transition markers in productive and reproductive spheres. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 129–148.

Perelli-Harris, B. (2008). Family formation in post-soviet Ukraine: Changing effects of education in a period of rapid social change. *Social Forces, 87*(2), 767–794.

Quivy, R., & Van Campenhoudt, L. (1995). *Manuel de Recherche En Sciences Sociales*. Dunod.

Riley, M. W. (1979). Introduction: Life-course perspectives. In M. W. Riley (Ed.), *Aging from birth to death: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (Vol. 1). Westview Press.

Sapin, M., Spini, D., & Widmer, E. (2007). *Les Parcours de Vie. De l'adolescence Au Grand Âge*. Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes.

Schatzmann, L., & Strauss, A. (1973). *Field research: Strategies for a natural sociology*. Prentice-Hall.

Schoeni, R. F., & Ross, K. E. (2008). Material assistance from families during the transition to adulthood. In R. Settersten, F. F. Furstenberg, & R. G. Rumbaut (Eds.), *On the frontier of adulthood. Theory, research, and public policy* (pp. 396–416). The University of Chicago Press.

Settersten, R., & Ray, B. E.. (2010). *Not quite adults*.

Settersten, R., Furstenberg, F. F., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2008). *On the frontier of adulthood. Theory, research, and public policy*. The University of Chicago Press.

Shanahan, M. J. (2000). Pathways to adulthood in changing societies: Variability and mechanisms in life-course perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26*, 667–692.

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). Foundations of mixed methods research. *Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences*.

Thorton, A., & Philipov, D. (2008). Sweeping changes in marriage, cohabitation and childbearing in central and Eastern Europe: New insights from the developmental idealism framework. *European Journal of Population, 25*, 123–156.

Tian, F. F. (2016). Transition to adulthood in China in 1982−2005: A structural view. *Demographic Research, 34*(16), 451–466.

Utomo, A., Reimondos, A., Utomo, I. D., MacDonald, P., & Hull, T. (2013). Female migrants and the transition to adulthood in greater Jakarta. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 648*, 70–86.

Van de Velde, C. (2008). *Devenir Adulte. Sociologie Comparée de La Jeunesse En Europe*. Presses Universitaires de France.

Wang, F. (2005). *Organizing through division and exclusion. China's Hukou System*. Stanford University Press.

Wu, X., & Xie, Y. (2003). Does the market pay off? Earnings returns to education in urban China. *American Sociological Review, 68*, 425–442.

Xenos, P., Sulistinah, A., Hui, S. L., Ping, K. L., Chai, P., Corazon, R., & Shyam, T. (2007). Delayed Asian transition to adulthood. A perspective from National Youth Surveys. *Asian Population Studies, 2*, 149–185.

Xie, Y., & Hannum, E. (1996). Regional variation in earnings inequality in reform era urban China. *American Journal of Sociology, 101*, 950–992.

Yeung, W.-J. J., & Alipio, C. (2013). Transitioning to adulthood in Asia: School, work, and family life. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 6–41.
Yeung, W.-J. J., & Shu, H. (2013). Coming of age in times of change: The transition to adulthood in China. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 149–171.
Zhang, Q. F. (2004). Economic transition and new patterns of parent-adult child Coresidence in urban China. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66*, 1231–1245.
Zhao, Z., & Chen, W. (2008). Changes in household formation and composition in China since the mid-twentieth century. *Journal of Population Research, 25*, 267–286.
Zhong, J., & Arnett, J. J. (2014). Conceptions of adulthood among migrant women workers in China. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 38*(3), 255–265.
Zhou, X. (2004). *The state and the life chances in urban China. Redistribution and stratification, 1949–1994*. Cambridge University Press.
Zhou, X., & Hou, L. (1999). Children of the cultural revolution: The state and the life-course in the People's Republic of China. *American Sociological Review, 64*, 12–36.
Zhou, X., & Moen, P. (2001). Explaining life chances in China's economic transformation: A life-course approach. *Social Science Research, 30*, 552–577.
Zhou, X., Tuma, N. B., & Moen, P. (1997). Institutional change and patterns of job shifts in urban China, 1949–1993. *American Sociological Review, 62*, 339–365.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

Part II
Coming of Age in Uncertain Times

By the end of the 1970s, it had become clear to China's leaders that acting on the quality of its population–by seeking to raise it—constituted a way for the country to regain its former greatness (Greenhalgh, 2010). This project involved the implementation of population policies. These public policies, located at the intersection between biology, medical and social sciences, are eminently political. They are used by the Party-State to administer and govern the population. Among other things, they constitute a means to control migration. For instance, through the residence booklet system which enables the State to control people's mobility within the country. Population policies are also useful to control demographic growth. Acting either, for example, on the mortality rate through investment in the health sector, or on the fertility rate by limiting the number of authorized births.

Since the mid-1950s, and especially since the late 1970s, the population has become a central object of governance. The Party-State then dream of transforming the country into a prosperous and modern Nation that enjoys a strong footing on the international stage. In this context, families who invest, both emotionally and materially, in the development of their children, are socially valued. This discourse about "quality" especially resonates with families where the closure of Universities during the Cultural Revolution and the sending-down movement to the countryside of urban youth[1] meant that it was not possible to pursue higher education. Among them, some project their social ascent through their children, or rather that of the family group (Chicharro, 2010; Fong, 2004). This collective behavior is further reinforced through the publication of successful novels, such as "Harvard Girl – Liu Ying—Documentary on quality training" published in 2001 and reissued in 2009 and 2014 (Liu & Zhang, 2001), which illustrate how the fierce competition within the educational system and on the labour market leads individuals to maneuver to stand out from each other and to give their children the ability to stand out. Tingting's parents subscribed to this logic. From the time their only son was a child, they

[1] In the People's Republic of China (PRC), between 1966 and 1978, during the ultural revolution, about 17 million young Chinese who had completed their secondary education had to leave their hometowns to work in the countryside (Bonnin, 2004).

sought to maximize his chances of getting into one of the country's top universities. Tingting was raised in Shanghai in a family belonging to the upper-middle class (born in 1993, urban, Shanghai *hukou*, Bachelor). Tingting's journey is emblematic of the young elites. At the time I was conducting the interviews, his father was a sales manager and his mother a project manager. His parents saved money all their life so that their only son could go to a prestigious University. The family project was for Tingting to enroll in the best high school in the city in order to maximize his chances of obtaining excellent results in the University entrance exam (*gaokao*) and thus be accepted at the University of his choice. Once admitted to one of the best Universities in the country, his parents continued to invest in their son's educational path by financing his university fees (5000 RMB per year), his accommodation (1000 RMB per year) and his pocket money (between 1000 and 1500 RMB per month). In February 2013, during the Chinese New Year holidays and his third year at university (bachelor degree), he participated in the GIMUN (Geneva International Model United Nations) in New York. His parents financed the trip (40,000 RMB). They did it again in 2013–2014, when he went to study a semester at Sciences-Po Paris. Because of his excellent academic record, he was awarded a scholarship to study abroad. While it covered his university fees, his parents had to finance his accommodation, as well as his daily expenses in Paris. Tingting, like all the young adults who participated in this research, believes that "*Nowadays to enjoy life, one must not only work hard but also study hard*". According to the respondents, there is a royal road to success ("*chenggong lu*") that goes through a good education. This is not surprising since according to the values disseminated the level of "quality" of a person is partly correlated to his academic level. Yet this rational conduct induces a collective irrationality. It encourages more and more youth to graduate from university, and that in turn leads to a progressive devaluation of the value of diplomas on the labor market (Liu, 2011).

Tingting is aware of the important role played by "interpersonal relationships" (*guanxi*) to achieve his goals and build a career. He admits that "*those around me are elites. I prefer to be part of elite groups"*. One of the strategies implemented by some young adults to increase their chances of professional success is joining the Chinese Communist Party (CCP): 20% of the respondents born between 1980 and 1985, regardless of gender, made this choice. Data shows that it is primarily young adults with a high level of education who seek to become members of the CCP. Among all the young adults met (data corpus combining both quantitative and qualitative), over 60% of the respondents who have obtained a doctorate or a master's degree are members of the CCP. Whereas less than 10% of the respondents with an education level equal to or lower than high school are members of the CCP. Beyond the numbers, it should be kept in mind that it is primarily the students from the country's best universities who become members of the CCP (Rosen, 2004). This trend reflects the CCP's desire to focus its recruitment efforts on young intellectuals. This move towards the formation of a "technocratic elite" marks a turning point from the Maoist period, during which workers and peasants were favored by the Party-State (Andreas, 2009; Li & Walder, 2001). Tingting explains that being a member of the CCP: *"has advantages for finding a civil service job or*

for working in a state-owned company. You have more chances of being promoted too. If you want to continue in the system, it's necessary". He thinks that "*it is out of pragmatism that students decide to join the CCP: to find a job, to be promoted, to be elected as a cadre*", because "*to secure a promising career it is better to be a member of the CCP* "(born in 1993, urban, Shanghai *hukou*, Bachelor). Moreover, from the employers' point of view, the fact that someone is a member of the CCP may indicate that this person is disciplined and will not seek to disturb public order (Hsu, 2007).

The respondents are very clear-sighted. Whether they are urban or rural, from Beijing or not, men or women, they all identify the *hukou* as a source of discrimination. Several have clearly stated that the *hukou* system "*makes no sense*", that it is "*not fair*" and that it "*should be abolished*". This chapter shows, on the one hand, how young adults from rural and urban backgrounds transition to adulthood in an uncertain society exposed to market values and competition. On the other hand, it sheds light on the strategies they deploy to cope with the many difficulties of integrating into a job market that is increasingly precarious, competitive, and characterized by discrimination, institutionalized among other things by the residence booklet system (*hukou*).

Bibliography

Andreas, J. (2009). *Rise of the red engineers. The cultural revolution and the origins of China's new class*. Stanford University Press.

Bonnin, M. (2004). *Lost Generation. The Movement of Sending Educated Youth to the Countryside in China, 1968–1980*. Editions of the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences.

Chicharro, G. (2010). *Le Fardeau Des Petits Empereurs*. Société d'ethnologie.

Fong, V. L. (2004). *Only Hope. Coming of age under China's one-child policy*. Stanford University Press.

Greenhalgh, S. (2010). *Cultivating global citizens. Population in the rise of China*. Harvard University Press.

Hsu, C. L. (2007). *Creating market socialism. How ordinary people are shaping class and status in China*. Duke University Press.

Li, B., & Walder, A. (2001). Career advancement as party patronage: Sponsored mobility into the Chinese administrative elite (1949–1996). *American Journal of Sociology, 106*, 1371–1408.

Liu, F. (2011). *Urban youth in China: Modernity, the internet and the self*. Routledge.

Liu, W., & Zhang, X. (2001). *Harvard girl – Liu Ying – Documentary on quality training*. Writers Publishing House.

Rosen, S. (2004). The state of youth/youth and the state in early 21st-century China. The triumph of the urban rich? In P. H. Gries & S. Rosen (Eds.), *State and society in 21st-century China. Crisis, contention, and legitimation*. Routledge Curzon.

Chapter 5
Exploring Pathways to Adulthood

Contents

5.1 A Longer Transition to Adulthood in Post-collectivist China 64
5.2 Family Roles and Responsibilities as Central Values 67
  5.2.1 Marriage, "an existential question" for Young Adults and their Families 67
  5.2.2 Being Good Wives and Good Mothers (Xianqi Liangmu) 68
  5.2.3 "Housing [...] Is the Foundation of the Family" 71
Bibliography 77

Abstract Through examining the life-course of the cohorts born post-1950s and post-1980s, this fifth chapter reveals a substantial extension in the duration of education for the latter group, impacting subsequent life events.

The chapter also discusses the significance of family roles and responsibilities in the transition to adulthood in China, emphasizing the central role of marriage in this process. It explores how Confucian thought, government policies, and societal expectations contribute to a normative approach to marriage and parenthood. In particular, it sheds light on President Xi Jinping's discourses that promote family values as essential for national development and social harmony.

Moreover, the analyses delve into the portrayal of marriage and housing in Chinese TV series. Reflecting societal norms and expectations, they reveal and discuss the pressure on women to be married at a certain age, by calling those, who are not, "leftover women". TV drama can be understood as a window on the tensions existing between traditional values and changing gender roles. Last but not least, the findings highlight the challenges young adults face in achieving homeownership, and the meaning they give to this transition, as a symbol of stability and financial autonomy, in their pathway to adulthood.

Keywords Transition to adulthood · Longer · Roles · Responsibilities · Leftover women · Gender

© The Author(s) 2024

S. V. Constantin, *A Life Course Perspective on Chinese Youths*, Life Course Research and Social Policies 17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57216-6_5

5.1 A Longer Transition to Adulthood in Post-collectivist China

The inter-cohort analyses of the stages of the transition to adulthood reveal the emergence of a new social time – higher education – in the life-course of young adults (Fig. 6.1). Urban youth study on average 3 years longer than their elders: the post-1980s finish their education on average around 21 years old, while the post-1950s finish it on average around 18 years old. At 22 years old, 80% of respondents born between 1950 and 1959 had finished their studies; whereas at the same age only 65% of urban respondents born between 1980 and 1985 have completed their schooling.

One should remember that most universities were closed during the cultural revolution (1966–1972). During this period many students and professors were sent-down to the countryside to either work on farms, monitor the borders, or teach (Bonnin, 2004). Among this birth cohort, urban young adults who were able to stay in the city were mainly assigned to a state or collective enterprise to work.

From 1972, universities gradually reopened their doors (Bernstein, 1977; Unger, 1982). The university entrance exam was reinstated in 1977. As part of the "four modernizations" championed by Deng Xiaoping, schooling and diploma regained a foremost place. In 1986, the Party-State declared 9 years of primary and secondary education compulsory for all citizens. At the same time, numerous technical schools opened (Zhou et al., 1998). These changes were followed in 1999 by a policy in favor of the development of higher education (Li, 2013a, 2013b). China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 further strengthened public policies in favor of equality in access to education. This movement is reflected in the publication of laws and directives in favor of the expansion of higher education (Ren & Zhu, 2014).

The analyses carried out indicate that these policies have been effective (Fig. 5.1). However, while access to education has significantly improved for both men and women, the formers nevertheless tend to study longer than the latter. The analyses also reveal the structuring role played by the type of residence booklet (urban/rural) in the educational path of young adults. Urban dwellers tend to pursue longer studies than young people from rural areas.

The emergence of this new stage in the life-course of the post-1980 birth cohort impacts the age of occurrence of other events that are constitutive of the transition to adulthood. These specific events not only tend to occur later in the life-course, but the findings also reveal variations in the duration spent in these different states. The longer time spent at school has led to a relative delay in the mean age at first employment and therefore to young adults' financial independence. While examining the average age at transitions for the two birth-cohorts, we observe among respondents born in the 1980s the almost perfect juxtaposition of the average age for school termination and the average age at first employment. On average urban dwellers, regardless of their gender, finish school just before 21-year-old and enter the labor market at 21-year-old. While young people from rural areas finish their studies on average between 18 or 19-year-old and start working at 19-year-old.

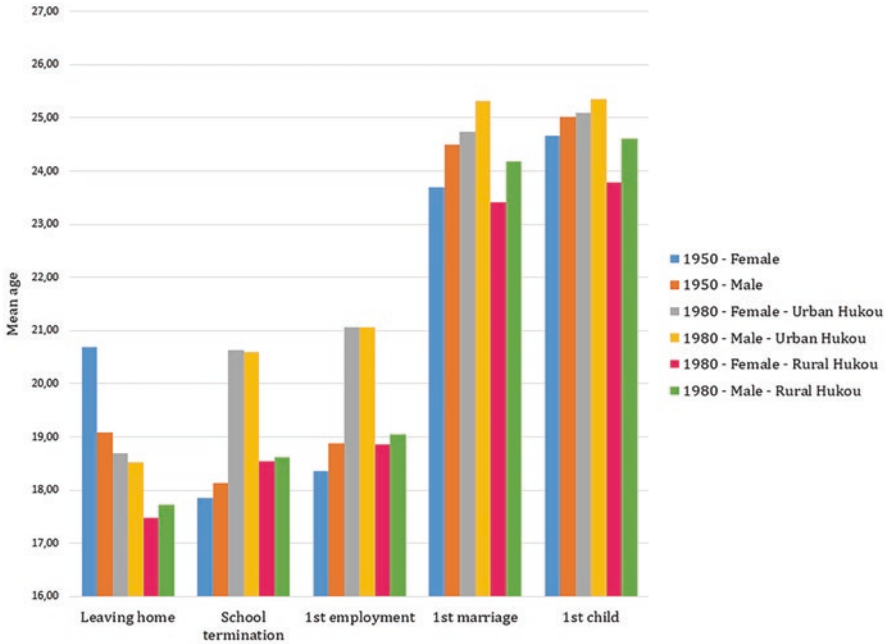


Fig. 5.1 Intergenerational comparison of the mean age at transitions (1950–1959 and 1980–1985) (Agricultural employment is also considered a first job)

The delayed age for school termination, the postponement of the age to first job, and variations in the average duration spent in a professional activity for young people born in the 1980s, compared to the cohort born in the 1950s, are the result of public policies supporting the expansion of post-secondary education in the 1980s and the dismantling of work units in the 1990s. They also had the consequence of pushing back the age of young adults' financial autonomy. In post-collectivist China, it is no longer the political profile[1] of candidates that matters to find a job, but their level of qualification. Indeed, young adults are no longer guaranteed a job for life at the end of their studies. They must find their place in an extremely competitive labor market. In this context, the level of education (diploma) turns out to be a comparative advantage for finding a job that meets their life expectations. In this context, to support their children, families invest more and more in their education. Families' bigger investments in their children's education, and the trend towards a later access to a stable job also leads to a delay in the transition to marriage and

[1] During the Maoist period, the position held in a work unit, the possibility of continuing or not continuing studies, or even vocational training were evaluated based on the political profile of the candidates. The "blood theory" prevailed, according to which not only the "counter-revolutionaries" had to be punished, but also their children and parents in application of the principle: "Hero father, prodigal son; reactionary father, bastard son" (laozi yinxiong, er haohan, laozi fandong, er hundan) (Béja, 2011, p. 12).

parenthood. Whereas their paths to adulthood were disrupted by the Cultural revolution and the send-down movement to the countryside, 87% of the respondents born in the 1950s were married before the age of 28 and 70% gave birth to a child before this very age.

Life-course theorists who studied this birth cohort revealed that these socio-historical changes had the effect of delaying the stages of their transition to adulthood. Some young people belonging to the sent-down generation resumed their studies after 1976. Other members of this birth cohort only acceded to a job (non-agricultural job) after the end of this State policy in 1976. In addition, interesting research pointed out that this generation tended to wait for their definitive return to the city to get married and have a child (Chen, 1999; Lin, 2013; Meng & Gregory, 2002; Zhou & Hou, 1999).

The birth control campaign (*wanxishao*), introduced in 1973, may also explain the delay in the age of first marriage and first childbirth for members of this birth cohort. Since this demographic policy urged the population to late marriage and procreation, spacing between births and few births (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005).[2] Out-of-wedlock births were not socially accepted at this time (and still largely today). Therefore, as revealed by the analyses carried out in this book, women's age at first birth was *de facto* delayed by this campaign.

The end of the "*wanxishao*" campaign at the end of the 1970s, as well as the new marriage law implemented on January 1, 1981 – according to which the legal age of marriage is 20 years for women and 22 years for men (article 5 of the marriage law)[3] – could have led to an earlier age at marriage and parenthood for the birth cohort born in the 1980s. However, the data reveal a delay in the average age towards these transitions. If we consider the paths of respondents up to the age of 27, we observe that the average age at first marriage went from 23–24-year-old for urban women born in the 1950s to 25–26-year-old for city dwellers born in the 1980s (Fig. 6.1). The inter-cohort comparative analysis of transition rates to first marriage and first birth of young people born in the 1980s confirms a postponement in the age of entry into the roles of spouses and parents. At 27-year-old, only 42% of urban respondents born between 1980 and 1985 were married, and 18% had had a child. Among them, just over 50% of women and 34% of men were married at the age of 27. They were 23% to have become mothers and 14% to have become fathers. At the same age, 63% of rural respondents were married and 50% gave birth to a child. Rural women were nearly 70% to be married at 27-year-old, and 57% had become mothers. Rural men were 58% to be married, and 44% to had become fathers at this age.

---

[2] In cities, where the policy was strictest, women were encouraged not to marry before 25 and men before 28. Couples were also encouraged not to have more than two children, with a 3–4 year interval between births. In the countryside, the marriage age is 23 for girls and 25 for boys. Couples are encouraged not to have more than three children, with 3 or 4 years between births. National minorities (10% of the population) are not affected by these measures.

[3] According to the same article (article 5), late marriage and late births are strongly encouraged: the age of marriage should not be earlier than 22 years for boys and 20 years for girls. Late marriage and late births are strongly encouraged (Marriage Law, 1981).

If the findings account for a lengthening of the journey towards adulthood in China, unlike what was observed in Germany by Brückner and Mayer (2005), the visible signs of a complexification of the life-course are less present in family trajectories than in work trajectories.

5.2 Family Roles and Responsibilities as Central Values

5.2.1 Marriage, "an existential question" for Young Adults and their Families

Family roles and responsibilities play a pivotal part in the meaning attributed by the respondents to the transition to adulthood, whereas in research conducted in Western countries, individualistic criteria such as financial autonomy, independent decision-making and a sense of responsibility are ranked first (Arnett & Galambos, 2003). In Confucian thought, the family occupies a privileged position. It is seen as "an extension of the individual" (Cheng, 1997:79). In pre-Maoist China, marriage was a relationship between two family groups that served to perpetuate the family lineage. The marriage law has institutionalized the legal foundation of marriage (the marriage contract) as the basis for living together (Marriage Law, 1981). This normative prescription is relayed in official discourses. For instance, Xi Jinping declared in December 2016 that the family constitutes an "*important foundation for national development, progress and social harmony*"[4] (CPCNews, 2016). Through this discourse, he explicitly urges the cadres of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to serve as an example to the population by promoting and valuing family values. In this speech, President Xi recalls that: "*families form the cells of society. When these are healthy, society prospers; but when family values are lacking, it is difficult to avoid social unrest*" (CPCNews, 2016). Families are described by Xi as the primary agent of socialization: good family traditions influence individual values and it is the responsibility of each individual to disseminate them (CPCNews, 2016).

Through this discourse, Xi Jinping openly places the family at the center of the country's project towards prosperity. As was already the case in the early 1950s with the marriage law, and then in the early 1980s with the institutionalization of birth control policies, the Party-State explicitly gives a social, political and economic role to the family by reminding that respect for family traditions benefits not only individuals and their family, but the society as a whole. Through this discourse, the Chinese President promotes a form of familialism, which gives the illusion, supported by the Party-State, that families have the power and resources to find solutions to systemic problems.

[4] Already in 2013, Xi Jinping had reminded, in front of the organization of women of China, the importance of promoting family values.

Marriage appears to be not only an important step in the transition to adulthood in China, but also a logical one. At no point in the interviews did the young adults question the validity of the normative model of the couple and the family. It is mentioned 75 times that marriage provides the necessary basis for the formation of a family and the birth of children. For male or female respondents, urban or rural, regardless of their level of education, marriage is not to be taken lightly. It is seen as "the most important thing in an individual's life" (Niu, born in 1982, urban, Hebei *hukou*, specialized college). According to Tingting, who is now an interpreter, marriage is a "normal" process: "*When you love each other, getting married to stabilize your life, I think it's quite natural*" (born in 1993, urban, Shanghai *hukou*, Bachelor). Han's words, who is an administrative employee, also go in this direction:

> "*I find it very strange not to want to start a family, because it's a core that brings comfort. Getting married, having children, it's something perfectly normal, a duty*" (born in 1989, rural, Jilin *hukou*, Bachelor).

According to Qian, who grew up in a city in Jilin province, in northeast China, where he returned to work as a University professor once he obtained his PhD from Peking University:

> *The family, especially a harmonious family, gives a person dignity. […] that's why in China, marriage, is not just a matter of feeling, but also an existential issue for individuals. […] A person who does not get married is single and childless. […] Through marriage the family is formed. […] Marriage is the first step to having a family. No registered marriage, no child in China.* (Born in 1982, urban, Jilin *hukou*, PhD)

This normative approach to marriage and parenthood has diverse consequences for men and women I interviewed.

*5.2.2 Being Good Wives and Good Mothers (*Xianqi Liangmu*)*

The themes of love and marriage are also at the heart of the TV series studied in the corpus. Cohabitation appears as a possible prerequisite before marriage, but the latter remains the final goal of the protagonists. The centrality of marriage shown in TV series could aim to respond to the continuous increase in the number of divorces, which doubled between 1985 and 1995, then tripled in 2005 (Kong, 2008).

The TV series examined convey an ideal of femininity which, unlike the portrayed ideal of masculinity, is less linked to women's professional trajectories than to their family trajectories. In "Beijing Youth" The dialogue below between Quanzheng and her friend, a psychologist, is revealing:

> Quanzheng: "*A woman who only has her career and no family (understood in the sense of having a husband and a child) is not a fulfilled woman*."[5]

[5] "A woman who only has a career and no family is not a successful woman" (*zhi you shiye mei you jiating de nüren bu shi yige chenggong de nüren*), DVD 1, sequence 3:08:30–3:08:39.

Her friend responds: "*But a man who only has his career and no family is however highly desirable*."[6]

Then, the latter continues: "*According to custom, the expectations for men are professional success and it is expected that women be good wives and caring mothers. If, we, women, wish for professional success like men, we must make a double effort. We must juggle a career and take care of our family, otherwise we face social condemnation*."[7]

Young women who wish to pursue a career are therefore subject to a double constraint and if they fail to juggle both, they expose themselves to social condemnation for having violated the norm of the good wife and devoted mother.

Television series convey another normative constraint addressed to young women: to get married before 28 years old. The term *shengnü*, which means "leftover women", is used in Chinese to refer to young women who are not married after 27 years old. Since 2007 and the official use of this term by the All-China Women's Federation and the Ministry of Education, Chinese media have also widely disseminated it through articles, surveys, cartoons, or editorials stigmatizing in particular young women who have completed higher education and who were still single after 27 years (Hong Fincher, 2014). The creation of this new social category by State structures can be interpreted as a desire of the latter to encourage marriages, birth rates and to maintain social peace. Indeed, "[t]he State Council [has named since 2007] the sex-ratio imbalance as one of the population pressures because it « causes a threat to social stability »"(Hong Fincher, 2014:28). The encouragement of marriage and reproduction of educated young women (through the stigmatization of those who are not married and who do not have children) is a means used by the government to increase the quality of the population. This goal is indeed one of the key objectives of the government. The latter has mandated, in this sense, the All-China Women's Federation, propaganda services, the Public Security Bureau and civil affairs to help it implement the family planning policy (Hong Fincher, 2014:29).

The interviews reflect the tensions produced by the normative prescriptions that concern young people in relation to marriage. Young women face a double contradictory injunction. A discourse on the "quality of the population ", which emerged when they were still children, values independence, reflexivity and physical and intellectual performance. While in parallel, another discourse, also conveyed by the State and its institutions, values wives and mothers capable of taking care of their spouse and their children by ensuring the formation of harmonious families. For all

[6] "But a man who only has a career and no family is indeed a diamond bachelor", (*keshi guangyou shiye mei you jiating de nanren queshi zuanshi wanglaowu*), DVD 1, sequence 3:08:30–3:08:39.

[7] "The secular expectation for men is to have a successful career, for women it is to be a good wife and mother. If we women want to achieve the same success as men, we have to put in double the effort. At the same time, we must also take care of the family, otherwise we will be condemned by society." (*shisu dui nanren de qiwang shi shiye youcheng, dui nüren de qiwang shi xianqi liangmu. Ruguo women nüren xiang huode tamen nanren tongyang de chenggong, jiu dei fuchu shuangbei de nuli. Tongshi hai dei jiangu jiating, fouze jiu yao zaodao shehui de qianze*), DVD 1, sequence 3:08:44–3:08:59.

the female respondents, marriage plays a central role in the meaning they give to the transition to adulthood, more important than the transition to employment. Concepts such as "stability" (*wending*), "guarantee" (*baozhang*) and "feeling of security" (*anquangan*) are frequently mentioned in the respondents' discourses on marriage. Wei, who is a teacher in Beijing and comes from Heilongjiang province, in north-east China, explains:

> *A cohabiting household cannot be considered a real family because the situation is not stable. [...] Such a situation would make me anxious because I have no guarantee. The government gives its approval for marriage, you receive a certificate, a marriage certificate. So, I consider marriage as legal (hefa) and cohabitation as illegal (fei hefa). If you cohabit, people might wonder: Why don't you get married? Why do you cohabit? I think that marriage is the first step, then you can live with your spouse. Because in China if you don't get married and you live in cohabitation, people will not only think that the couple has a problem, but that the whole family has a problem. Everyone will wonder: But why don't they formalize their situation in front of the government by getting married? Living in cohabitation without getting married, it's like a marriage, but with the bad sides only for a woman. You would have to do the housework, cook, without feeling secure. So why not get married?* (Born in 1981, urban, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Master)

If the idealized conception of marriage refers to a stable union, which is meant to last a lifetime and legitimized by law, young women are down-to-earth. Like Suzhi, who raises her son alone and who works in a massage parlor in Beijing, her words clarify those of Wei about the idea of guarantee/insurance that marriage provides:

> *Marriage is like life insurance for women. If a woman cohabits with her boyfriend in the long run, in case of separation she risks ending up without a house, without money and without work if she did not work. Not cohabiting is an argument to ensure that the relationship with the spouse ends with a marriage.* (Born in 1978, rural, Hebei *hukou*, college)

Linguistic changes also reflect the weight of the injunction to marriage in the lives of young adults, and particularly young women. Sentences such as "I am part of the tribe of the unmarried" (*wo shi bu hunzu*) used by Shasha, or even that of " leftover women" (*shengnü*) evokes a dichotomy between married and unmarried people that leaves little (or no) room for other ways of "making family". Women who remain single beyond 27 years are stigmatized. Wei describes the situation in these terms:

> *Society tells us that if you are not married by 25–27 years old, there is something wrong with you. In China our traditional culture tells us that from 25–27 years old you should marry a man. And if you don't do it others will think you are strange, or ugly, or that you have private things [...].* (Born in 1981, urban, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Master)

If the transition to adulthood is experienced as a journey that takes time, its duration is socially constrained, especially for young women, regardless of their social anchoring. This is illustrated by Wei's path. She complains about the social pressure she feels because she is not yet married at over 30 years old (born in 1981, urban, Heilongjiang *hukou*, master's degree). It is also exemplified by Suzhi's life-course. She feels socially sanctioned because of her single mother status and because she gave birth to a child out of wedlock. The attitudes of other respondents illuminate the weight of these social injunctions on the shoulders of young women as well.

To try to respect the social script, they accelerate the passage of role transitions characteristic of adulthood around the age of 27–28 years old.

According to Qian,

> *marriage is a prerequisite for obtaining a [adult] status within society. [...] a woman or a man who would remain single would have a somewhat vague social status, as the Chinese generally refer to the family status of people. If an individual does not get married, she or he could be socially discriminated against, and be perceived as an incomplete person in the sense that she would not have fulfilled her responsibilities.* (Born in 1982, urban, Jilin *hukou*, PhD).

Getting married and having children are transitions intimately linked in the minds of young adults. The birth of children is indeed an integral part of the normative expectations surrounding marriage. Like most of the respondents, Xiaocui, a teacher in a private school in the Chinese capital, admits to never having asked herself the question of having or not having a child and even less of its birth outside the legitimate framework of marriage:

> "*To me it's not a question, I first want to get married and then have a child*" (born in 1986, rural, Heilongjiang, *hukou*, Bachelor).

For Han, it is clear that this is what motivates many young women:

> *In China many women are concerned about the issue of children. I think that many women only want to get married for this reason. [...] Really, it's to have a child that they want to get married before 30 years old, because that's when the body is in better condition to give birth to a child.* (Born in 1989, rural, Jilin *hukou*, Bachelor)

Contrary to what has been observed in the United States, marriage and parenthood are not disconnected in the minds of young people in China (Furstenberg, 2010). These transitions confer new social roles and personal attributes to young adults.

5.2.3 "Housing [...] Is the Foundation of the Family"

"Financial autonomy" (*duli shenghuo*) from parents, is a central aspect in the respondents' definitions of adulthood. According to Qian, being an adult means no longer depending on financial aid from parents to live (born in 1982, urban, Jilin *hukou*, PhD). This aspiration is more present in the discourse of male respondents. They feel an obligation, once adult, to be the main provider for their family. In this sense, financial autonomy from parents is less about proving their individualism than it is about them acting as breadwinners and no longer being a burden on their parents. It is about moving from a logic of assistance to a logic of reciprocity based on filial ties. Once schooling is finished, it is up to young people to support themselves financially, or even to help their parents financially. The respondents' comments denote a deep structuring of trajectories by a strong valorization of employment, especially in male paths, with employment being the main vector of financial autonomy.

Financial autonomy is never mentioned as the only element marking the transition to adulthood. Having one's own housing is another central element in the respondents' discourse. Renting a home is not a satisfactory solution for the respondents. The comments of Qian and Xiaocui are emblematic. The respondents consider housing as a solid and stable foundation for starting a family:

> *There is no religion in China, but there is a belief: devotion to the family. Devotion is not for the Nation, for society or leaders. It is for the family. The family is the heart of the Nation. We all think that housing is not just a construction, a building, it is the foundation of the family [...] renting [a home] does not constitute this foundation.* (Qian, born in 1982, urban, Jilin *hukou*, PhD)

Without a house, if marriage is still possible, it is however unthinkable to have a child. (Xiaocui, born in 1986, rural, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Bachelor).

If data suggest that young adults achieve residential autonomy early, becoming a homeowner is however not easy for them. Since the country's opening-up to market economy and the privatization of housing, men remain the main providers of housing (Kane & Li, 2021). Access to property constitutes in the collective imagination an element of identification with the middle class (Zhang, 2008). Access to property, however, is not just a vector of social distinction. In a context where the State has largely withdrawn from its social and protective functions, property ownership is also seen as a form of economic security. This is one of the reasons why the purchase of a home plays such a central place in marriage negotiations. This subject came up nearly a hundred times in the interviews.

Although the article 3 of the Marriage law prohibits the transfer of money or gifts in connection with marriage, practices are moving away from this prohibition (Marriage Law, 1981). Even today, even if it is sanctioned by the Marriage law, the practice of the "bride price" persists both in rural and urban areas. Traditionally, once married most young women would go to live in their spouse's family. The "bride price" was used to thank the parents of the bride for having raised her until her marriage and to compensate them for the loss of a resource (Croll, 1981; Yan, 2009). Since the 1990s in cities, the standard of private three-room apartments with "a room of one's own" has replaced that of overcrowded apartments offered by work units (Davis, 2002). In recent decades, this new need for intimacy within the private sphere and the staggering rise in real estate prices make intergenerational cohabitation increasingly rare in urban areas.

While it is socially expected that men (or their families) provide housing at the time of marriage, the interviews revealed a more nuanced reality that depends on the financial situation of families. Very few young men were in the position of being able to offer housing to their fiancée. The interviews reveal several configurations: in the first, the spouse's parents had already bought additional housing in anticipation of their son's marriage, so that the young married couple could settle there. These are urban families from Beijing and Shanghai. In the second configuration, the girl's parents also acquired additional housing, which they transferred to their only daughter so that she can earn a rental income in case she does not live there. However, as in the first situation, her parents think it is the responsibility of their

daughter's husband and his family to provide housing for the couple. In the third configuration, which was the most common, the spouse's parents finance part or all of the down payment necessary for the purchase of a house, and the spouses together repay the mortgage. I observed that in this situation young women usually use their dowry to invest in the purchase of the house. In the last configuration, called by the respondents "naked marriage" (*luohun*), they pool together their financial resources in order to be able to take out a mortgage and repay it. The future spouses can set up a common strategy and unite, as Xiaocui and her spouse did, to negotiate the highest possible "bride price". This strategy aims to increase the amount of their savings and the part of the down payment they can invest in the property. Xiaocui thought that her in-laws would be able to finance the entire amount of the down payment for their mortgage. After the first discussions between her fiancé and his parents, it quickly became apparent that this would not be the case. They therefore decided that he would negotiate directly with his parents. Xiaocui believed it is important that her name appears on the deed of purchase of the property so that she is not harmed in the event of divorce. Since not only has she invested the money she received for the "bride price" as well as her savings in the apartment, but she is also repaying their mortgage at the same level as her spouse (Xiaocui, born in 1986, rural, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Bachelor).

This example shows that access to property is seen by the respondents as a marker of the transition to adulthood. For the male respondents, it is a central element of their identity, as it is a criterion by which men are judged. It embodies the autonomy and ability that men have to earn their living and to provide for their family (Kane & Li, 2021). However, as the interviews illustrate, the reality is more complex, as women also often play their part to enable the couple to become homeowners.

Housing also occupies a central place in each of the TV series analyzed. The choice to stage this private space is heavy with meaning. Until the 1990s, in an attempt to erase private spaces from social imagination, these spaces were not shown in TV series. The series "Yearnings" (*kewang*), first aired at the end of 1990, marks a turning point towards the individualization of housing. For the first time, the narrative is set in the family space and focuses on family life (Zhu, 2008:81).

In each of the TV dramas examined, housing plays a key symbolic role in young people's transition to adulthood. It is depicted as a symbol of stability. In the TV drama "Ants' Struggle", the narrative revolves around the daily struggle of young adults from outside Beijing (*waidi ren*) to make a place for themselves in the city. The staging of housing is used to show the ideal of material comfort and social status they hope to achieve through hard work. The first scene shows the dormitories in which the main characters live. Male characters live in a small room made up of several beds, without privacy, a bathroom and a communal kitchen. Women's dormitories are separated from those of men. The second scene shows Xiaoyan, a young migrant. She comes from the countryside and left school after high school. She is portrayed as preparing an apartment she rented especially for the arrival of her boyfriend Hu Yifan's mother. He, originally from a provincial city, has

completed university studies in the capital. They both live in separate dormitories, in a residence located in the Tangjialing district. To convince her future mother-in-law to agree to her marrying Hu Yifan, Xiaoyan rented for the duration of her stay (one month) an apartment. The place, located in a freshly built residential complex inhabited mainly by middle-class families, has two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen and a bathroom. This staging, orchestrated by Xiaoyan, aims to symbolize the stability of the young couple, as well as their social ascent through material comfort and social insertion in Beijing.

The purchase of a home also constitutes an obstacle to the marriage of Tong Jiaqian and Liu Yiyang in the eyes of the young woman's parents, in the series "Naked Wedding Era". Liu Yiyang is thus led to prove, in a moving way, to Tong Jiaqian's mother his willingness to work hard to provide a home for his fiancée:

> *I know that in your eyes I am not good enough for your daughter, you think that I have no money, no savings, that I am neither a homeowner nor a car owner. But the fact that I don't have this now does not mean that I won't have it later. You older people, you say that one can say how much one loves each other, but that does not allow one to survive [in other words, one cannot live on love and fresh water alone]. But ayi, I think that Jiaqian and I are capable of it. […] Once I graduated from University when I was looking for a job, I was determined to find a job that pays a lot, that allows me to buy a house, a car and that allows me to propose to Tong Jiaqian in grand style. But despite all my efforts, I cannot keep up with the speed of real estate inflation.*[8]

If his efforts are not enough to achieve this for the moment, he believes they will be in the future. That's why once married the young couple plans to temporarily rent an apartment.[9] Moreover, as the tirade below suggests, the narrative places the responsibility for acquiring a home, which the couple would own, on the young man's shoulders. Tong Jiaqian asks her fiancé who agrees:

> *This rental is only a transitional period. It is certain that you cannot let me live all my life in a rental, can you?*[10]

[8] "I know you've always looked down on me, thinking I have no money, no savings, no house, no car. But just because I don't have them now doesn't mean I won't have them in the future. You always say that our verbal expressions of love can't be eaten as food. But auntie, I think they can in my and Jiaqian's case. […] After graduating from university and looking for a job, I was desperate to find a job that paid enough for me to afford a house, a car, and to proudly marry Tong Jiaqian. But even if I risked my life, I couldn't keep up with the speed of the housing price increase." (*wo zhidao nin da xinyanr li jiu qiaobushang wo, juede wo mei qian, mei jixu, meifang, meiche. Danshi wo xianzai meiyou bu daibiao wo yihou meiyou a. ni lao shuo women guang zuishang ai lai ai qu de, bu neng dang fanchi. Danshi ayi, zai wo he jiaqian zher wo juede neng. […] houlai*).

[9] "Increase the proportion of the middle-income group, *kuoda zhongdeng shouru qunti de bizhong* ".

[10] The residence booklet (*hukou*), institutionalized in the 1950s and still in force today although softened several times, is a key administrative tool to understand social policies in China. It not only allows to control population flows within the country, but also to determine the place of perception of social benefits. This administrative document produces forms of discrimination and exclusion within the population by institutionalizing a division between the population holding an urban *hukou* and those holding a rural *hukou* (Wang, 2005).

He also says he is ready to work hard to ensure the material comfort of the couple.[11] However, their mothers are opposed to the idea of a "naked marriage" and prefer instead multi-generational cohabitation. Again, in the TV drama "Rules before Divorce", the renting of a home as proposed by the young married couple, Mingxuan and Xinyao, is not feasible from the parents' point of view. After a tough negotiation between the two families, it is decided that the young married couple will buy, with the help of their parents (especially those of Mingxuan, the husband), a new apartment in a residential compound.[12]

In post-collectivist China, where 82.3% of the population owned their own home in 2007, the style of home purchased and inhabited became a vector of social distinction. The middle class turned away from socialist buildings. These three-storey buildings have basic equipment. They prefer to live in gated residential compound, which group several buildings over 30 floors high (Man, 2013; Tomba, 2013). These are the kinds of homes that are said in TV drama to typify "good taste". The decoration of middle-class homes no longer reflects their allegiance to the Party-State, but the tastes, personalities, and lifestyles of their occupants.

The housing reform initiated by the State began in the early 1980s. The policy was then extended after 1988. In a first step (1980–1998),[13] the aim was to privatize public housing and housing belonging to work units. These homes were sold to employees at preferential rates.[14] As a result, the benefits enjoyed by some workers during the Maoist period have been perpetuated in post-collectivist China.[15] With the rise in property prices and the government interventionist policies,[16] these lucky workers were able to use cheaply bought homes to invest in new property in the 1990s. These years marked the beginning of the construction of commercial housing, in a new type of buildings: gated communities (*shequ fengbi*), which have become the new architectural standard (Tomba, 2013:187).

---

[11] The work unit (单位， *danwei)* refers to state and collective enterprises, as well as administrative units in urban areas.

[12] These services notably cover assistance to orphans, to disabled people, to elderly people without family or with too modest incomes. If these services were already provided by the residents' committees during the Maoist period (居民委员会, *jumin weiyuanhui*), the scope of neighborhood community activities has expanded: they also provide financial support to people who have been dismissed from their posts during the restructuring of state enterprises (下岗, *xiagang*), to parents who have lost their only child and who can no longer have offspring to take care of them, they also relay the directives of family planning in terms of birth control, contraception and reproductive health.

[13] Article 33, chapter 2 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China: http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/xinwen/node_505.htm#2

[14] On the concept of new social risks refer to the article by Giuliano Bonoli (Bonoli, 2005).

[15] The 1993 law on fiscal decentralization has reinforced the heterogeneity of interests between administrative entities.

[16] In the early 1980s, the State still imposed on agricultural households production quotas that will gradually disappear as the reforms progress.

These changes in the housing policy have had the effect of creating a new segregation of residential spaces, which is illustrated in TV drama by opposing the two categories of housing. In the TV drama "The Era of Naked Marriage", the different lifestyles are used to indicate a difference in social status between two families from Beijing. Three generations of the Liu family live in a popular three-storey building. The flat they bought from the work unit is on the first floor. It consists of a kitchen, a living room in which the parents – who are workers – live, and two independent bedrooms – one is for their son and the other is for the paternal grandmother. The apartment is rudimentary. The kitchen and the pots seem to date from the Maoist era and the decoration is made from cheap objects. For their part, the Tong family lives in a two-generation (parents-child) apartment located on the upper floors of a recently built and secure residence. The apartment has a modern kitchen, living room, bathroom and bedrooms. The parents, who are civil servants, and their daughter have separate bedrooms. The decoration of their apartment is cosmopolitan. It recalls the interiors presented in IKEA store catalogs.

In the TV drama "Rules Before Divorce" the same opposition technique is used to stage the homes and implicitly signal the social status of their occupants: the Zhang family and the Li family. The Zhangs live in a popular three-storey building, an apartment bought from their work unit. The decoration of the apartment has been worked on by its occupants, but it reflects their modest financial means. Whereas the Li family live in a posh house located in an upscale suburb of the capital. The staging of the father's professional success is reflected in the decoration of their interior with prestigious goods (solid wood traditional Chinese furniture, works of art, abundance of fruits and green plants, etc.) and the volume of spaces.

The presentation of the median and upper middle classes as homeowners of a home in new gated residential compounds or in a posh suburb is to be seen as part of the State discourse on the "quality" of the population and the construction of a society of "small prosperity" (*xiaokang shehui*). This latter concept refers to the Book of Rites, a classic text in which the concept first appears (Tomba, 2013). This historical reference places the project of societization proposed by the Party-State in a millennial historical continuity. By skillfully marrying socialism with classical thought, it manages to resolve the ideological conflict posed by the opening-up of the country to market economy without making a radical break with the past. The pursuit of private economic interests was recognized as legitimate and became the new standard. The rapid emergence of the consumer society not only increased individuals' choices and material comfort, but by granting them greater autonomy to some extent, it also destroyed the State's monopoly over individual lives and made citizens responsible for their own lives.

The places, the way they are decorated and the consumer practices that are highlighted by the *mise en scène* in television series are highly significant. Through these social practices and the appropriation of lifestyles associated with the middle classes, young adults seek to distance themselves from what they consider to be old-fashioned and to move closer to the feeling of belonging to the middle class. However, anyone familiar with Beijing will realize that the homes portrayed in TV series are not always in line with social reality. There is a distortion aimed at valorizing housing associated with high social statuses. Yet, the people who live there do

not always have a professional activity that would enable them to afford such luxury. The use of these representations contributes to valorizing the socioeconomic attributes of the middle class. Indeed, in 2002 during the People's National Assembly, the Party-State called for an expansion of the proportion of the "middle income group" within the society[17] (Li, 2013a, b:11). The middle class is seen by the Party-State as an asset and a political ally for the socioeconomic development and social cohesion of the country, offering hope of upward social mobility for the most disadvantaged fringe of the population, as well as a model level of "quality" to be reached.

Bibliography

Arnett, J. J., & Galambos, N. (Eds.). (2003). *New directions for child and adolescent development: Exploring cultural conceptions of the transition to adulthood* (Vol. 2003, pp. 91–98). Wiley, Jossey-Bass.

Béja, J.-P. (2011). Introduction. In X. Liu (Ed.), *La philosophie du porc et d'autres essais* (pp. 10–42). Editions Gallimard.

Bernstein, T. P. (1977). *Up to the mountains and down to the villages: The transfer of youth from urban to rural China*. Yale University Press.

Bonnin, M. (2004). *Lost Generation. The Movement of Sending Educated Youth to the Countryside in China, 1968–1980*. Editions of the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences.

Bonoli, G. (2005). The politics of the new social policies: Providing coverage against new social risks in mature welfare states. *Policy & Politics, 33*(3), 431–439.

Brückner, H., & Mayer, K. U. (2005). De-standardization of the life-course: What it might mean? And if it means anything, whether it actually took place? In R. Macmillan (Ed.), *The structure of the life-course: Standardized? Individualized? Differentiated?* (Advances in life-course research) (Vol. 9, pp. 27–53). Elsevier.

Chen, Y. (1999). Lost in revolution and reform: The socioeconomic pains of China's red guards generation, 1966–1996. *Journal of Contemporary China, 21*, 219–239.

Cheng, A. (1997). *Histoire de La Pensée Chinoise*. Editions du Seuil.

CPCNews. (2016). Xi Jinping emphasizes the construction of cadre family style, promotes excellent family traditions, and sets a good social example (*Xi Jinping Qiangdiao Ganbu Jiafeng Jianshe Hongyang Youliang Jiafeng Zuohao Shehui Biaoshuai,* xi Jinping insists on the promotion of family traditions by cadres so that beautiful family traditions serve as a model for the construction and development of society)'. (China Communist Party News Network*,* Zhongguo Gongchandang Xinwen Wang *, Online Information Of The Chinese Communist Party)* .

[17] *Migrant population* (迁移人口), *migratory population* (迁徙人口), *foreign population* (外来人口), *inflow population* (流入人口), *foreign mobile population* (外来流动人口), *foreign workers and business personnel* (外来务工经商人员), *temporary resident population* (暂住人口), *spontaneous migrant population* (自发迁移人口), *self-flowing population* (自流人口), *lodger population* (寄住人口), *foreign temporary resident population* (外来暂住人口), *short-term migrant population* (短期迁移人口), *temporary migrant population* (暂时性迁移人口), *informal migrant population* (非正式迁移人口), *non-registered migrant population* (非户口迁移人口), *migratory population* (流迁人口), *peasant workers* (民工), *laborer* (打工仔), *female laborer* (打工妹), *rural migrant workers* (农民工), *surge of migrant workers* (民工潮), *blind flow* (盲流), *population separated from household registration* (人户分离人口), *overbirth guerrillas* (超生游击队), *new citizens* (新市民), *blue-stamp household population* (蓝印户口人口), etc. (Duan et al., 2012; Hou, 2010; Shen, 2011; Sun & Li, 2015; Wang, 2010; Yan, 1999; Yang & Yang, 2009).

Croll, E. (1981). *The politics of marriage in contemporary China*. Cambridge University Press.
Davis, D. (2002). When a house becomes his house. In P. Link, R. Madsen, & P. Pickowicz (Eds.), *Popular China. Unofficial culture in a globalizing society*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
Duan, C. (段成荣), Yang, G. (杨舸), & Ma, X. (马学阳). (2012). Research on China's floating population 2011 (*Zhongguo Liudongrenkou Yanjiu 2011*). China Population Publishing House (zhongguo renkou chubanshe).
Fincher, H., & Leta. (2014). *Leftover women: The resurgence of gender inequality in China*. Zed Books.
Furstenberg, F. F. (2010). On a new schedule: Transitions to adulthood and family change. *The Future of Children, 20*, 67–87.
Greenhalgh, S., & Winckler, E. A. (2005). *Governing China's population. From Leninist to neoliberal biopolitics*. Stanford University Press.
Hou, J. (侯佳伟). (2010). *Beijing migrant population aggregation: Trends, patterns and influencing factors* (Beijing Shi Liudong Renkou Juji Di: Qushi, Moshi Yu Yingxiang Yinsu *, The Study on Migrants Agglomeration in Beijing: Current, Pattern and Determinants*). Guangming Daily Publishing House (guangmin ribao chubanshe).
Kane, D., & Li, K. (2021). Gendering a new marker of adulthood: Home ownership in Southwest China. *Sociological Forum, 36*(3), 668–688.
Kong, S. (2008). Family matters: Reconstructing the family on the Chinese television screen. In Y. Zhu, M. Keane, & R. Bai (Eds.), *TV drama in China*. Hong Kong University Press.
Li, C. (李成). (2013a). The Rise of the Middle Class in China (Zhongguo Zhongchan Jieji de Xingqi). In C. (李成) Li (ed.), 'Middle Class' China: Beyond economic transformation, the emerging Chinese middle class (*'zhongchan' zhongguo: chaoyue jingji zhuanxing de xinxing zhongguo zhongchanjieji*). Shanghai Translation Publishing House (Shanghai yiwen chubanshe).
Li, C. (李春玲). (2013b). Experience, attitudes and social transition: A sociological study of the post-80's generation (*Jingyu, Taidu Yu Shehui Zhuanxing: 80 Hou Qingnian de Shehuixue Yanjiu*). Social Sciences Academic Press (shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe).
Lin, Q. (2013). Lost in transformation? The employment trajectories of China's cultural revolution cohort. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 172–193.
Man, Y. (满燕云). (2013). '中国的住房改革与崛起的中产阶级 (Zhongguo de Zhufang Gaige Yu Jieqi de Zhongchan Jieji, China's Housing Reform and Emerging Middle Class)'. In C. (李成) Li (Ed.), '中产'中国:超越经济转型的新兴中国中产阶级 *('zhongchan' zhongguo: chaoyue jingji zhuanxing de xinxing zhongguo zhongchanjieji, China's emerging Middle Class)*. Shanghai Translation Publishing House (Shanghai yiwen chubanshe).
Meng, X., & Gregory, R. G. (2002). The impact of interrupted education on subsequent educational attainment: A cost of the Chinese cultural revolution. *Economic Development and Cultural Change, 50*, 935–959.
Ren, Q., & Zhu, X. (2014). Education in China: Uneven progress. In I. Attané & B. Gu (Eds.), *Analysing China's population. Social change in a new demographic era* (pp. 51–75). Springer.
Shen, Q. (沈千帆). (2011). *Study on the social integration of the floating population in Beijing*. Peking University Press.
Sun, F. (孙福滨), & Li, H. (李怀祖). (2015). Definition of migrant and floating population in China. *Journal of Xi'an Jiaotong University*.
Tomba, L. (2013). The real estate effect: The making of China's social distinctions. In C. (李成) Li (Ed.), *'Middle Class' China: Beyond economic transformation's emerging Chinese middle class*. Shanghai Translation Publishing House.
Unger, J. (1982). *Education under Mao: Class and competition in Canton schools, 1960–1980*. Columbia University Press.
Wang, F. (2005). *Organizing through division and exclusion. China's Hukou System*. Stanford University Press.
Wang, P. (王培安). (2010). *Comprehensive report on the floating population: Theory and policy*. China Population Publishing House (zhongguo renkou chubanshe).

Yan, B. (阎蓓). (1999). New era Chinese population migration (*Xin Shiqi Zhongguo Renkou Qianyi*). Hunan Education Publishing House (Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe).
Yan, Y. (2009). The individual and transformation of bridewealth. In Y. Yan (Ed.), *The individualization of Chinese society*. Berg.
Yang, C. (杨聪敏), & Yang, L. (杨黎源). (2009). Investigation of the scale of contemporary Chinese rural migrant Workers' migration (Danddai Zhongguo Nongmingong Liudong Guimo Kaocha, examination of the extent of contemporary migrations of peasants-workers). *China Sociology Network* (Zhongguo Shehuixue Wang, Chinese Sociology Internet Site).
Zhang, L. (2008). Private homes, distinct lifestyles. Performing a new middle class. In L. Zhang & A. Ong (Eds.), *Privatizing China. Socialism from afar*. Cornell University.
Zhou, X., & Hou, L. (1999). Children of the cultural revolution: The state and the life-course in the People's Republic of China. *American Sociological Review, 64*, 12–36.
Zhou, X., Moen, P., & Tuma, N. B. (1998). Educational stratification in urban China: 1949–1994. *Sociology of Education, 71*, 199–222.
Zhu, Y. (2008). *Television in Post-Reform China. Serial dramas, Confucian leadership and the global television market*. Routledge.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

Chapter 6
The Rise of New Social Risks in Post-collectivist China

Contents

6.1 From Collective to Individualized Social Policies........ 82
6.2 The Rise of New Social Risks........ 84
6.2.1 The Rise of Work Uncertainties........ 84
6.2.2 Increased Dependency on Intergenerational Solidarities........ 86
6.3 Precarious Employment as New Normality........ 88
6.4 Young Adults' Work Expectations: From Idealism to Realism........ 91
Bibliography........ 94

Abstract This chapter highlights in a first section the complex changes in China's Welfare system, marked by historical legacies, reforms, and the ongoing tension between collectivist and individualized approaches.

The chapter reveals that China's transition to market economy triggered shifts in employment dynamics. The dismantling of State and collective sectors in 1992 led to a surge in job insecurity, with most jobs moving to the private sector by 2005. Efforts to formalize labor contracts began in 1986 but faced challenges. The 1994 Labor Law standardized contracts, but informal jobs persisted.

The chapter uncovers that in this context of uncertainties, intergenerational solidarities tend to replace the collectivist provisions. Demographic shifts strain this new contract. Faced with the challenges of precarious employment, particularly in the informal sector, young adults exhibit varying vulnerabilities. Migrants face increased vulnerabilities, often lacking social security schemes. Many respondents, including those with degrees, experience frustration due to fixed-term contracts, impacting income and personal life. The risk of disaffiliation is exacerbated by long working hours, hindering social interactions. Despite attempts with the 2008 labor law to address job precariousness, poor law enforcement persists, especially after the 2008 economic crisis.

Keywords Hukou · New social risks · Welfare State · Uncertainties · Employment, Intergenerational solidarities

© The Author(s) 2024

S. V. Constantin, *A Life Course Perspective on Chinese Youths*, Life Course Research and Social Policies 17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57216-6_6

6.1 From Collective to Individualized Social Policies

The new middle class, like other social groups, is not immune to new social risks that result from the decollectivization and the individualization of the social protection system. To understand the transformation of employment policies and social policies in China, it is important to keep in mind that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) still exercises complete control over their development (Chan et al., 2008). In a political system where there is *de facto* a single political party, the CCP is not subject to the same political demands as in multi-party systems. The CCP is, of course, not a homogeneous and uniform block. It indeed covers several conflicting visions - conservative, moderate and reformist - on social policies and, therefore, on solutions to social problems and demands from civil society.

During the collectivist period, the social protection system was already characterized by its duality. The distinction between urban and rural population, institutionalized through the residence booklet (*hukou*)[1] which operates a social hierarchy between local population and population coming from outside, allowed, and still allows, to assign unequal social rights to different categories of citizens. Individuals are attached to a community - rural or urban - and resources they receive from the community depend on its financial situation. This results in a social and spatial hierarchy in which township are at the bottom of the scale and autonomous municipalities, like Beijing, the country's capital, are at the top. Therefore, people coming from places with better resources (top of the scale) benefit from a higher level of social protection than others.

In the planned economy system (1949–1978), the structure of social policies, organized around the work unit or the people's commune, aimed to encourage the population to participate in the productive effort. Groups of population directly involved in the industrialization effort of the country (officials, urban workers) were favored, at the expense of rural workers who were not attached to a work unit[2] (Cook, 2000). While the rural population had to rely entirely on its own resources, from the early 1950s the urban population began to benefit, not only from lifetime employment, housing, education, and subsidized childcare, but also from a social security system (*shehui baozhang*). This included social insurances (*shehui baoxian*), social protections (*shehui fuli*), social assistance (*shehui jiuji*), and assistance to disabled or deceased revolutionaries and military personnel and their families (*shehui youfu*). These mechanisms, managed by government agencies, targeted different groups of the population at different stages of their life-course.

[1] According to experts, data on the number of migrants published in official sources are probably below reality.

[2] "Atypical" jobs are defined in opposition to the "typical" employment relationship, which according to the International Labour Organization involves "working continuously full-time, within a direct relationship between the employer and the employee", https://www.ilo.org/infostories/fr-FR/Stories/Employment/Non-tandard-Employment#what-is-non-standard-employment

From the early 1980s, the collectivist social security system began to be reformed where it was least efficient, that is, in the countryside, with the dismantling of people's communes. Then, the reform of this system continued where its institutional anchoring was the strongest, that is, in the cities. From the early 1980s, and especially from the mid-1990s, the Party-State sought to transfer the responsibility and the obligation to finance the social security system from work units or people's communes to State agencies, the community, and individuals (Cook, 2000; Gao et al., 2013). Various non-State actors (NGOs, associations, and communities) have emerged in the social landscape, albeit maintaining close ties with the Party-State. Alongside unemployment insurance, adopted as early as 1986 to address the growing problem of urban unemployment caused by the dismantling of state and collective enterprises, the Party-State implemented neighborhood communities (*shequ jianshe*) to take over part of the role played by the work units. These local organizations combine service to residents (*shequ fuwu*)[3] with a degree of social control over them (Monteil, 2010). By 2014, the unemployment insurance system had been revised four times since its creation. This insurance is administered by local governments and financed both by local, provincial governments, the employer (2% of all wages) and the employee (1% of his gross income). The systems of health and maternity insurances institutionalized in 1951 have been adjusted no less than 14 times since the late 1970s, with a State desire, since 2011, to unify the system at the national level. Again, benefits are partly conditioned by workers' contributions. Dating from 1951, the insurance system covering work accidents has been amended seven times since 1978. It is administered by local governments and financed by the employer (1% of all wages). China has also a pension system, disability and death insurances (in case of death of the spouse or parents). They have been reformed many times since 1951. Since 2011, the Chinese government has also expressed the desire to unify these social insurances at the national level (with the aspiration to cover the rural population). These insurances are financed both by the central government and by local governments, employers and employees in varying proportions depending on the localities (SSPTW, 2012; Wang & Ding, 2012). Citizens who hold a rural residence booklet remain largely excluded from these reforms, although *de jure* article 33 of the Constitution guarantees the same civic, social and political rights to the entire population.[4]

The process of decollectivization has led to the emergence of new social risks, particularly in the labor market and in terms of intergenerational solidarity.

---

[3] Precarity is understood as "more labile relationships to work that contrast with the stability and consistency" of permanent jobs (Castel, 2009, p. 163).

[4] While it is common to use the word *gaokao* to refer to this exam, it is actually the *putong gaodeng xuexiao zhaosheng kaoshi*, which can be literally translated as "general recruitment exam for higher schools". This exam is national, but its content varies according to provinces and municipalities. The number of points obtained in this test determines the quality of the universities that students can join.

6.2 The Rise of New Social Risks[5]

6.2.1 The Rise of Work Uncertainties

With the opening-up to the market economy, allocated jobs are no longer the norm. It has been supplanted by "chosen" employment. Before 1978, almost all urban jobs were in the State and collective sectors. Then, with the dismantling of State and collective enterprises undertaken in 1992, by 1995, 40% of urban workers had been dismissed from their posts. This represents 50 million unemployed people. In 2005, State and collective sectors accounted for only 27% of urban jobs. Since then, more than 70% of jobs in cities have been redirected to the private economy sector (Naughton, 2007:184; Park & Cai, 2011:17). The State has thus gradually withdrawn from the responsibility of guaranteeing a right "to" work and providing a solid safety net of social protections to the entire urban population of working age. As a result, candidates have been enjoined to learn to "sell themselves" and their skills through the writing of *curriculums vitae* and cover letters. Employers, for their part, have learnt to present an attractive image of their companies to attract the best candidates. Deprived of job security, workers are now in competition for job positions (Naughton, 2007; Park & Cai, 2011).

As early as 1986, the central government attempted to implement "Temporary Regulations on the Labor Contract System" (RTSCT, 1986). Despite this attempt, a number of companies have continued to recruit workers without signing a labor contract with them. These companies, relying on cheap labor, have continued to favor work flexibility at the expense of job security and social protection for workers (Gallagher & Dong, 2011). To attract foreign investments during the first stage of reforms (1978–1992), local governments were inclined to turn a blind eye to the continuous increase in the number of informal jobs, that is to say precarious and non-guaranteed jobs, which do not result from the signing of an agreement or a labor contract and do not guarantee social protection for workers (Gallagher et al., 2011).

It was not until 1994 that labor law made its first developments nationwide. For the first time since the country's opening-up to market economy, the 1994 Labor law standardized labor law in a single text (LDF, 1995). Before this law, a multitude of laws, regulations, and directives coexisted. Their content varied depending on the type of company and the sector of activity. The 1994 law established several categories of labor contracts, each entitling to specific levels of social protection. Only open-ended contracts (OEC) guarantee a right to social insurances based on a contribution shared between the employer and the employee. They encompass health, accident, pension, unemployment and maternity insurances. With fixed-term contracts (FTC) and fixed-term contracts for a specific mission (FTCM), it is the workers who must finance their social insurance on their own (LDF, 1995). Despite the

[5] Javornik prefers the term "State familialism" to analyze the transformations that have taken place in post-socialist Eastern European countries in the field of social policies (Javornik, 2014).

1994 labor law, which requires companies to sign a labor contract with their employees, many have ignored the legislation. In response to the competition introduced by neoliberalism, they prefer to recruit flexible staff, or even staff without work contracts because these employees cost less, rather than employees with open-ended contracts (Lin, 2011; Peng, 2009; Swider, 2011; Zhang, 2011). In 2005, between 27% and 36% of jobs were in the informal economy sector (Park & Cai, 2011; Peng, 2009; Tong, 2009). Number discrepancies between studies in the literature can be explained by the use of different definitions of informal employment according to authors.

Despite the safeguards provided to workers by the 1994 labor law, opening the door to flexible jobs and guaranteeing companies a relative autonomy from the State, the law has ultimately better served the interest of employers than those of workers. This law gave the *coup de grâce* to the socialist welfare system (the iron rice bowl). It institutionalized as a national standard the practice of individualized labor contracts, which provided differentiated social protections in place of permanent jobs and unified social protection from cradle to grave. In this sense, the new legislation definitively broke with the old socialist social pact. In 2008, the Party-State tried to remedy this situation by institutionalizing the new labor contract law (LDF, 2008). The aim of this law was to respond to the growing precariousness of work by requiring employers to sign a work contract with their employees. The law also requires employers to offer their employees an open-ended contract after two consecutive fixed-term contracts, in order to prevent the succession of fixed-term contracts. Moreover, to terminate a labor contract, it is expected that the employer motivates his reasons. The implementation of this legislation is part of the Hu-Wen administration's project to build a harmonious society.

As will be detailed in the following section, the 2008 labor law has not succeeded in stemming the presence of informal jobs and inequalities in access to employment. The analyses conducted in the context in this book indicate that young adults from Beijing are significantly more likely to find a job in public administration or a state-owned enterprise. These "in-the-system" jobs (*tizhi nei*) require a university degree and an urban residence booklet. The life-course being more uncertain than in the past, *tizhi nei* jobs are nowadays highly sought after. They offer not only economic security, but also social prestige. The relative ineffectiveness of the 2008 labor law can be explained in part by the attitude of provincial and local governments. As the latter play a major role in the funding[6] and implementation of social policies, their costs, combined with the need to balance their budgets, sometimes lead them to resist the implementation of policies issued at the national level.

[6]The position held in a work unit, the possibility of continuing or not continuing studies, or even vocational training were evaluated based on the political profile of the candidates. During the Maoist period, the "blood theory" prevailed, according to which not only the "counter-revolutionaries" had to be punished, but also their children and parents in application of the principle: "Hero father, prodigal son; reactionary father, bastard son" (*laozi yinxiong, er haohan, laozi fandong, er hundan)*, (Béja, 2011).

6.2.2 Increased Dependency on Intergenerational Solidarities

During the Maoist period, Marxist ideology, the collectivization of the economy, and the almost general elimination of private property destabilized the foundations on which family solidarities rested in pre-Maoist China. The social protection system offered to the population and, in particular to workers in the work units, provided them with a pension, housing, and medical care once they reached retirement age. These social supports provided by the State supplemented traditional support from the family (Sheng & Settles, 2006). In this sense, they had an individualizing effect by allowing individuals to no longer depend on the "traditional" family organization and solidarity system. This also had the effect of making them dependent on the social protection system guaranteed by the socialist State.

Since the 1980s, with the policy of decollectivization and the crumbling of the social security system, the Party-State has gradually transferred the role once played by the socialist State (the people's communes and work units) to close family members: parents, children, grandparents and siblings. A new social contract is then born. It relies on intergenerational solidarities, as reflected in the marriage law. Its article 29 stipulates that older brothers and sisters who have the means to do so have a duty to look after their minor brothers and sisters if their parents are unable to do so (HYF, 1981).

This process of re-familialization should be understood as the State's gradual withdrawal from social policies in favor of families. It can be observed both in rural and urban areas. In the countryside before the early 1980s, the People's communes constituted the basic political and economic unit to which individuals were attached. With their dismantling, the family responsibility system succeeded them. Farmers then gained a right of usufruct over their land. Households, which had once again become the unit of production, were allowed to manage their farm[7] (Bianco, 2005). The loss of the social safety net previously provided by the People's communes, even if it was rudimentary, tends to strengthen family solidarity. In urban areas at the beginning of the reforms, private entrepreneurship, although encouraged by official rhetoric, remained limited. The urban population clung firmly to the work unit system and the socio-economic benefits it provided. In this system, urban families played a very weak role in social protection (Davis & Harrell, 1993), but the situation would suddenly change after 1992. Following the dismantling of the work unit system, and due to the lack of institutionalization of robust and inclusive social policies, some individuals had no choice but to remobilize family solidarities to compensate for the shortcomings in the new welfare system. Article 21 of the marriage law states that parents have the duty to raise and educate their children, and that children have a duty to support and assist their parents (HYF, 1981).

However, the combined effect of longer life expectancy and demographic policies aimed at containing the population growth are putting this new intergenerational contract under strain. Although since the 1980s the country has benefited

[7] Agricultural employment is also considered a first job.

from a "demographic bonus", reflected in a low dependency ratio of the inactive population to the active population, this ratio now is inexorably shrinking. A social protection system and a pay-as-you-go pension scheme have not yet been generalized to the entire population, so many among those benefiting from a pension scheme find it difficult to make ends meet. In the mid-2000s, half of the retirees could only survive with the help of a family member. This family member is often an only child (Attané, 2011), who has sometimes been compelled to migrate to meet the family's economic needs. Change in employment policies and the rise of uncertainty in the labor market have gone hand in hand with a loosening of the Party-State's control over internal migration flows. The absence of young adults makes it difficult for them to meet the daily needs of their elders in terms of social, medical, or administrative support.

The 1980s saw the start of major waves of migration from the countryside to the cities. These migrants are referred to as "floating population" (*liudong renkou*) because if they work in the city, their *hukou* and entitlement to social benefits remain registered in their place of origin. The authors have identified in the literature more than 20 concepts to designate the migrant population.[8] Some refer to legal temporary work migrations from the countryside to the cities or interurban, while others refer to illegal migrations or even the type of activity carried out. It should be underlined that government statistical reports differ on the temporal indicator used to make the calculations. The 1987 and 1995 surveys, focusing on the migrant population (*qianyi renkou*) and carried out on a sample of 1% of the population, consider as migrants those who have left their place of registration of the *hukou* for more than 6 months (Wang, 2010:3); while in the population census carried out in 1990, those considered as migrants are people who have left their place of registration of the *hukou* for more than a year. The 2000 census also uses the duration of 6 months as an indicator. The plurality of definitions associated with the concepts *qianyi renkou* and *liudong renkou* explains the differences in the figures presented by the various statistical sources. The latest population census does not define the migrant population in Beijing as *qianyi renkou*, but as *wailai renkou*. According to the definition adopted by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) who conducted the census, the migrant population refers to the long-term resident population (*changzhu*) in possession of a *hukou* registered in another province or city and who have been away from their place of origin for at least 6 months. The National Bureau of Statistics also excludes foreign nationals or those from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan from this definition (NBS, 2012). People who have come to work in the capital for less than 6 months are therefore not included in these data, nor are informal workers. The ambiguity of the various categories makes it difficult for researchers to estimate the exact number of migrants in China in general and in Beijing in particular.

Today in China, these migratory flows are numerous as they involve more than 200 million people (Chan, 2010). Between 1978 and 2011, the urban population's

---

[8] In rural areas, the marriage age is 23 for girls and 25 for boys. Couples are encouraged not to have more than three children, with an interval of 3 or 4 years between births. National minorities (10% of the population) are not affected by these measures.

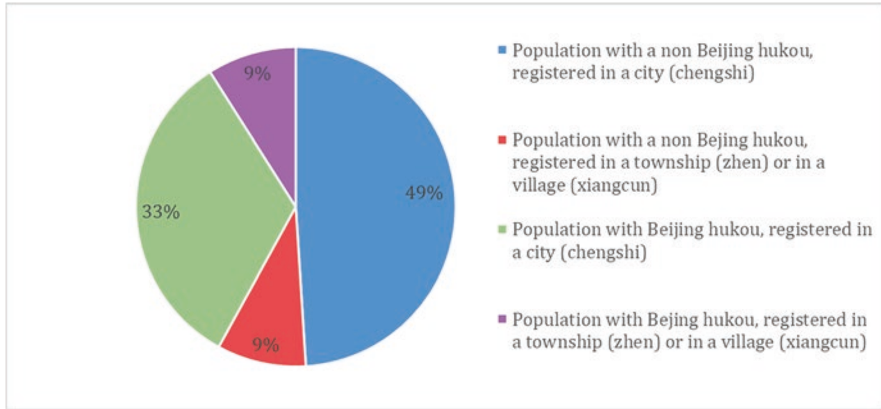


Fig. 6.1 Distribution of the population born between 1978 and 1993, Beijing (percentage). (Source: Figure based on the data of the 2010 population census in Beijing)

share in the total population rose from 18% to over 51% (NBS, 2012). According to the population census, there were over 19 million inhabitants in the municipality of Beijing in 2010 (19,612,368 people). Among these people the majority have a *hukou* from Beijing (64%) and for half of them their residence booklet is urban (50%) (NBS, 2012:6–9 and 308–311). If we consider only young adults born between 1978 and 1993, 58% of them are migrants (*wailai renkou*)[9] as defined by the NBS (Fig. 6.1) (NBS, 2012:172–180 and 318–335). Slightly more men (30%) than women (28%), and among these migrants the large majority (85%) are of urban origin (*chengshi*).

In the eyes of the Party-State, precarious jobs and internal migrations constitute significant risks of social instability.

6.3 Precarious Employment as New Normality

The transition to market economy, along with the wage-earner model and the multiplication of labor contract status, have given rise to a new organization of labor relations. In cities, it is no longer the work unit that organizes the welfare of workers, but a system of social insurance financed by employers, workers, and the State. This is associated with a form of social insecurity, since protections against social risks vary according to the type of labor contract. In an environment that has become

[9]According to the same article, late marriage and late births are strongly encouraged: 第五条 结婚年龄，男不得早于二十二周岁，女不得早于二十周岁。晚婚晚育应予鼓励 (*di wu tiao, jiehun nianling, nanbude zao yu ershier zhousui, nü bude zao yu ershi zhousui. Wan hun wan yu ying yu guli*, Article 5, the marriage age, should not be earlier than 22 years for boys, 20 years for girls. Late marriage and late births are strongly encouraged) (HYF, 1981).

competitive, job categories have multiplied and the number of atypical jobs[10] has increased to the point of becoming the norm. The analysis of the career paths of young adults born in the 1980s reveals such a trend.

Four biographical model clusters emerge from the analysis. They are named according to their main characteristics. The findings reveal that nearly 80% of respondents hold a precarious job.[11] While almost 60% of respondents are on fixed-term contracts (groups 3 and 4), and 18% of the young adults we met do not have a work contract (group 2), only 20% of respondents are fortunate enough to have a permanent job (open-ended contract) (group 1).

The analyses show that, in post-collectivist China, a large proportion of jobs created take the form of atypical employment, "meaning that they escape the form of open-ended contract which provides time insurance and significant social coverage" (Castel, 1995:19). By institutionalizing different categories of labor contracts instead of lifetime employment, the 1994 labor law opened the door to flexible and less costly forms of labor (Gallagher & Dong, 2011). Unlike lifetime employment, individualized labor contracts not only served the interests of companies - whether private, public or collective - and of State services, but they also contributed to breaking with the old socialist social pact by depriving urban workers of their right "to" employment and the generous welfare provisions that went with it. Until the 1994 Labor law, the differentiation of labor contracts created inequalities in the access to social insurance, since under the 1994 law only permanent contracts provided employees protection on the basis of a contribution shared between the employer and the employee. According to the law, with other forms of labor contracts, social contributions to health, accident, pension, unemployment and maternity insurance are only paid by workers (LDF, 1995).

Employment contracts established by most companies for increasingly short durations create a form of permanent insecurity. The average duration of contracts, which was about 3–5 years in the mid-1990s, has given way since the early 2000s to contracts with an average duration of 1 year (Gallagher & Dong, 2011).

Young adults are not on an equal footing when it comes to coping with job insecurity and the widespread use of precarious contracts. The analyses below show that respondents who are not from Beijing (that is to say with a *hukou* not registered in Beijing) face a higher risk of having an atypical job during their lifetime. Alongside social origin, respondents' level of education also plays a decisive role in explaining their career paths (Fig. 6.3).

---

[10] Yeung and Hu observed in an article published in 2013 that young people born between 1976 and 1981 (without making a distinction according to the type of *hukou*) married and had a child on average earlier than people born between 1946 and 1955 (Yeung & Hu, 2013). It is probably because we are not working on exactly the same birth cohorts that the results between our two studies on the transition to adulthood differ on this point.

[11] After evaluating the different quality indicators (ASW, PBC, HC, HG) for different group numbers, testing several clustering algorithms and visually analyzing the clusters produced, we chose the PAM algorithm in four groups (Studer, 2012).

The less educated young adults are, the more vulnerable they are to job insecurity. Findings reveal that respondents with a university degree are significantly less likely to be in precarious employment than those with no qualification, but they are not completely immune against this risk, since about 33% of respondents in precarious employment have at least a bachelor's degree (group 4, Figs. 6.2 and 6.3). However, the latter benefit from medical insurance, which is not always the case for respondents who work in atypical jobs and have a baccalaureate or bac + 2 diploma (group 3, Fig. 6.2).

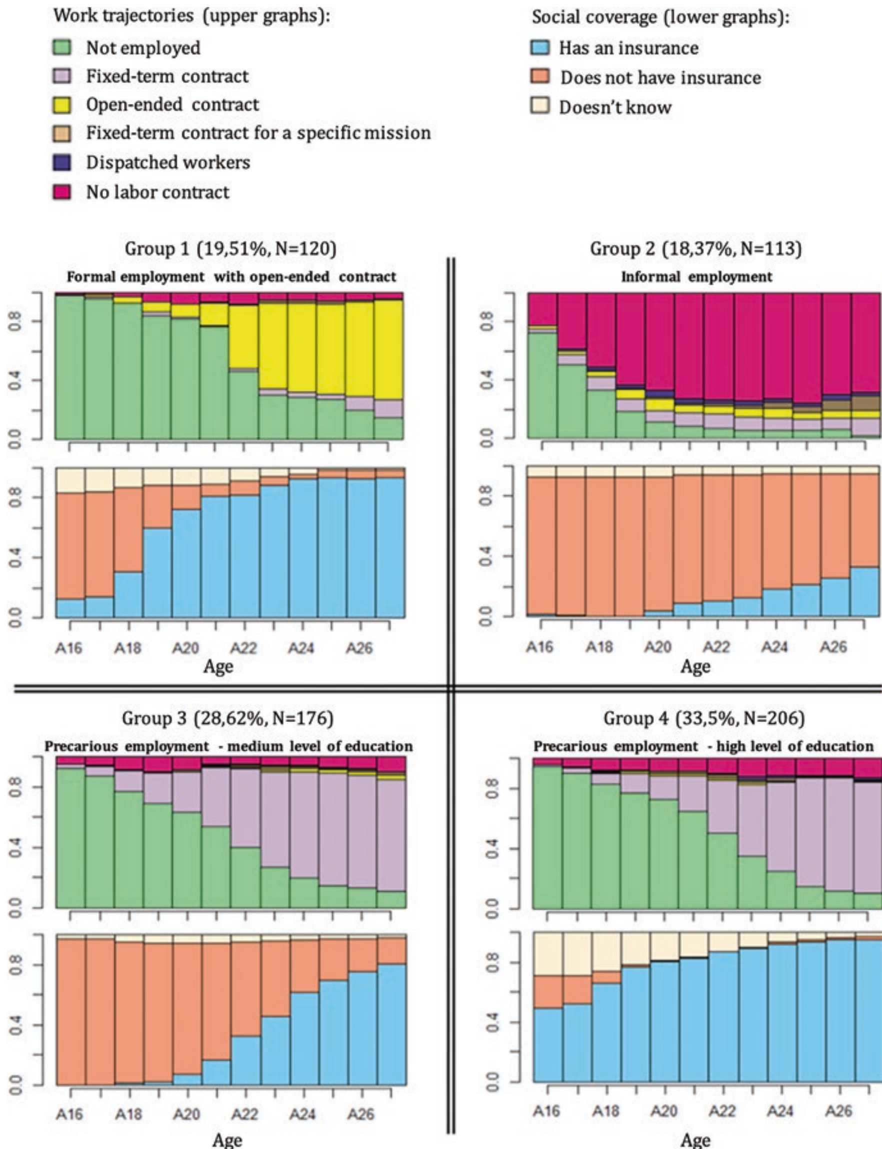


Fig. 6.2 Typology of career paths of the respondents born in the 1980s and of their inclusion in the health and accident insurance system

Insecurity, which affects a relatively heterogeneous population of young adults, tends to become permanent (Fig. 6.4). The longitudinal representation of the typology of professional paths according to the type of labor contract shows that this situation is not transitory, in the sense that fixed-term contracts would eventually lead to open-ended contracts. Workers are placed in a "temporary" situation that tends to become permanent. Precarious work is fragilizing a significant proportion of young adults, especially since many young people in this situation do not have the means to finance, through the system of private insurances, a level of social protection identical to that provided by open-ended labor contracts.

6.4 Young Adults' Work Expectations: From Idealism to Realism

Faced with the fragility of career paths and the rise of precarious employment, individuals are not equal when it comes to coping with the challenges they face. Young adults working in the informal sector are indeed the most vulnerable. The level of education of these young people, most of whom are migrants, tends not to exceed general or specialized/technical middle school. They often come to Beijing to work and are not covered by a health and accident insurance scheme (Figs. 6.2 and 6.3). Social and economic vulnerabilities produced by employment insecurity can lead to the disaffiliation of the young adults, since these situations occur at the end of a twofold process of dropping out in relation to work and in relation to relational insertion (Castel, 1994, p. 13). Young people working in the informal economy are not in a situation of non-employment or even in a situation of social isolation, since they develop sociabilities linked to their professional activity. However, they find themselves in a "zone of vulnerability". In other words, in "a social space of instability and turbulence" (*Ibid.*, p. 16). Their relationship with work and their integration into relationships being fragile, they run the risk of falling into disaffiliation (*Ibid.*).

This is the case for Suzhi, a 35-year-old single mother from a village in the Hebei province. She dropped out of middle school. After a few years spent in her village, she then migrated to the Chinese capital at the age of 25. After a brief training course lasting a few months, she was employed - without a labor contract - by a massage parlor, where she was still working at the time of the interview. She declared that she did not feel integrated in Beijing, or even despised by Beijingers (inhabitants with a Beijing *hukou*). Her only friends were her work colleagues, who were also migrants, but she did not consider them as her confidantes. Her mother plays this role. She was the only person aware of her out-of-wedlock pregnancy. She supported her from a distance to get through this "ordeal", because in China out-of-wedlock births remain stigmatized.

The vulnerability expressed in Suzhi's discourse is echoed by many of the respondents who came to Beijing to study and/or to work. These adults have not managed to find in Beijing a job that offers them the stability they were looking for.

Variables	Work and insurance status trajectories			
	Group 1	***Group 2***	***Group 3***	***Group 4***
Sex	*Odds ratio (SE coef.)*			
Male (ref.)	1	1	1	1
Female	1,136 (0,213)	0,684 (0,255)	1,057 (0,182)	1,058 (0,180)
Type of Hukou				
Rural (ref)	1	1	1	1
Urban	0,809 (0,265)	0,796 (0,267)	0,840 (0,211)	1,398 (0,222)
Place of Hukou registration				
In Beijing (ref.)	1	1	1	1
Not in Beijing	0,994 (0,228)	5,947*** (0,321)	0,829 (0,191)	0,536** (0,188)
Education				
High education (ref.)	1	1	1	1
Medium education	0,619* (0,245)	13,701** (0,768)	2,041** (0,232)	0,514** (0,222)
Low education	0,163*** (0,314)	74,876*** (0,733)	1,426 (0,232)	0,390*** (0,222)
Marriage				
Not married (ref.)	1	1	1	1
Married	0,907 (0,222)	1,132 (0,281)	1,050 (0,192)	0,840 (0,187)
Chi-square	46,165***	194,231***	12,842*	48,209***
Df	6	6	6	6
Cox & Snell R Square	0,072	0,271	0,021	0,075
N	615	615	615	615

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 (Wald test)

Fig. 6.3 Logistic regression models on membership in a cluster (*odds ratio*)

- The following definitions apply:
- "Low education level": people who graduated from primary school (*xiaoxue biyezheng*), middle school (*zhongkao*) and specialized/technical middle school (*zhongdeng zhuanye biyezheng*).
- "Medium education level": people who graduated from high school (*gaokao*) and specialized university training/bac+2 (*daxue zhuanke*).
  "High education level": people who graduated from university (bachelor's degree or higher).

If they have a labor contract, it is for a fixed term. This leaves a particularly bitter taste for Wei and Lixin, who are of urban origin. Wei was born in 1981 in Haerbin, in the north-eastern province of Heilongjiang. After graduating with a bachelor's degree from the University of Haerbin in her home province, she began working part-time on a fixed-term contract. For 4 years she worked as a teacher in a private school. At the age of 27, she decided to leave her hometown and her job to "go discover Beijing" and work there. She worked part-time for a private school for 4 years, without a labor contract. She took the opportunity to enroll in a master's program at a university in Beijing. At the age of 30, she graduated. Her degree enables her to teach Chinese to foreigners. Thanks to this diploma, she found a fixed-term job in a language school in Beijing, where she was still teaching at the time of the interview.

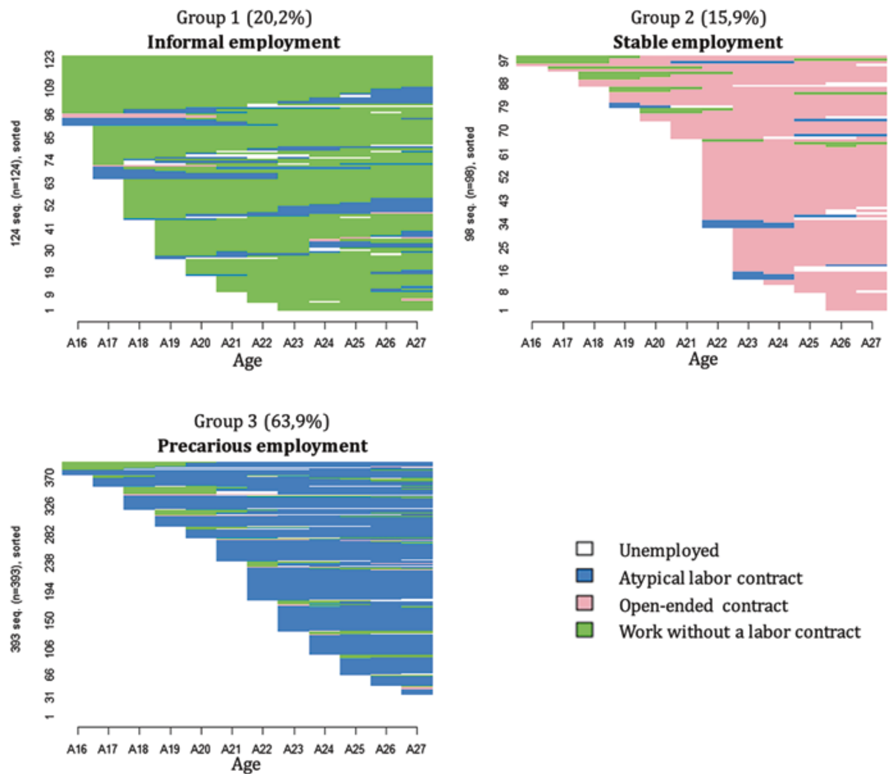


Fig. 6.4 Longitudinal representation of the typology of professional trajectories of young adults born between 1980 and 1985 according to the type of labor contract

She was then very angry at the permanent insecurity that her professional situation brought:

> *Relationships in Beijing are not fair* […] *I am here because my income is higher here than in Haerbin. I am here for work* […], *but despite my degree to teach Chinese to foreign students, my income does not allow me to rent an apartment in Beijing on my own.*

She therefore lives, not by choice, but out of necessity, in a shared apartment. This gives her a huge sense of frustration, as her income does not allow her to live the adult life she aspires to. Since she started University, she has also often felt alone. She thinks it is because she does not have many friends and because none of them live in Beijing. She is worried because she no longer wishes to confide her worries to her elderly parents, so as not to worry them. As she puts it, she finds herself " *alone with her worries* " (*wo ziji chiku*).

As for Lixin, he was so disappointed by his professional experience in the capital that he went back to work in his home province, Zhejiang. This young man, born in 1983, is an only child because his mother's second pregnancy was forcibly terminated by the family planning. A brilliant student, as soon as he passed his high

school diploma,[12] he was admitted to a prestigious University in Beijing to study foreign languages. This degree, along with some work experience in the United States, were not enough to overcome the discrimination he experienced and his professional insecurity. For this reason, at the time of our meeting (2013–2014), he had decided to return to his home province to open a consulting agency.

The risk of relational disaffiliation for young adults in atypical jobs is heightened by the long working hours, which leaves them little free time and few opportunities to socialize. The simultaneous longitudinal analysis of respondents' career paths and working hours indicates that the more unstable their professional situation is, the more likely they are to exceed the statutory working hours, which are set at 8 h a day and 44 h a week, with at least 1 day off a week (Constantin, 2016; LDF, 1995, art.36–42 §4).

Precarious employment makes young adults vulnerable not only economically, but also socially. Research based on data dating from before 2008 indicates that only 50% of companies (state and non-state) had signed a work contract with their employees in 2007; and among them, only 20% of private companies had done so. Of the contracts signed, 60–70% were fixed-term contracts of less than a year (Friedman & Lee, 2010:509). The 2008 labor law is an attempt to remedy the growing precariousness of jobs. The provision relating to the employment contract aims, in particular, to address the problem of informal work. One of the articles aims to curb situations of lasting precariousness by limiting the chaining of fixed-term contracts. For the same position within the same company, the law stipulates that after two consecutive fixed-term contracts, the employee must be offered a permanent contract. To terminate a contract of employment, the employer is now required to justify the reasons (LDF, 2008). This legislation, intended as a tool for social peace by President Hu Jintao and his Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, unfortunately arrived at the wrong time. It coincided with the 2008 economic crisis and it has so far been poorly enforced.

Bibliography

Attané, I. (2011). *Au Pays Des Enfants Rares. La Chine Vers Une Catastrophe Démographique*. Fayard.

Béja, J.-P. (2011). Introduction. In X. Liu (Ed.), *La philosophie du porc et d'autres essais* (pp. 10–42). Editions Gallimard.

Bianco, L. (2005). *Peasant uprisings and revolution in 20th century China*. Editions de la Martinière.

Castel, R. (1994). *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale: Une chronique du salariat*. Gallimard.

Castel, R. (1995). *Les Métamorphoses de La Question Sociale: Une Chronique Du Salariat* (Vol. 2, pp. 97–102). Gallimard.

[12] After evaluating the different quality indicators (ASW, PBC, HC, HG) for different group numbers, testing several clustering algorithms and visually analyzing the clusters produced, we chose the Ward algorithm in three groups (Studer, 2012).

Castel, R. (2009). *La montée des incertitudes. Travail, protections, statut de l'individu*. Editions du Seuil.
Chan, K. W. (2010). The household registration system and migrant labor in China: Notes on a debate. *Population and Development Review, 36*, 357–364.
Chan, C. K., Ngok, K. L., & Phillips, D. (2008). *Social policy in China: Development and well-being*. The Policy Press.
Constantin, S. V. (2016). Reforms, individualisation and informal employment in urban China. In S. Routh & V. Borghi (Eds.), *Workers and the global informal economy* (Interdisciplinary perspectives). Routledge.
Cook, S. (2000). *After the iron Rice bowl: Extending the safety net in China*. Institute of Development Studies.
Davis, D., & Harrell, S. (1993). *Chinese families in the post-Mao era*. University of California Press.
Friedman, E., & Lee, C. K. (2010). Remaking the world of Chinese labour: A 30-year retrospective. *British Journal of Industrial Relations, 48*, 507–534.
Gallagher, M. E., & Dong, B. (2011). Legislating harmony: Labor law reform in contemporary China. In M. E. Gallagher, C. K. Lee, & S. Kuruvilla (Eds.), *From iron Rice bowl to informalization*. Cornell University Press.
Gallagher, M. E., Lee, C. K., & Kuruvilla, S. (2011). Introduction and argument. In S. Kuruvilla, C. K. Lee, & M. E. Gallagher (Eds.), *From iron Rice bowl to informalization*. Cornell University Press.
Gao, Q., Evans, M., & Garfinkel, I. (2013). Social benefits and income inequality in post-socialist China and Vietnam. In D. J. Besharov & K. Baehler (Eds.), *Chinese social policy in a time of transition* (pp. 48–67). Oxford University Press.
HYF. (1981). Marriage law (Hunyinfa, Law on Marriage) .
Javornik, J. (2014). Measuring state De-Familialism: Contesting post-socialist exceptionalism. *Journal of European Social Policy, 24*(3), 240–257.
LDF. (1995). *People's Republic of China labor law* (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Laodong Fa, The Labor Law of the PRC) .
LDF. (2008). *People's Republic of China labor contract law* (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Laodong Fa, The Labor Law of the PRC).
Lin, K.-C. (2011). Enterprise reform and wage movements in Chinese oil fields and refineries. In S. Kuruvilla, C. K. Lee, & M. E. Gallagher (Eds.), *From iron rice bowl to informalization*. Cornell University Press.
Monteil, A. (2010). *Emploi Informel et Gestion Des Inégalités Sociales En Chine Urbaine. Les Politiques de Promotion de "l'emploi Communautaire" Parmi Les "Groupes Vulnérables" à Chengdu (2006–2009)*. Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales.
National Bureau of Statistic (NBS). (2012). *Tabulation on the 2010 population census of Beijing municipality* (北京市2010年人口普查资料, *Beijing shi 2010 nian renkou pucha ziliao*), Beijing (北京), China Statistics Press (中国统计出版社, zhongguo tongji chubanshe).
Naughton, B. (2007). *The Chinese economy. Transitions and growth*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
Park, A., & Cai, F. (2011). The Informalization of the Chinese labor market. In S. Kuruvilla, C. K. Lee, & M. E. Gallagher (Eds.), *From iron Rice bowl to informalization*. Cornell University Press.
Peng, X. (彭希哲). (2009). *2006 China's informal employment development report: A re-examination of the labor market*. Chongqing Publishing House.
RTSCT. (1986). *Provisional regulations on institution of labour contract system in state-owned enterprises* (Guoying Qiye Shixing Laodong Hetong Zanxing Guiding).
Sheng, X., & Settles, B. H. (2006). Intergenerational relationships and elderly care in China: A global perspective. *Current Sociology, 54*, 293–313.
SSPTW. (2012). *Social security programs throughout the world: Asia and the Pacific*, 2012. China.

Studer, M. (2012). ‘Étude des inégalités de genre en début de carrière académique à l’aide de méthodes innovatrices d’analyse de données séquentielles. https://doi.org/10.13097/archive-ouverte/unige:22054.
Swider, S. (2011). Permanent temporariness in the Chinese construction industry. In S. Kuruvilla, C. K. Lee, & M. E. Gallagher (Eds.), *From iron Rice bowl to informalization*. Cornell University Press.
Tong, X. (佟新). (2009). *China's labor relations. Research report*. China’s Real Speech Publishing House.
Wang, P. (王培安). (2010). *Comprehensive report on the floating population: Theory and policy*. China Population Publishing House (zhongguo renkou chubanshe).
Wang, F. (王发运), & Ding, Y. (丁谊). (2012). The advancement of social security system in China, 2012. In P. (李培林) Li, & G. (陈光金) Chen (Eds.), Society of China analysis and forecast, 2013 , Blue book of China’s society (pp. 61–73). Social Sciences Academic Press.
Yeung, W.-J. J., & Shu, H. (2013). Coming of age in times of change: The transition to adulthood in China. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 149–171.
Zhang, L. (2011). The paradox of labor force dualism and state-labor-capital relations in the Chinese automobile industry. In S. Kuruvilla, C. K. Lee, & M. E. Gallagher (Eds.), *From iron rice bowl to informalization*. Cornell University Press.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

Part III
The Rise of Neo-familialism

In Confucian thought, the family holds a privileged position as the center of the solidarity system. It is considered as "an extension of the individual" (Cheng, 1997). The concept "family" (*jiating*) then referred to a group much larger than the parent-child relationship. It included all members of the family clan (*jiazu*) gathered in networks and at the center of which is the individual (Fei, 1992). In this type of vertical family organization, control was exercised by the patriarch over other members of the family.

Recent work by Chinese sociologists of the family highlight changes in meaning taken by the concept. They describe this concept as "flexible" (*shensuo*) because in post-collectivist China the family tends to follow the model of the nuclear family. The family unit, which was previously an economic unit, is becoming more elective (Ma, 1999; Shen, 2013). Ethnographic research conducted by Yan Yunxiang has shown that, in contemporary China, individuals no longer systematically place the interests of the family group above their individual interests (Yan, 2003a, b). As a result, researchers are observing a shift from vertical patriarchal family organizations (with the ancestors at the centre) towards more horizontal organizations (with conjugality at the centre). Thus, in China as elsewhere, under the effect of individualization, the meaning of the family is changing. The family is becoming relational (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Evans, 2008; Singly (de), 2012). Families are taking the form of units of feelings and affection, values that have partially dethroned those of obligation around which family solidarities were articulated (Friedman, 2006; Gonçalo & Harrell, 2017; Hansen & Svarverud, 2010; Yan, 2009).

In my doctoral thesis, I described these transformations as part of a form of neo-familialism (Constantin, 2017). I then reflected on the concept of familialism developed in the field of social policy. This concept makes it possible to understand the structure of social rights by revealing whether they are familialized or individualized (Lister, 1990). Building on this concept, the concepts of "familialization" and "defamilialization" emerged to account for State injunctions made to families, and

more particularly to women, to take on the tasks of *care* (Hantrais, 2004; Leitner, 2003; Ostner, 2004; Saraceno, 2016)[1]. For example, the childcare schemes set up in China during the collectivist period refer to the concept of defamilialization. Childcare facilities were set up to relieve families of this workload to enable them to work within work units. Later, the dismantling of this social policy has participated to a form of "familialization" since families have been urged to find private solutions for looking after preschool children. These solutions may take the form of a diminution in the activity rate of one of the parents (usually the mother), the solicitation of grandparents (usually grandmothers), or the involvement of third parties. As this form of familialism is no longer based on the same principles as in the past, it seems to me that the concept neo-familialism allows to account for this change and for the new value system around which it is articulated, as it will be unfolded in this third and final part.

Bibliography

Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1995). *The normal chaos of love*. Polity Press.

Cheng, A. (1997). *Histoire de La Pensée Chinoise*. Editions du Seuil.

Constantin, S. V. (2017). *L'individualisation de la société chinoise: emploi, famille et genre au prisme des parcours de vie de jeunes adultes à Beijing*. https://doi.org/10.13097/archive-ouverte/unige:101801

Evans, H. (2008). *The subject of gender: Daughters and mothers in urban China*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Fei, X. (费孝通). (1992). *From the soil. The foundations of Chinese society* . University of California Press.

Friedman, S. L. (2006). Intimate politics. *Marriage, the market, and state power in Southeastern China*.

Gonçalo, S., & Harrell, S. (Eds.). (2017). *Transforming patriarchy: Chinese family in the twenty-first century*. University of Washington Press.

Hansen, M. H., & Svarverud, R. (2010). *IChina: The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. NIAS Press.

Hantrais, L. (2004). *Family policy matters*. Policy Press.

Leitner, S. (2003). Varieties of Familialism. The caring function of the family in comparative perspective. *European Societies, 5*(4), 353–375.

Lister, R. (1990). Women, economic dependency and citizenship. *Journal of Social Policy, 19*(4), 445–467.

Ma, G. (麻国庆). (1999). 家与中国社会结构 *(Jia Yu Zhongguo Shehui Jiegou, The family and the structure of Chinese Society)*. Cultural Relics Publishing House (wenwu chubanshe).

Ostner, I. (2004). "Individualisation" – The origins of the concept and its impact on German social policies. *Social Policy & Society, 3*(1), 47–56.

Saraceno, C. (2016). Varieties of Familialism: Comparing four southern European and East Asian welfare regimes. *Journal of European Social Policy, 26*(4), 314–326.

[1] After evaluating the different quality indicators (ASW, PBC, HC, HG) for different group numbers, testing several clustering algorithms and visually analyzing the clusters produced, we chose the PAM algorithm in three groups (Studer, 2012).

Shen, Y. (沈奕斐). (2013). *iFamily: Individuals, family, and state in the process of urban modernization in China*. Shanghai Sanlian Bookstore.

Singly (de), François. (2012). *Sociologie de La Famille Contemporaine. 4e Édition*. Armand Colin.

Studer, M. (2012). 'Étude des inégalités de genre en début de carrière académique à l'aide de méthodes innovatrices d'analyse de données séquentielles. https://doi.org/10.13097/archive-ouverte/unige:22054.

Yan, H. (2003a). Neoliberal governmentality and Neohumanism: Organizing Suzhi/value flow through labor recruitment networks. *Cultural Anthropology, 18*, 493–523.

Yan, Y. (2003b). *Private life under socialism*. Stanford University Press.

Yan, Y. (2009). The individual and transformation of bridewealth. In Y. Yan (Ed.), *The individualization of Chinese society*. Berg.

Chapter 7
The Postponement of Family Formation Due to Employment Instability

Contents

7.1 A Lengthier Path Toward Family Formation.......... 102
7.2 From Filial to Conjugal Ties.......... 107
7.3 The Quest for a Place to Call Home.......... 109
Bibliography.......... 114

Abstract This chapter reveals that the lengthening of the period of schooling, for the 1980s birth-cohort, delayed their entry into the workforce and financial autonomy. Job-seeking is likened to a "rat race", emphasizing the importance of prestigious University degrees to find a job. Young adults face more and more challenges finding stable employment, with many experiencing job instabilities. Unemployment rates rise, particularly impacting those with rural *hukou* and lower educational achievements.

Prolonged schooling and delayed stable employment lead to postponed transitions to marriage and parenthood for the 1980s birth-cohort compared to the 1950s. These shifts often create tensions and misunderstandings with parents who grew up and who were socialized in a very different social context.

This chapter examines in-depth family trajectories and depicts the rise of independent lifestyles nestled between filial and conjugal ties. During this specific time lapse, young adults have jobs but are not yet burdened by family responsibilities. Findings reveal that while the housing market leans towards buying, gaining homeownership proves more and more challenging, particularly for those in precarious employment.

Keywords Youth unemployment · Instability · Precarity · Housing · Middle class · Family

© The Author(s) 2024

S. V. Constantin, *A Life Course Perspective on Chinese Youths*, Life Course Research and Social Policies 17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57216-6_7

7.1 A Lengthier Path Toward Family Formation

As revealed in Chap. 5, the extension of the time spent at school in the life calendar of young people born in the 1980s has induced a delay in the average age at first job, and therefore to financial autonomy (Fig. 5.1). In post-collectivist China, looking for a job can be compared to a rat race according to some respondents. There is a growing sense amongst them that if they do not work hard to get a diploma, they will be ousted by the very competitive job market. Degrees from prestigious Universities constitute a comparative advantage to find a job and a job that matches with their expectations. But more investments from families in the education of young people does not mean the latter will not have to struggle to find a stable employment. Some young adults coming from cities outside Beijing can count on their fingers how many times they had to change jobs (see Chap. 6). If there are many jobs available, a large number of them are precarious (short term contracts, part-time, low paid). As shown by earlier studies (Lian, 2009, 2010; Wang & Guo, 2012), the data collected indicate that the unemployment rate is rising. Unemployment affects categories of workers differently. All other things being equal, this phenomenon mainly impacts young people who have a rural *hukou* at the time the research was conducted. This social group tends to have a lower school achievement than urban youths.

Longer school trajectories and delay in the age at first stable employment induce later transition to marriage and parenthood. The inter-cohort comparative analysis of transition rates to first marriage and birth of a first child confirms the delay in the age of entry into the roles of spouses and parents for young people born in the 1980s (Fig. 5.1). Whereas 87% of respondents born in the 1950s were married before the age of 28 and 70% had a child before this age (Figs. 7.1 and 7.2), at the same age

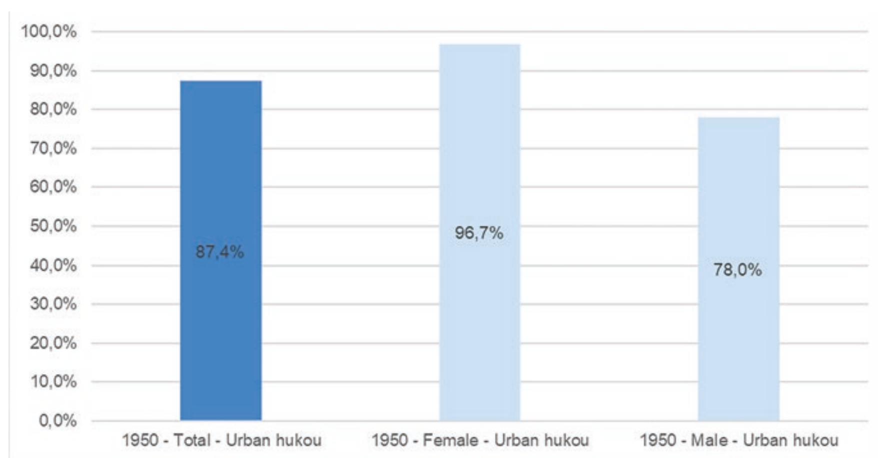


Fig. 7.1 Percentage of respondents born between 1950 and 1959 married before the age of 28-year-old

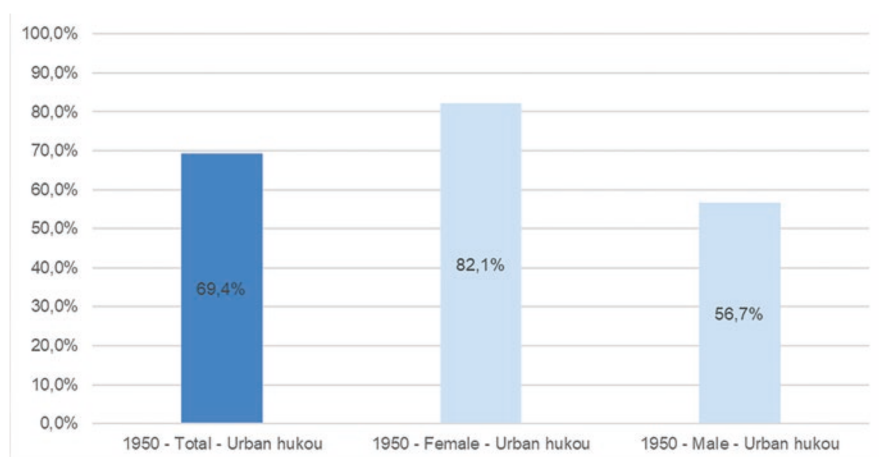


Fig. 7.2 Percentage of respondents born between 1950 and 1959 who became parents before the age of 28-year-old

only 42% of urban respondents born between 1980 and 1985 were married and 18% had had a child (Figs. 7.4 and 7.5).

It is worth recalling that the 1950s birth cohort's path to adulthood was disrupted by the Cultural revolution and the Sent-down movement of urban youth to the countryside. These sociohistorical changes had the effect of delaying the stages of their transition to adulthood. For instance, amongst the *zhiqing* (sent-down youth) many waited for the end of the movement and their definitive return to the city to get married and have a child because they feared that getting married in the countryside, with a rural spouse, could mark a break with their urban origins and deter their chances of returning to the city (Chen, 1999; Lin, 2013; Meng & Gregory, 2002; Zhou & Hou, 1999; Bonnin, 2004).

The birth control campaign "*wanxishao* (晚稀少)" implemented in 1973 may also explain the delay in the age of first marriage and first childbirth of the members of this birth cohort, since it urged individuals to late marriage and procreation, spacing between births and few births. In cities, where the policy was the strictest, women were encouraged not to marry before 25 and men before 28. Couples were also enjoined not to have more than two children, with a three-to-four-year interval between births.[1] Out-of-wedlock births were not socially accepted at this time in China (and still largely today).

[1] In the sample:

22.6% of respondents have had a car at least once in their life (21.72% of women and 23.38% of men).

Among all young adults of urban origin, 28.77% have had a car at least once in their life (28.84% of women and 28.7% of men).

Among all young adults of rural origin, 7.34% have had a car at least once in their life (1.33% of women and 11.76% of men).

The analyses reveal that 97% of female respondents were married at 27-year-old, while 78% of male respondents were married at the exact same age (Fig. 7.1). After 27-year-old, nearly 30% of men are married. If women born in the 1950s mainly get married between 22 and 26- year-old, men mainly take the step between 24 and 28- year-old.

Amongst this birth cohort, 82% of female respondents had become mothers at 27-year-old, and 57% of male had become fathers at this age (Fig. 7.3). It is mainly between 22 and 28- year-old that women reach motherhood and between 24 and 29-year-old for men. Women are significantly more likely than men to be married and have a child at/or before 27. This is especially true if their level of education does not exceed middle school (low level of education, Fig. 7.3).

The abandonment of the " *wanxishao* " campaign at the end of the 1970s and the marriage law of January first 1981 according to which the legal age for marriage is 20 for women and 22 for men (article 5 of the marriage law)[2] could have led to an advancement in the age of marriage and parenthood for the birth cohort born in the 1980s. However, the data reveals a delay in the average age towards these transitions. If we consider the paths of the respondents up to the age of 27, we observe that the average age at first marriage has moved from 23–24-year-old for urban women born in the 1950s to 25–26-year-old for city dwellers born in the 1980s (Fig. 5.1). Urban women born in the 1950s gave birth to their first child on average 1 year after their marriage. Whereas young women born in the 1980s tend to give birth to their first child in the same year as their marriage.

Just over 50% of city women and 34% of city men are married at the age of 27 (Fig. 7.4). They are 23% to have become mothers and 14% to have become fathers (Fig. 7.5). At the same age, 63% of rural respondents were married and 50% had had a child. Rural women are nearly 70% to be married at 27 and 57% have had a child. Rural men are 58% to be married and 44% to have become fathers at this age (Figs. 7.4 and 7.5).

The logistic regression models indicate that amongst the post-1980 birth cohort, it is the women, the rural respondents, or those with a low level of education who have significantly more chance of being married or having a child before the age of 28 (Fig. 7.3). Because they married later, young adults born in the 1980s and of urban origin had been married for a shorter time than their peers from post-1950 at the same age.[3] However, young rural people born in the 1980s, who married before this age, tended to do so slightly earlier than the cohort born in the 1950s (Fig. 5.1).

These results indicate that transitions to marriage and parenthood occured later over the life-course of young adults. If the timing of the family trajectories of young urban people differs from that of city dwellers born in the 1950s, that of young rural people tends to approach it. The delay in the age at first marriage and first childbirth

[2] Expression frequently used by respondents to express this idea.

[3] N = 571 because only those who answered the question are considered in the analyses.

1950-1959:

Variables	***Respondents married at 27 years old or before***	***Respondents having a child at 27 years old or before***
Sex	*Odds ratio (SE coef.)*	*Odds ratio (SE coef.)*
Male (ref.)	1	1
Female	12,781*** (0,574)	4,041*** (0,288)
Hukou registration at birth		
Not in Beijing (ref.)	1	1
In Beijing	0,606 (0,434)	0,743 (0,294)
Education		
Low education (ref.)	1	1
Medium education	0,757 (0,443)	0,559* (0,296)
High education	0,054*** (0,62)	0,103*** (0,518)
Chi-square	51,332***	46,394***
Df	4	4
Cox & Snell R Square	0,157	0,143
N	301	301

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 (Wald test)

1980-1985:

Variables	***Respondents married at 27 years old or before***	***Respondents having a child at 27 years old or before***
Sex	*Odds ratio (SE coef.)*	*Odds ratio (SE coef.)*
Male (ref.)	1	1
Female	1,449* (0,167)	1,867** (0,207)
Type of Hukou (2012)		
Rural (ref)	1	1
Urban	0,448*** (0,193)	0,314*** (0,213)
Hukou registration at birth		
Not in Beijing (ref.)	1	1
In Beijing	0,979 (0,188)	0,873 (0,227)
Education		
Low education (ref.)	1	1
Medium education	0,897 (0,217)	0,403*** (0,240)
High education	0,658* (0,202)	0,124*** (0,285)
Chi-square	31,31***	135,0***
Df	5	5
Cox & Snell R Square	0,039	0,197
N	615	615

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 (Wald test)

Fig. 7.3 Logistic regression models (*odds ratio*) on the risk for respondents to be married and have a child before 28-year-old (1950–1959 and 1980–1985)

cannot, however, be explained by the disaffection of the family institution. Indeed, Ji and Yeung's research shows that contrary to what has been observed in Western countries and in several Southeast Asian countries, the marriage rate in China is not declining (Jones & Yeung, 2014; Shanahan, 2000). Marriage and births within marriage remain a prevalent social phenomenon.

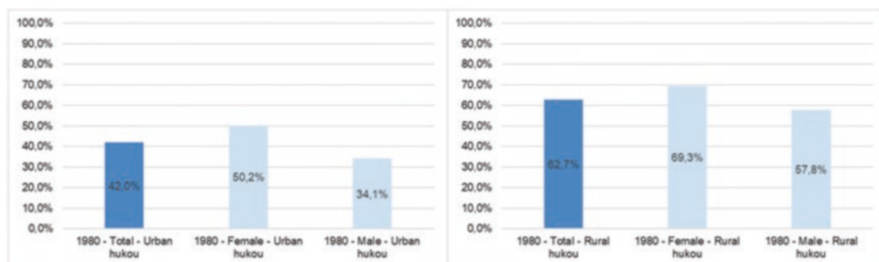


Fig. 7.4 Percentage of respondents born between 1980 and 1985 married before the age of 28-year-old

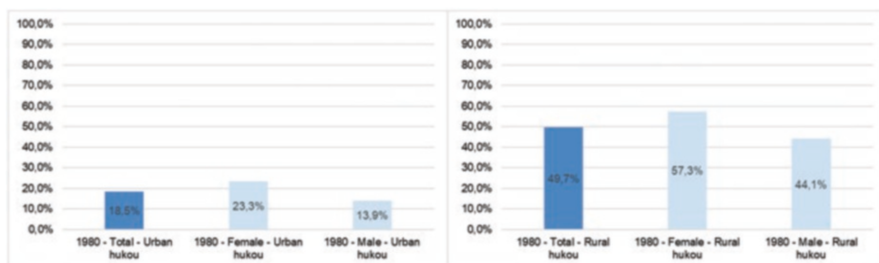


Fig. 7.5 Percentage of respondents born between 1980 and 1985 who became parents before the age of 28-year-old

The rise of uncertainties in Chinese society over the past 20 years partly explains the delay in the age of marriage and parenthood. Decollectivization, by "emancipating" the economy and individuals from the tutelage of the socialist state to some extent, has created new opportunities and an increase in income for some; and a degradation of living conditions for others. With the disintegration of the socialist welfare state, individuals had no choice but to internalize the negative externalities of economic liberalization; namely, the liberalization of the labor market, the liberalization of prices in the health, education, housing, and food sectors (sectors which were previously taken care of by the collective). Access to these resources has become highly competitive over the years and is now the responsibility of individuals. It is in this context that more and more young people born in the 1980s are extending their studies and consequently the stages of their transitions to adulthood. They are delaying certain transitions, such as transitions to the roles of spouses and parents. Moreover, for many respondents, the formation of the family is conditioned on the prior achievement of economic independence, a transition that also comes later in the life-course of young cohorts due to the average lengthening of study duration. The delay in the age of marriage and parenthood can be a source of misunderstandings and tensions within families. The parents of young adults, who became adults in Maoist society, were subject to different social expectations. Under pressure from their parents, some young people – who are facing new realities – try

to meet their parents' expectations, but many cannot and are forced to forge new paths to adulthood.

7.2 From Filial to Conjugal Ties

The young adults' family trajectories reveal the existence of independent and exploratory lifestyles slipping between filial and conjugal ties. This social phenomenon has been described by researchers as "the rice bowl of youth" because they have jobs and are not yet burdened by family responsibilities (Zhang, 2000). Young adults take advantage of this time to assert themselves as actors and actresses of Chinese "modernity". Young people from rural areas use this time as well to migrate to the city and "see the country" (Chang, 2008; Pun, 2005). Migrations, which are often not only motivated by economic reasons for this birth-cohort, offer young women an opportunity to escape family obligations, parental control and to acquire autonomy, leading to a delay in the age of marriage (Hershatter, 2007; Murphy, 2002).

Multichannel sequence analyses (MCSA) reveal that marriage still plays a central role in the lives of young adults, despite a relatively long single life (Fig. 7.6)[4] .

The findings uncover that respondents who have completed short studies, not exceeding high school (groups 1 "Precarious employment and "early" marriage" and group 4 "Informal employment and "early" marriage" Figs. 7.6 and 7.7), tend to marry earlier than those who have completed higher education – Bac + 2 and beyond (groups 2 "Stable employment and "late" marriage" and group 3 "Precarious employment and "late" marriage" Figs. 7.6 and 7.7). If the extension of the duration of schooling plays a role in the delay of the age at first marriage, the precarization of professional trajectories also seems to exert an influence. It does not indeed appear easy for young urban and rural people from outside Beijing to reach this stage when they have atypical labor contracts.

Respondents with higher educational background and who have a precarious employment contract (Group 3 "Precarious employment and "late" marriage" Fig. 7.6) tend to marry later than young adults who have the same level of education, but who have a permanent employment contract (Group 2 "Stable employment and "late" marriage" Fig. 7.6). Xiaocui's situation, for instance, is emblematic of these trade-offs. She met her future husband in 2012 and explains that, for financial reasons, they have postponed the date of their wedding several times. They both have a bachelor's degree from a prestigious university in Beijing and have been working in the city for several years. As their parents were farmers, their income alone did not allow them to organize a wedding that met their "expectations" (born in 1986, rural, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Bachelor). As we shall see in the next chapter, these expectations are complex in the sense that they are at the crossroads of

[4] Comparing the education level of the partners' parents-in-law would also be useful to complete the analyses conducted. Unfortunately, this is not possible because I only have the education level of the respondents' parents.

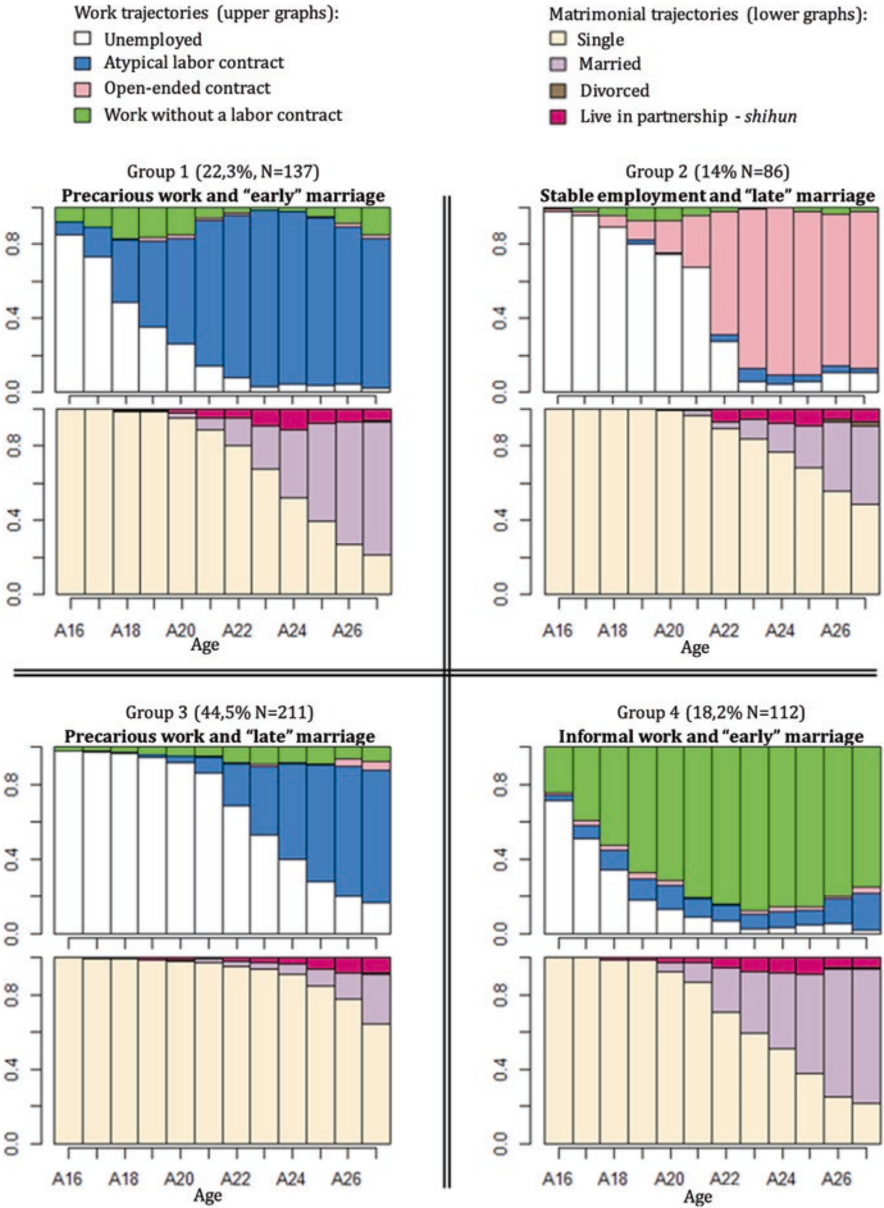


Fig. 7.6 Cross-sectional representation of the typology of professional and marital paths of young adults born between 1980 and 1985 (MCSA)

different norms stemming from social expectations dating from different eras (pre-Maoist, Maoist, post-collectivist). They wanted to celebrate their engagement in Beijing a year before the wedding, so that their parents could meet. As they each

Variables	*Group 1*	*Group 2*	*Group 3*	*Group 4*
Sex	*Odds ratio (SE Coef.)*	*Odds ratio (SE Coef.)*	*Odds ratio (SE Coef.)*	*Odds ratio (SE Coef.)*
Male (ref.)	1	1	1	1
Female	1,113 (0,205)	1,451 (0,239)	0,668* (0,186)	1,154 (0,237)
Type of hukou (2012)				
Rural (ref)	1	1	1	1
Urbain	1,547 (0,232)	0,7 (0,282)	0,824 (0,219)	0,966 (0,245)
Hukou registration at birth				
Not in Beijing (ref.)	1	1	1	1
In Beijing	1,370 (0,219)	0,997 (0,273)	1,203 (0,207)	0,507* (0,269)
Education				
Low education (ref.)	1	1	1	1
Medium education	0,119*** (0,239)	3,785*** (0,352)	3,607*** (0,241)	0,195*** (0,297)
High education	0,364*** (0,312)	3,988*** (0,343)	13,235*** (0,243)	0,019*** (0,603)
Chi-square	67,360***	24,670***	150,358***	141,781***
Df	5	5	5	5
Cox & Snell R square	0,104	0,039	0,217	0,206
N	615	615	615	615

***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$ (Wald test)

Fig. 7.7 Logistic regressions (*odds ratio*) – Professional and marital paths of young adults born between 1980 and 1985

lived in shared accommodation in cramped housing, it was impossible for them to accommodate them at home. Her future husband's parents agreed to pay for their trip from Shandong province. This was not the case with Xiaocui's parents, who live in Heilongjiang province. They announced that they "did not have time to come to Beijing". She was very saddened by this, as she wanted to oversee every stage of her wedding so that it would be "perfect". She sadly told me that, not having the means to offer her parents the trip, they decided to cancel their engagement and get married straight away. They were subsequently forced to postpone the date of their wedding again because they were not financially able to organize a reception that suited their wishes. They wanted to take souvenir photos with a photographer in Beijing, organize a first reception in Xiaocui's village with family and neighbors, a second in her husband's village with family and neighbors, a third in Beijing with their friends and colleagues, and go on a honeymoon. They waited another year before getting married to save money. In the end, however, they had to forego the reception in Beijing (born in 1986, rural, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Bachelor).

7.3 The Quest for a Place to Call Home

A trend has been observed in European countries (especially in southern Europe) and North America for young adults to return to their parents' home despite their entry in the labor market. This is due to the development of flexible and precarious jobs that do not allow young adults to meet their needs without the support of their parents (Settersten & Ray, 2010; Van de Velde, 2008). Multichannel sequence analyses do not reveal such a trend in China. Whether young adults have a permanent contract, have no employment contract or have an atypical contract, they tend to live

in shared accommodation before living alone or as a couple (Fig. 7.8).[5] Even in the third group "Precarious employment and cohabitation", including mainly Beijingers, the analyses do not show back-and-forth trajectories between the parental home and residential autonomy.

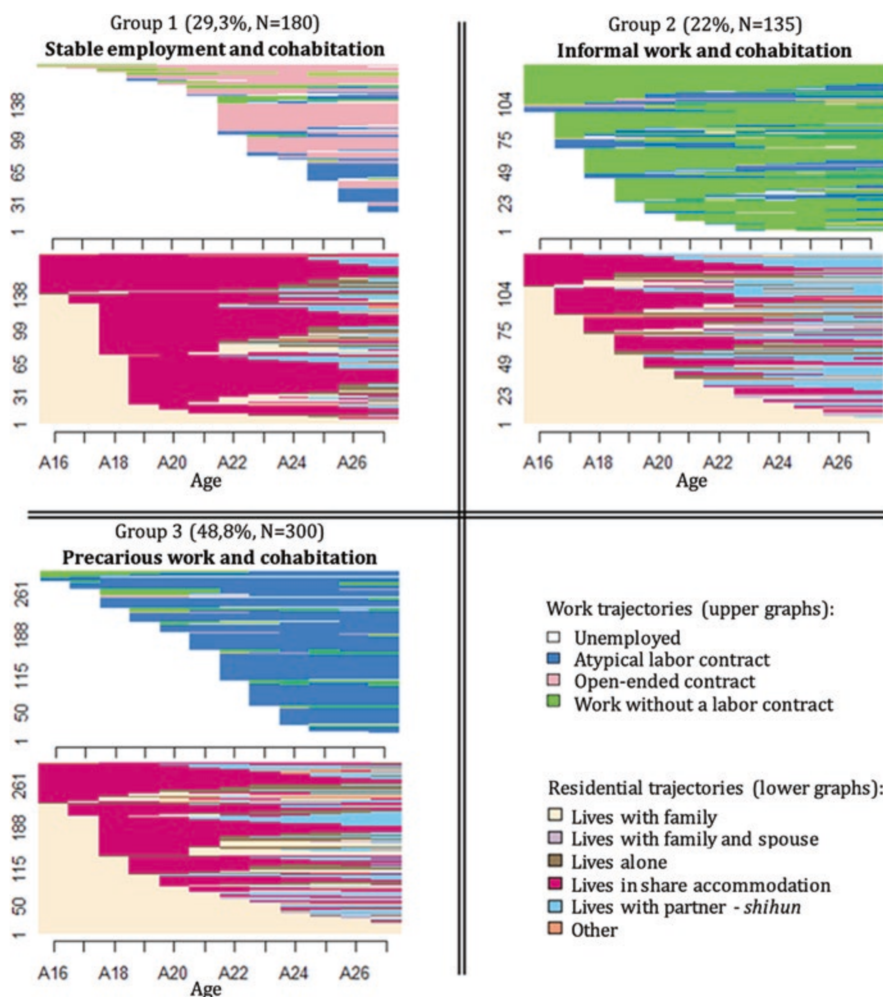


Fig. 7.8 Longitudinal representation of the typology of professional and residential paths of young adults born between 1980 and 1985 (MCSA)

[5] During the interviews, I asked all the respondents what they think about cohabitation, but I did not ask them to specify their views on people who practice cohabitation.

Although the housing market is more oriented towards buying rather than renting, and young adults do not receive support from public institutions to help them become self-sufficient, there is no trend towards prolonging family cohabitation, even for young people who find themselves in the most precarious situations (Group 2 "Informal employment and cohabitation" and Group 3 "Precarious employment and cohabitation" Fig. 7.8). In our view, this does not mean that family solidarity no longer exists, but rather that it has evolved, changed and adapted to the new context of post-collectivist society.

Although young adults achieve residential autonomy at an early age, it is not easy for them to gain access to home ownership, which in the collective imagination is an essential element of identification with the middle class. The clusters obtained through the Optimal Matching (OMA) method[6] (Fig. 7.8) and the transition rates to home ownership calculated for each group (Fig. 7.10) indicate that it is even more difficult for precarious workers to become homeowners. By the age of 27, just over 15% of young adults working informally and slightly more than 20% of those with atypical labor contracts had become homeowners (Fig. 7.10). In addition, about 25% of permanent contract employees were able to buy a home at the same age, even though they entered the labor market later (Fig. 7.10). Higher education beyond high school protects against the risk of working in the informal economy, but it does not necessarily shield young adults from job insecurity[7] (Fig. 7.2, group 3 "Precarious Employment" and Fig. 7.9).

Variables	***Group 1***	***Group 2***	***Group 3***
Sex	*Odds ratio (SE Coef.)*	*Odds ratio (SE Coef.)*	*Odds ratio (SE Coef.)*
Male (ref.)	1	1	1
Femlale	1,107 (0,230)	1,508 (0,227)	0,728 (0,175)
Type of hukou (2012)			
Rural (ref)	1	1	1
Urban	0,988 (0,240)	0,689 (0,270)	1,183 (0,196)
Hukou registration at birth			
Not in Beijing (ref.)	1	1	1
In Beijing	0,383*** (0,268)	1,016 (0,260)	1,787** (0,202)
Education			
Low education (ref.)	1	1	1
Medium education	0,212*** (0,282)	3,416*** (0,337)	1,925** (0,223)
High education	0,026*** (0,480)	4,461*** (0,323)	3,117*** (0,215)
Chi-Square	150,235***	29,687***	45,718***
Df	5	5	5
Cox & Snell R square	0,217	0,047	0,072
N	615	615	615

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 (Wald test)

Fig. 7.9 Logistic regressions (*odds ratio*) – professional paths of young adults born between 1980 and 1985 according to the type of employment contract

[6] For example: http://sh.eastday.com/m/20141008/u1ai8378295.html; http://emotion.pclady.com.cn/133/1336199_all.html; http://www.shuolianai.com/thread-10495-1-1.html

[7] "A couple shall go through marriage registration if it has not done so" (HYF, 1981).

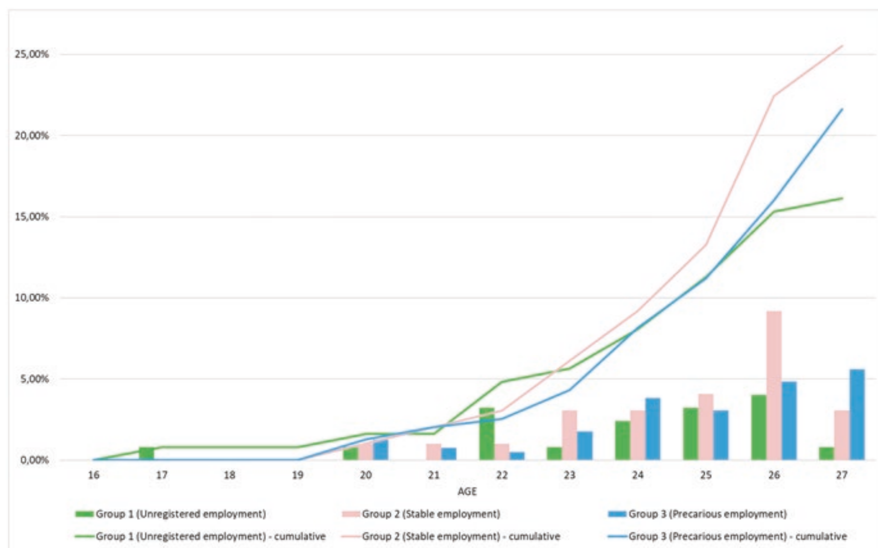


Fig. 7.10 Transition rates to homeownership of young adults born between 1980 and 1985 according to the typology above (Fig. 7.8)

The creation of a new lifestyle, in other words, practices and/or representations associated with a specific social group, through the media, official discourse, and public policies creates a strong tension among young adults between their high expectations and the reality of their economic situation. Young people born in the 1980s were led to believe that they were lucky and privileged to have grown up in a China undergoing rapid economic growth. Now, as adults, they find themselves alone in facing ruthless competition and struggling to be part of the new middle class, symbol of the "society of small prosperity" sought by the Chinese government. Tired of this new "cult of performance," the young adults I met denounced the competition, the cult of money, corruption, the decline in values or morality in the society and the "illusion of a better life they were lulled into" (Chicharro, 2010; Ehrenberg, 2010). They do not, however, give up on wanting to be part of the middle class, whose membership is socially valued, as its members are represented as well-educated (*wenhua*), civilized (*wenming*) and of quality (*suzhi*) (Rocca, 2016:6). 45% of the young adults I met identify with the middle class.[8] All other things being equal, logistic regressions indicate that, among all respondents, the urban population in general is more likely than the rural population to identify with this social group, and that women are more likely than men to declare that they belong to this

[8] "Marriage is a major event in life, it needs to be taken very seriously, *hunyin shi rensheng dashi, xuyao hen shenzhong*".

Variables	*Group 1*	*Group 2*	*Group 3*
Sex	*Odds ratio (SE Coef.)*	*Odds ratio (SE Coef.)*	*Odds ratio (SE Coef.)*
Male (ref.)	1	1	1
Female	1,616** (0,180)	0,750 (0,194)	0,606* (0,255)
Type of hukou (2012)			
Rural (ref)	1	1	1
Urban	4,496*** (0,232)	8,538*** (0,304)	0,032*** (0,273)
Hukou registration at birth			
Not in Beijing (ref.)	1	1	1
In Beijing	1,140 (0,209)	1,303 (0,221)	0,467* (0,309)
Education			
Low education (ref.)	1	1	1
Medium education	1,712* (0,235)	0,624 (0,255)	0,692 (0,325)
High education	1,822** (0,221)	0,471** (0,240)	1,101 (0,315)
***Owns a car** (at least once in her/his life)*			
Never had a car (ref.)	1	1	1
Had at least one car	1,085 (0,231)	1,011 (0,244)	0,732 (0,383)
***Property owner** (at least once in her/his life)*			
Never owned a property (ref.)	1	1	1
Owned a property	2,163** (0,243)	0,487**(0,270)	0,669 (0,395)
Chi-square	120,033***	79,848***	286,238***
Df	7	7	7
Cox & Snell R square	0,177	0,122	0,372
N	615	615	615

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 (Wald test)

Fig. 7.11 Logistic regressions (*odds ratio*) on the feeling of social belonging of the respondents born between 1980 and 1985

group. This sense of belonging is also significantly correlated with the level of education of young adults: The higher their level of education is, the more likely they are to identify with the middle class (Fig. 7.11).

According to research on the Chinese middle class, owning an individual home in a secure compound and a car have become inseparable elements of the feeling of belonging to the middle class (Davis, 2000; Li, 2013). The analyses confirm the very strong link that exists in individuals' subjectivity between "owning one's home" and "identification with the middle class". Young adults who do not own their home significantly tend to have a feeling of belonging to the working class (Fig. 7.11). However, the data does not establish a significant correlation between "identifying with the middle class" and "owning a car" (Fig. 7.11). It should be noted, however, that among all young adults from urban areas, 28% have owned a car at least once in their lives, while only 7% of young adults from rural areas had done so.[9]

[9] "Getting married and having children is a matter of course, *jiehun shenghaizi shi tianjingdiyi de shiqing*".

Bibliography

Bonnin, M. (2004). *Lost Generation. The Movement of Sending Educated Youth to the Countryside in China, 1968–1980*. Editions of the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences.

Chang, L. T. (2008). *Factory girls. From village to city in a changing China*. Spiegel & Grau.

Chen, Y. (1999). Lost in revolution and reform: The socioeconomic pains of China's red guards generation, 1966–1996. *Journal of Contemporary China, 21*, 219–239.

Chicharro, G. (2010). *Le Fardeau Des Petits Empereurs*. Société d'ethnologie.

Davis, D. S. (2000). *The consumer revolution in urban China*. University of California Press.

Ehrenberg, A. (2010). *Le Culte de La Performance*. Fayard/Pluriel.

Hershatter, G. (2007). *Women in China's long twentieth century*. University of California Press.

HYF. (1981). Marriage law (Hunyinfa, Law on Marriage) .

Jones, G. W., & Yeung, W.-J. J. (2014). Marriage in Asia. *Journal of Family Issues, 35*, 1567–1583.

Li, C. (李成). (2013). The Rise of the Middle Class in China (Zhongguo Zhongchan Jieji de Xingqi). In C. (李成) Li (ed.), 'Middle Class' China: Beyond economic transformation, the emerging Chinese middle class (*'zhongchan' zhongguo: chaoyue jingji zhuanxing de xinxing zhongguo zhongchanjieji*). Shanghai Translation Publishing House (Shanghai yiwen chubanshe).

Lian, S. (2009). 蚁族*:*大学毕业生聚居村实录 *(yizu: daxue biyesheng jujucun shilu, Fourmis: Rapport sur leurs conditions d'habitation)*. 广西师范大学出版社 (Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe).

Lian, S. (2010). 蚁族*:*谁的时代 *(yizu: shei de shidai, Fourmis: l'époque de qui?*). 中信出版社 (zhongxin chubanshe).

Lin, Q. (2013). Lost in transformation? The employment trajectories of China's cultural revolution cohort. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 172–193.

Meng, X., & Gregory, R. G. (2002). The impact of interrupted education on subsequent educational attainment: A cost of the Chinese cultural revolution. *Economic Development and Cultural Change, 50*, 935–959.

Murphy, R. (2002). *How migrant labor is changing rural China*. Cambridge University Press.

Pun, N. (2005). *Made in China. Women factory Workers in a Global Workplace*. Duke University Press.

Rocca, J.-L. (2016). *The making of the Chinese middle class: Small comfort and great expectations*. Spinger.

Settersten, R., & Ray, B. E.. (2010). *Not quite adults*.

Shanahan, M. J. (2000). Pathways to adulthood in changing societies: Variability and mechanisms in life-course perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26*, 667–692.

Van de Velde, C. (2008). *Devenir Adulte. Sociologie Comparée de La Jeunesse En Europe*. Presses Universitaires de France.

Wang, B. (王伯庆), & Guo, J. (郭娇). (2012). 年中国大学生就业报告 (2012 nian zhongguo daxuesheng jiuye baogao. Rapport annuel sur l'emploi des diplômés de l'université, 2012). 社会科学文献出版社 (shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe).

Zhang, Z. (2000). Mediating time: The "Rice bowl of youth" in fin de Siècle urban China. *Public Culture, 12*, 93–113.

Zhou, X., & Hou, L. (1999). Children of the cultural revolution: The state and the life-course in the People's Republic of China. *American Sociological Review, 64*, 12–36.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

Chapter 8
Young Adults' Aspiration for Intimacy in Post-collectivist China

Contents

8.1 From Free Choice to Social Homogamy 118
8.2 *Shihun:* An Understatement for Premarital Cohabitation 123
Bibliography 130

Abstract This chapter delves into the dynamics of marital choices in contemporary China. The chapter presents contrasting responses between men and women regarding parental influence. While men often assert independence, women frequently seek parental advice in their marital decisions. Notably, several women employ strategic approaches to circumvent parental disagreement, reflecting a delicate balance between individual autonomy and familial harmony. The analysis unveils a complex interplay of societal norms and aspirations, indicating that, despite legal emphasis on free choice, familial considerations continue to shape marital decisions.

Additionally, the chapter explores social homogamy and hypergamy trends, revealing gendered patterns in the importance placed on education, income, and family background in partner selection.

Furthermore, the findings shed light on a growing form of intimacy in post-collectivist China: cohabitation before marriage. Encountering social resistance, particularly from older generations, a new concept surfaced: "trial marriage" (*shihun*). This strategic term emerged among young adults seeking to legitimize living together before formalizing the union. It bridges the gap between societal norms and evolving practices.

The findings reveal a complex interplay between societal expectations, individual choices, and the enduring influence of Confucian values in shaping attitudes towards cohabitation and marriage in contemporary China.

Keywords Intimacy · Marital choice · Parents influence · Gender · Confucian values · Cohabitation · *Shihun*

© The Author(s) 2024

S. V. Constantin, *A Life Course Perspective on Chinese Youths*, Life Course Research and Social Policies 17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57216-6_8

8.1 From Free Choice to Social Homogamy

On May 1, 1950, the government of the People's Republic of China announced the abolition of all laws supporting arranged and arbitrary marriages by implementing the marriage contract based on individual free choice (Croll, 1981). This law was replaced on January 1, 1981 by a new law on marriage (HYF, 1981). This law stipulates that marriage is the foundation of communal life (art.8):

> Article 8: Both the man and the woman desiring to contract a marriage shall register in person with the marriage registration office. If the proposed marriage is found to conform with the provisions of this Law, the couple shall be allowed to register and issued marriage certificates. The husband-and-wife relationship shall be established as soon as they obtain the marriage certificates. A couple shall go through marriage registration if it has not done so.

The law also stipulates the right to free choice of marriage (art.5) and the prohibition of forced and arranged marriages (art.3). It mentions the equal place of spouses within the couple (art.2). It indicates that the spouses are free to choose to use their own surname (art.14) and that the children can bear either the surname of their mother or that of their father (art.22). Once the marriage has been registered, depending on the wishes of both parties, the wife or the husband can become a member of his or her in-laws (art.9). Through these provisions, marriage is no longer a matter between two families (as it was the case in pre-Maoist China). It becomes an affair between spouses, who have autonomous rights enabling them to take care of their marital affairs without interference from third parties. By giving spouses control of marriage negotiations, the marriage law has given marriage a new significance for the spouses and helped to spread new family values.

The free choice of a spouse enables women to become active players in the formation of their couple. 58% of respondents born between 1980 and 1985 declared that their parents could not influence them in their choice of spouse. Among respondents born in the 1950s, i.e. after the enactment of the marriage law, 59% said they had not followed their parents' influence in choosing the person with whom to build a family. It is particularly interesting to note that, in both birth cohorts, it is the men who are the least influenced by their parents. 63% of men born in the 1980s and in the 1950s claim not to be influenced by their parents in choosing a spouse. In contrast, 52% of women born in the 1980s and 55% of women born in the 1950s where able to overcome the influence of their parents. Overall, men seem to be more emancipated from parental influence than women. This is even more acute in the responses of young adults from rural backgrounds: 73% of men and 55% of women born between 1980 and 1985 say that they do not allow themselves to be influenced by

their parents in a matter as intimate as the formation of their couple. The redefinition of marriage by the Party-State and the direct intervention of the government in the family sphere has contributed to weakening parental influence and opening a space for the rise of intimacy.

In addition, the radical change in the organization of society during the Maoist period also contributed to transforming the social organization of families. From the mid-1950s onwards, the loss by these families of their land, industrial and real estate properties, as well as the questioning of the cult of ancestors, directly weakened the basis on which patriarchal authority rested. Production was organized by collectives, the work unit in town and the commune in the countryside, which took the place of parents in assigning individuals a specific job to do. There are three reasons that could explain why parental influence is weaker in the countryside. Firstly, since the opening-up to the market economy and the importation of new production techniques, the knowledge of parents has become relatively outdated in the eyes of their children. Secondly, young adults, and especially sons, have been able to access a higher level of education than their parents. This has given them the legitimacy to participate in the social life of the village (Yan, 2009:76). Thirdly, the experience of migration to urban centers has enlarged opportunities for young people to socialize with people of the opposite sex. This has had the effect of opening up their range of options when it comes to choosing a partner. Enriched by these experiences, young rural men have gained in agency. This makes them feel more empowered to take charge of their own lives and question parental authority.

It is however significant to observe that just over half of the women born in the 1980s declare not wanting or not having followed the recommendations of their parents in terms of marital choice. Qualitative interviews reveal that, regardless of the level of education, it is important for the respondents to discuss the choice of their spouse with their parents. Yet, the analyses reveal that men are more likely to tell their parents about their choices (after they made up their decision on their own), while women are more likely to ask their parents for advice. The responses of Niu and Zhiqiang are emblematic of the corpus of interviews:

Niu was born in 1982 in a city in Hebei province. He is engaged. He declared:

> *"My parents could not influence my choice, because it's my business. My parents ask me questions about my private life, but they do not want, they do not seek, to influence my choices on the choice of a girlfriend"* (born in 1982, urban, Hebei *hukou*, specialized college).

Zhiqiang was also born in 1982. He grew up in a village in Henan. He explains to us:

> *"Generally, my parents do not influence my choices. Maybe because they live far away. I inform them. I tell them: I intend to do this. I intend to do that"* (born in 1982, rural, Henan *hukou*, Bachelor).

On the other hand, the women's responses are much more nuanced. I have selected four emblematic answers:

Min was born in 1981. She is from a city in Shanxi province. She declared:

> "*I discussed my choice of spouse with my parents. But they could not have influenced my choice in the sense of forcing me to change my mind. [...] Especially for a girl, it is important to have the consent of her parents, because if the parents appreciate our spouse, it facilitates family relations. Lovers want to share their joy with their parents*" (born in 1981, urban, Shanxi *hukou*, Bachelor).

Lina, who was born in 1993 in a village in Jiangsu province, explained that "*parents may not support a marriage, but they cannot prevent it.*" She elaborates by recounting the strategy devised by her cousin, whose parents were opposed to her union with a young man whose financial means were very modest.

"*My cousin wanted to marry a man who had neither a house nor a good situation. They had a son who is now one year old. They got married in December 2013. My cousin's parents are not happy, but they could not change the situation by opposing the marriage as my cousin and her spouse already had a child. Her parents had to accept the reality*" (born in 1993, rural, Jiangsu *hukou*, Bachelor).

According to the marriage law, her cousin could have married without her parents' consent. However, this was so important to her to legitimize her union, that she chose to force their hand by having a child out of wedlock. This deviation from the norm being even more unbearable to her parents than letting their daughter marry a penniless young man, they finally, reluctantly gave their consent to their union.

Without going so far, Shasha, who was born in 1986 in Tianjin, also developed a strategy to circumvent her parents' disagreement and to put all the chances on her side for them to accept her love relationship:

> "*I know that my parents do not agree that I marry my boyfriend who is Russian and who is more than two years younger than me. So that they do not try to influence my choice, I chose not to tell them that I have a boyfriend. I will only introduce him to them when he has a stable situation*" (born in 1986, urban, Tianjin *hukou*, Bachelor).

In other words, when he would have completed his master's in international relations at the People's University and found a job.

For Wei too, her parents' consent is very important. She was born in 1981 in the capital of Heilongjiang province. While her parents have never forced her to do anything, she thinks her parents could influence her choice of spouse. She gives me the example of her last three serious love stories. Each time, she discussed her choices with her parents. During her last love relationship, it was they who suggested she end this relationship "*because the young man was not honest*". He wanted her to help him take advantage of naive migrants and make money for himself (born in 1981, urban, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Master).

All respondents are aware that their parents could not impose a spouse on them or legally prevent them from getting married. However, while the analyses show that decisions about who to marry are becoming more individualized, this remains limited. In post-collectivist China, "free" marital choices are still thought out in terms of family norms and aspirations, especially for young women who are looking for a compromise that will maintain family harmony.

The marriage law and its emphasis on the free choice of spouse could be a factor encouraging social heterogamy. However, in practice, marital choices remain dependent on the socio-economic status of the future spouses. If for all respondents physical and moral characteristics are important, young adults born before 1985, who were not yet married when I met them, also attached importance to the future partner's socio-economic situation. When I asked them what they consider important in the choice of a spouse, men were more likely to mention "family background". While women mentioned "income", "education level" and "job held". Men who had studied at university would not envisage building a family with a woman who would not be from the "same background" (*mendanghudui*).[1] Tingting, who graduated from Beijing University, particularly thinks that "*to meet someone you love, you must have common interests*". He continues: "*I don't think I could meet someone who is poorly educated*". By "poorly educated", he implies a person who would not have attended an elite University. Like other respondents, his point of view is closer to that of his grandparents than to that of his parents:

> "*If I decided to marry someone who does not belong to my social background, I think my grandparents could be an obstacle because they are more traditional. For them, the whole family must be well matched*" (born in 1993, urban, Shanghai *hukou*, Bachelor).

The quantitative data reveal a high degree of social homogamy. Young urban men with at least a bachelor's degree are all in a relationship or married to young women who have attended university. Urban men have also significantly stated that before their marriage, there was no economic difference between their family and that of their spouse (Fig. 8.1). Young adults' frequentation of places specific to their social background increases the probability that they meet partners who belong to the same milieu as them. Indeed, romantic encounters are often the result of a social process through which individuals belonging to the same background are placed in a position to meet (Bourdieu, 2007; Girard, 2012).

The analyses show, alternately, a significant trend towards social hypergamy among young women and respondents of rural origin. Their spouse's family had a higher economic level than their family before their marriage (Fig. 8.1). Young women from rural backgrounds, who have an education that does not exceed high school level, as well as young women from urban backgrounds, who have an education level that does not exceed a two-year degree after baccalaureate, are more likely to marry or be in a relationship with someone who has a level of education higher than theirs. The level of education is also an important criterion for Wei when choosing a partner, because from her point of view:

> *"a man who has not studied at university has a very low level of "quality". He knows little. He does not have the ability to understand me, to understand my choices". She adds: "income is a very, very important element. It is indeed linked to the level of education and*

[1] This practice is common in China as shown by Sun Peidong in his Chinese-language work "Who will come to ask for my daughter's hand in marriage? (谁来娶我的女儿?, *shei lai qu wo de nü er?*)" (Sun, 2013).

Variables	*La famille du répondant a une situation économique plus favorable*	*La famille du conjoint a une situation économique plus favorable*	*Ni l'une ni l'autre*
Sexe			
Homme (ref.)		1	1
Femme		2,328***	0,652*
Type de hukou (2012)			
Rural (ref)		1	1
Urbain		0,585*	1,550*
Enregistrement du hukou à la naissance			
En dehors de Beijing (ref.)		1	
A Beijing		0,828	
Niveau d'éducation			
Niveau d'éducation faible (ref.)		1	
Niveau d'éducation moyen		0,874	
Niveau d'éducation élevé		0,601*	
Significativité du modèle (test du rapport		34,607***	10,660**
ddl		5	2
R2 de Cox & Snell		0,059	0,018
N		571	571

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, pas d'asterisk: pas significatif (test de Wald)

Fig. 8.1 Logistic regressions (*odds ratio*) on the economic situation of the spouse's family compared to that of the respondent's family among the 1980–1985 birth cohort (Male child)

> *the job held. Income is important to me because my income is not very high. So if we want a child, it is obvious that income is very important. If his income was identical to mine, it is obvious that I would not want to marry because in no way could we afford to build a family. The sector of activity is important to me because it is linked to income and the level of "quality". For example, if a man is a driver, it is certain that his level of education is not high"* (born in 1981, urban, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Master).

For Xiaocui, who has a university education but comes from a rural background, the level of education is also an important criterion in the choice of a spouse. During the various interviews, we discussed how she met her current husband. She explained:

> *"My circle of relationships is narrow; they are mostly my colleagues who are almost all women. So, I chose to use a dating site on the Internet to find my future husband [...]. My selection criteria were: appearance (xiangmao), the level of education (xueli), income (shouru) and the level of quality (suzhi). [...] I was looking for a boyfriend who had at least the same social and economic status as me (mendanghudui)"* (born in 1986, rural, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Bachelor).

Like her, her spouse has a bachelor's degree. In other interviews, when we were discussing together about her spouse, Xiaocui indicated that the economic situation of the family of her partner was and still is better than that of her family. During the discussion, she declared with a smile: "*I am too pragmatic! (Wo tai xianshi*!)".

These examples illustrate the importance of considering not only the level of education of the respondents and their spouses but also the socio-economic

situation of both families.[2] While women are more likely than men to marry or be in a relationship with people who have a level of education higher than theirs, this pattern is not absent from men's trajectories. Given the imbalance in the sex ratio at birth in favor of men, it remains particularly difficult for men with a very low level of education to find a spouse (Attané et al., 2013; Ji & Yeung, 2014).

8.2 *Shihun:* An Understatement for Premarital Cohabitation

Cohabitation (*tongju*) before marriage is uncontestably a new form of intimacy that is gradually developing in post-collectivist China. However, for the time being it remains little accepted socially. Cohabitation before marriage, like almost all changes affecting the customary practice of marriage, initially provokes disapproval from many parents, as well as conflicts between generations. At a later stage, it will probably become socially accepted. At the time of the fieldwork, this was a very thorny issue for the respondents and in the news. Among the 660 young adults who participated in this research (quantitative and qualitative interviews), only a minority had lived in cohabitation with a partner without being married (in yellow on Fig. 8.2). When I tried to determine the profile of these respondents, it turned out that no explanatory criterion was statistically significant.

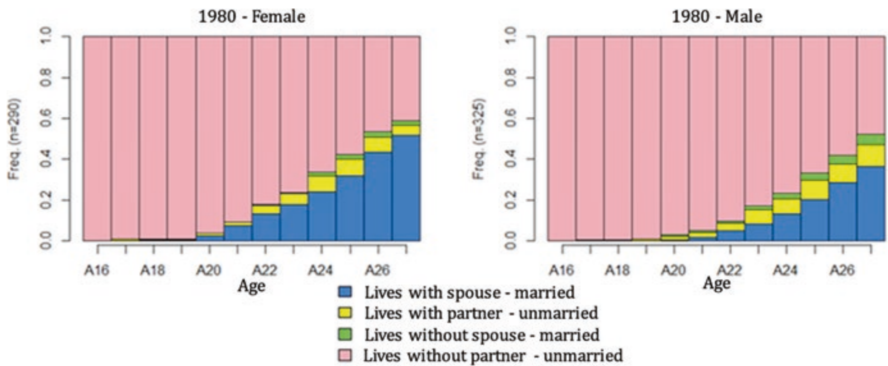


Fig. 8.2 Cross-sectional representation of the marital trajectories of young adults born between 1980 and 1985

[2] "There are three unfilial acts, the greatest of which is to have no offspring, *bu xiao you san, wu hou wei da*". http://baike.baidu.com/item/不孝有三，无后为大. Consulted on March 23, 2017.

While quantitative longitudinal data reveal the emergence of this new social norm, we need to go back to respondents' life stories to grasp its complexity. It is particularly interesting to observe that all young adults born in the 1990s see no problem in cohabiting before marriage, while those born in the 1980s are a little more reluctant.[3] The latter agree to cohabiting before marriage under one condition: it must be a prerequisite to marriage and does not replace it. For this reason, they prefer to speak of "trial marriage" (*shihun*) rather than "cohabitation" (*tongju*). The expression "*shihun*" is a lexical invention of the post-1980s. Xiaocui mentioned several times during the interviews that she did not want to live with her boyfriend until they were married:

> *"because of the influence of tradition, [...] of what other people say. People say that you cannot live together before marriage, have sexual relations before marriage. So maybe in my mind all this is engraved [...]. But little by little my way of thinking has changed".*

Xiaocui wanted to get engaged, before getting married. But as they could not get engaged, they decided to practice "trial marriage" before getting married:

> *"We moved in together as a trial marriage, to pretend we were married. For me, it's a form of engagement. Before, we lived separately on our own. I lived in a dormitory. Now, we're renting a small flat near Chaoyang Park. We plan to cohabit together (shihun) for a year, until we get married"* (born in 1986, rural, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Bachelor).

As this interview excerpt shows, Xiaocui appropriates the new concept of "*shihun*" to give new meaning and legitimacy to her practice of living together before marriage. For her, it is a form of engagement, a form of commitment between future spouses. On the occasion of one interview, she named another symbolic act to prove the seriousness of her commitment in the relationship with her boyfriend: for Chinese New Year, she was going to give her in-laws some of her own money as a New Year gift. Before the *shihun*, she did not want to do it and her parents did not want her to give gifts to her boyfriend's parents either. This is the second time she would spend New Year's Eve with them. The previous year, as they were not yet "engaged", her future in-laws gave her a *hongbao* as a gift. The following year (at the time of the interview) she received nothing from them, as the young lovers decided to give a joint *hongbao* and gifts to her partner's parents as a sign of their mutual commitment to marriage through the practice of *shihun*. Through this symbolic act, Xiaocui sends a strong message: She is not a "*bad girl*". With this expression, she means a girl of loose morals, who would have sexual relations easily with men or who would be with a man only for his money. She modestly uses the expression "*fasheng guanxi*", which literally means something that happens within a relationship, to refer to sexual relations. In her mind, *shihun* gives legitimacy to cohabiting with her partner and to the fact that they have sexual relations before marriage, because it only takes place for a determined period, that is to say, the time to organize their wedding. In this case, the practice of cohabitation becomes socially respectable for Xiaocui since the process ultimately ends with a marriage.

[3] "I think that now Chinese people do not necessarily need a son to take care of them in old age, *wo juede xianzai zhongguoren meiyou yiding yao erzi yanglao de shuofa"*.

The other respondents born in the 1980s also emphasize the risk that cohabitation lasts and does not lead to marriage. Gezi's and Han's responses are enlightening in this respect. Gezi declared:

> *"Living together before marriage, I agree in principle but not entirely, because if it's too long it's likely that we'll never get married. I find it good because we get to know each other better when there is love between two people. But I'm afraid to say that I'm totally for cohabitation before marriage. It makes me feel nervous. I'm afraid I won't end up getting married. I'm afraid of having children out of wedlock..."* (born in 1988, rural, Henan *hukou*, College).

Han is also in favor of cohabitation because:

> *"it allows two people to get to know each other and see if they can live together."*

She specified:

> *"However, I am not for cohabiting more than six months with someone. Because if it's too long the situation can become negative. We become an old couple. The young man may keep postponing the marriage, and the young girl becomes, in the meantime, older and older. It is therefore increasingly difficult for her to separate from her partner. She becomes trapped in the situation, as her chances of finding someone else decrease over time. [...] I have a friend who has been cohabiting with her boyfriend for three years, but he doesn't want to get married. In such a situation, I would have separated from him after six months, because for me this attitude is a sign that the young man is irresponsible. He doesn't want to take on his responsibilities"* (born in 1989, rural, Jilin *hukou* at birth, Bachelor).

This fear of ending up in a situation of permanent cohabitation is present only in the responses of young women. Men are less eloquent on this subject. In principle, they agree because they do not see any disadvantages. For them, it is a way of getting to know their partner better before legally formalizing their union and building a family. Whereas for young women, whose morals are more subject to social scrutiny, cohabitation is a very serious issue and constitutes a turning point that must be negotiated carefully. It is important for them that cohabitation does not become a substitute for marriage, as the institution of marriage still prevails as the dominant norm for conjugal life.

Risks linked with premarital cohabitation before marriage for young women give rise to intense discussions. This was, for example, the subject of the show "*Baogong lai le*" on March 18, 2013. The title of the show refers to the official and judge Bao Zheng (999–1062) who was renowned for his integrity and respect for the law. The show brought together several young adult couples and "experts" to debate their positions on cohabitation before marriage. This is also the subject of many discussions circulating on Chinese websites.[4] Like in the interviews I conducted, these discussions emphasize the risks of cohabitation for young women. These discussions are very discreet when it comes to addressing the issue of sexuality. Indirect expressions or euphemisms are preferred when talking about sexual relations. The problem with cohabitation is that it publicly reveals the dissociation of sexual relations and marriage. This is still not socially accepted for young women if the

[4] http://www.u148.net/tale/6736.html. Retrieved on February 10, 2017.

relationship does not end in marriage. Women who cohabitated before marriage would be less desirable partners, because considered as frivolous. In addition, with cohabitation, the passionate love of the early days of marriage would become non-existent. It would have time to fade during the period of cohabitation and the spouses would become an "old couple" (*laofu laoqi de zhuangtai*). Finally, in addition to the risk of out-of-wedlock birth, TV drama and internet dialogues mention a research conducted in the United States which suggests that the divorce rate is higher among couples who cohabited before marriage.

For these reasons and because it explicitly states that cohabitation is an intermediate stage between single life and the life of a young married woman, the expression *shihun* is preferred by some young women. They thus feel reassured, because the vocabulary used suggests that their behavior is not completely outside the dominant norm. In fact, they take a detour to then return to the path of marriage. Article 8 of the Marriage Law stipulates that couples have a legal obligation to formalize their union.[5] As the practice of cohabitation is not yet fully accepted by families and society, *shihun* is a compromise that may develop towards social acceptance of cohabitation, and it may thus gradually lose its negative connotation. Consequently, the individualization of premarital cohabitation paths is limited since it does not tend to replace marriage, as it is the case in European and American countries.

Marriage in China, in other words, the legal union between two spouses of the opposite sex, remains the norm as well as a necessary and unavoidable prerequisite for the founding a family. As in other Southeast Asian societies, it remains the bedrock of family life. At no point in the interviews did young adults question the validity of the couple and family model. It is mentioned 75 times in the in-depth interviews that marriage provides the necessary foundation to build a family and give birth to children. For male or female respondents, "*marriage is not to be taken lightly, as it is the most important thing in an individual's life*".[6]

For Niu, marriage is a serious event for women, because "*after a divorce a woman's value decreases in China and it is particularly difficult for her to build a new family*".

He continues: "*divorce also has an impact on our parents, because the neighbors speak negatively about their daughter's divorce*" (born in 1982, urban, Hebei *hukou*, specialized college).

Like those of other respondents who brought up the subject, Xiaolin's words abound in this sense. She explains:

> "*Marriage in China is a very important event in a person's life [...]. For example, if a woman divorces and wants to remarry, it is terribly difficult for her. Or if you have a child, it's very, very difficult. You are under a lot of social pressure*" (born in 1981, rural, Sichuan *hukou*, College).

---

[5] In the sample, in 2013, before or after 27 years, 37% of respondents had completed all the transitions marking the journey towards adulthood.

[6] Cheng, Tiejun and Selden, Mark, 1994, *The origins and social consequences of China's Hukou system*, in *The China Quarterly*, p. 649.

The notions of "stability (*wending*)", guarantee (*baozhang*) and feeling of security (*anquangan*) frequently come up in respondents' conversations about marriage.

For Wei, "*a cohabiting household cannot be considered a real family, because the situation is not stable*".

She adds: *"Such a situation would make me anxious because I have no guarantee*" (born in 1981, urban, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Master).

As this notion of guarantee that marriage would provide came up many times in the discussions, I sought to understand what they meant. In the discourse of young men, the notion "Guarantee" refers to the relationship between the two spouses. To quote Tingting:

> "*Marriage is something certain that guarantees the relationship between two people*" (born in 1993, urban, Shanghai *hukou*, Bachelor).

As stated earlier, according to Wei, the guarantee is provided by the legal status of marriage:

> "*The government gives its approval for marriage, you receive a certificate, a marriage certificate. So I consider marriage as legal (hefa) and cohabitation as illegal (fei hefa). If you cohabit, people might wonder: Why don't you get married? Why do you cohabit? I think marriage is the first step, then you can live with your spouse. Because in China if you don't get married and you live in cohabitation, people will not only think that the couple has a problem, but that the whole family has a problem. Everyone will wonder: But why don't they formalize their situation in front of the government by getting married? Living in cohabitation without getting married is like a marriage but with only the bad sides. You would have to do the housework, cook, without feeling safe. So why not get married?*" (born in 1981, urban, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Master).

Protected by legal provisions, the marriage is envisioned by Suzhi as life-insurance:

> "*Marriage is like life insurance for women. If a woman cohabits with her boyfriend in the long term, in case of separation she risks ending up without a house, without money and without work if she did not work. Not cohabiting is an argument to ensure that the relationship with the spouse ends in marriage*" (born in 1978, rural, Hebei *hukou*, college).

In this sense, marriage provides a sense of security. Shasha believes "*that in China girls want to get married because of tradition, but also because they are looking for a sense of security*" (born in 1993, rural, Jiangsu *hukou*, Bachelor).

This commitment marks, in her opinion, the seriousness of the love relationship. In this respect, during a period of cohabitation before marriage, Xiaocui's boyfriend entrusted her with his bank card as a sign of commitment and to provide her with a sense of security. According to her, he wanted to prove to her that she could trust him (born in 1986, rural, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Bachelor).

The pressure to marry is real. It is not only the young adults, or even their parents who want them to marry and have children, it is also the Chinese Communist Party. In a recent speech at the Party's All-China Women's Federation, President Xi Jinping declared that women must play a critical role and must establish a new trend of family, as birth rate plummets and the Nation grapples with an ageing population (Xinhua, 2023). Influenced by the mainstream narrative, Han finds it "*very strange*

not to want to build a family, because it is a core that brings comfort". She adds: "*Getting married, having children, it's perfectly normal, a duty*"[7] (born in 1989, rural, Jilin *hukou* at birth *hukou*, Bachelor).

Language development also reflects the importance of the marriage norm in the lives of young adults. The expression "*I am part of the tribe of the unmarried*" (*wo shi bu hunzu*) coined by Shasha, or even that of "leftover women" (*shengnü*), which the All-China Women's Federation has been promoting since 2007, evoke a dichotomy between married and unmarried people that leaves little (or no) room for other ways of "*faire famille*". Women who remained single beyond 27 years old are stigmatized and placed in a specific category (Hong Fincher, 2014). The trend is exemplified by a decision made in 2023 by a small town in Zhejiang province. The local government announced that they would "offer couples 1'000 yuan (130 euros) as a "reward" if the bride was 25 years or younger" (BBC 2023). As illustrated with this example, Chinese young women face a paradox: they are encouraged to become educated, cosmopolitan, and independent during their childhood and youth, but once they reach adulthood they are under strong pressure to marry before 27–30 years old, to give birth to children and to "return to family life" carrying forward "the traditional virtues of Chinese nation, establish a good family tradition, and create a new trend of family civilization" (Xinhua, 2023).

According to Hong Fincher, the promotion of marriage is instrumentalized by the Party-State to counter the risk of social instability that could be caused by the forced celibacy of a growing segment of the male population (resulting from the imbalance of the sex ratio at birth induced by demographic policies). Parents relay the Chinese government discourse that promotes "traditional" family values and make "pressure" on their children to marry and "give" them grandchildren. Respondents who were not yet married were particularly stressed upon returning from the Chinese New Year. On her return from Tianjin, Shasha explained that she is not completely happy to have returned to her family. In an upset tone, she declared:

> "*It is likely that in the end I will succumb to the pressures of my parents for marriage and motherhood, because I am tired of hearing them repeat or insinuate this. Every time my mother calls me, the subject comes up. Before my departure for Beijing, she introduced me to people in Tianjin. Now that I live and work in Beijing, she tries to introduce me to people here! To give me a desire for marriage, she pushes me to attend friends' weddings. Her behavior is very heavy and burdensome. This year during the New Year holidays, I got angry at my mother's insistent and pressing attitude. Now, she acts more indirectly. For example, my parents talk about marriage in the living room while I watch television. They*

[7] They represented, in December 1954, 39% of rural households. See Roux, Alain, 2006, *China in the twentieth century*, Armand Colin, Paris, p. 89, and CNA. (1981). 农业集体化重要文件汇编 *1949–1957 (Nongye jitihua zhongyao wenjian huibian 1949–1957, Official documents on the period of agricultural collectivization 1949–1957)*. Beijing: 中共中央党校出版社, p. 360.

> *know that I hear what they say". She concludes our discussion on the subject by saying: "It is impossible to control parents. For example, my mother discussed in parks with other mothers who asked for pictures of me and who were there to find a wife for their son*[8]" (born in 1986, urban, Tianjin *hukou*, Bachelor).

While there is no doubt that the government's campaigns overlook men's responsibilities and rather focus on women responsibility for carrying on marriage, childbearing and family values, men also feel pressure to marry from their families. Having noticed that Yan was spending much less money on his meals upon his return from Hebei, where he had gone to celebrate the New Year with his family, I asked him if everything was okay. In response, he explained to me that his parents had put pressure on him to save money so that he could buy a house and get married (born in 1984, rural, Hebei *hukou*, College).

The birth of children being an integral part of the expectations surrounding marriage, the marriage of the most educated segment of the population could serve the country by producing "high quality" children (Greenhalgh, 2010). For many young adults, the desire for a child is one of the reasons behind their decision to marry. Xiaocui indeed declares "*for me it's not a question, I first want to get married and then have a child*" (born in 1986, rural, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Bachelor). For Han, this is what motivates many young women:

> "*In China many women are concerned about the issue of children. I think that many women only want to get married for this reason. [...] Really, it's to have a child that they want to get married before thirty, because that's when the body is in the best condition to give birth to a child*" (born in 1989, rural, Jilin *hukou* at birth, Bachelor).

Out-of-wedlock births remain stigmatized. One of the respondents, Suzhi, whom I first met in the summer of 2011 and with whom I maintained regular contact until 2015, found herself in this uncomfortable situation (born in 1978, rural, Hebei *hukou*, College). While the social sanctions faced were severe, the marriage law protects children born out of wedlock. Article 25 stipulates that children born out of wedlock should enjoy the same rights as children born within a marital union and that they should not suffer from discrimination. The natural parents of the child, even if one of the two does not live with the child, must cover the child's daily and school expenses until he or she is able to support themselves (HYF, 1981).

However, Suzhi explained that she had to pay a fine for their son to obtain a residence booklet and, thus, a legal existence. The amount varies depending on the locality. Despite the law providing some safeguards for children born out of wedlock, customary practices remain tenacious. For instance, Qian, a University professor graduated from a prestigious University, stated on the subject that:

---

[8] Li, Huaiyin, 2009, *Village China under socialism and reform. A micro-history, 1948–2008*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, p. 39.

> *"without marriage, births are illegal in China. He has no hukou. A person who does not marry is single and without children. [...] Through marriage, the family is formed. [...] Marriage is the first step to having a family. No registered marriage, no children in China"* (born in 1982, urban, Jilin *hukou*, PhD).

The strength of this custom is reflected in the wedding celebration rites. The bridal bedroom where the newlyweds share their first night after the wedding is the subject of meticulous preparations. At Xiaocui's wedding, the bedroom where they were going to spend their first wedding night had been all decorated in red (the color of good luck) and with signs of double happiness. The family had pasted photographs of babies, especially baby-boys, on the walls of the room to encourage them to have a child soon, and preferably a son. On the red blanket that covered the bed, and whose set was offered to the newlyweds, a heart was drawn with jujubes (*zao*), peanuts (*huasheng*), longans (*guiyuan*) and seeds (*zi*). The choice of fruits and seeds is not left to chance. Their symbolic function is to encourage the newlyweds to give birth to a son as soon as possible. Indeed, the Chinese character for jujube is pronounced *zao*, like the word "early". Peanut is pronounced *huasheng* and, if we only keep the last part, "sheng" is written and pronounced like "birth". The first part of the word longan *guiyuan* is pronounced like "precious" (*gui*). Finally, the word "seed" has the same pronunciation in Chinese as "child"[9] (*zi*). The decoded message reads: "Give birth to a precious son quickly (*zao sheng guizi*)". This message is sometimes explicitly written on the bed of the newlyweds with the same fruits and seeds. As the interviews show, the decisions to marry and have children are intimately linked in the minds of young adults. The Confucian thinker Mencius himself said that "there are three ways of being unfilial, and not having offspring (a son) is the most serious".[10]

Bibliography

Attané, I., Zhang, Q., Li, S., Yang, X., & Guilmoto, C. Z. (2013). Bachelorhood and sexuality in a context of female shortage: Evidence from a survey in rural Anhui, China. *The China Quarterly, 215*, 703–726.

Bourdieu, P. (2007). *La Distinction. Critique Sociale Du Jugement*. Les Editions de Minuit.

Croll, E. (1981). *The politics of marriage in contemporary China*. Cambridge University Press.

Fincher, H., & Leta. (2014). *Leftover women: The resurgence of gender inequality in China*. Zed Books.

Girard, A. (2012). *Le Choix Du Conjoint. Une Enquête Psychologique En France*. Armand Colin.

[9] Goodman, David, 2004, *China's campaign to « Open up the West »: National, Provincial, and Local Perspectives*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

[10] http://english.gov.cn/official/2005-07/29/content_18334.htm. Consulted on May 3, 2010.

Greenhalgh, S. (2010). *Cultivating global citizens. Population in the rise of China*. Harvard University Press.

HYF. (1981). Marriage law (Hunyinfa, Law on Marriage) .

Ji, Y., & Yeung, W.-J. J. (2014). Heterogeneity in contemporary Chinese marriage. *Journal of Family Issues, 35*, 1662–1682.

Sun, P. (孙沛东). (2013). *Who will marry my daughter?* China Social Sciences Press.

Xinhua News. (2023). *Xi stresses organizing, motivating women to contribute to Chinese modernization.* https://english.news.cn/20231031/2d38b8241a39479cb29a1a7199c52e3b/c.html

Yan, Y. (2009). The individual and transformation of bridewealth. In Y. Yan (Ed.), *The individualization of Chinese society*. Berg.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

Chapter 9
What Does the Individualization Process Do to Intergenerational Solidarities?

Contents

9.1 "Better Not to Have a Child Than an Unfilial Child"........ 134
9.2 Elective Intergenerational Solidarities Revolving around the Family Nucleus........ 138
Bibliography........ 143

Abstract This chapter argues that TV series disseminate values of intergenerational solidarity to cope with daily struggles. The themes of filial piety and family relationships are recurrent. They convey a moral code designed to counteract the negative effects of individualization and the shortcomings of the social security system.

The dynamics of family solidarity reflect a nuanced evolution in filial piety practices. While the Confucian thought placed different obligations on sons and daughters, filial piety is transforming from an unconditional duty to a more reciprocal and negotiated form, influenced by factors such as affects, economic and family situations.

The findings also reveal the individualization of living spaces and simultaneously the maintaining of strong family ties. Financial and non-financial supports from parents remain a significant aspect of family solidarities. It is observed that the type of support changes over the life-course. For instance, once parents, 70% of respondents receive non-financial support from their families.

The chapter concludes highlighting the challenges faced by the "sandwich generation" caught between supporting elderly parents and raising their own children. The precariousness of working conditions and the absence of a robust Welfare system further contribute to the strain felt by young adults.

Keywords Filial piety · Intergenerational solidarity · Individualization · Reciprocity · Support · Welfare system

© The Author(s) 2024

S. V. Constantin, *A Life Course Perspective on Chinese Youths*, Life Course Research and Social Policies 17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57216-6_9

9.1 “Better Not to Have a Child Than an Unfilial Child”

TV dramas are another vector through which the Party-State promotes a familialist ideology, in other words, conservative family values. In the corpus of television series analyzed, the family personifies the country. The Chinese character that designates the family (*jia*) makes up the word for country or the Nation (*guojia*). For centuries, the family or the family unit has played a role in Chinese thought. The family is thought as constitutive of the Nation and the State (Kong, 2008). In Maoist era, the family was political and subordinate to the State. During the process of decollectivization, the family reemerged as a semi-private sphere. The Party-State retained control over the family sphere, but at the same time it privatized the family by enjoining it to take over functions it had previously assumed.

In TV dramas, the central place given to the family and family relationships reflects this logic. At a time when viewers are confronted with the problem of unemployment, economic and social pressures, and the rise of uncertainties in their daily lives, the representations of the family portrayed in TV series not only offer them emotional identification, but also provide benchmarks by disseminating values of solidarity between generations as a way of coping with everyday struggles. By tackling the theme of filial piety and family relationships, TV dramas convey a moral code that aims to counter the negative effects of the individualization. If they cannot manage to solve their problems on their own, individuals are less expected to turn to the State for answers, than to members of their family.

This discourse refers to the logics of family solidarities in force in pre-Maoist China. It is widely accepted by the respondents, who all declared that “it is better not to have a child than an unfilial child” (*yanger buxiao, buru buyang*). Chinese New Year is their favorite holiday because it is a family celebration. It gives them the opportunity to show their filial affection for their parents by giving them gifts. It is about “*giving something back*” to their parents as Ruyue puts it, “*taking care of them*”. She continues:

> “*You want to express your love, your piety. It allows you not to feel guilty. [...]. By earning 10,000 yuan per month, I can give them between 2,000 and 5,000 yuan per year*” (born in 1990, urban, Guizhou *hukou*, Bachelor).

Wanheng thinks that “*most Chinese give a part of their first salary to their parents to thank them*”. He adds:

> “*The amount is not important. It’s mainly the action, the gesture that matters. When you have children, you have less time to spend with your parents. So you give money to express your feelings. Because you have less time to go see them, spend time with them*” (born in 1980, rural, Shanxi *hukou*, College).

The financial contribution is sometimes not sufficient or not necessary when the parents of young adults have enough resources. Wei realizes, for example, that her parents need her more to “help them physically and morally”. This is also what Yule observes:

> “*Parents in China need their children when they retire. They need someone to accompany them, talk to them, entertain them*” (born in 1986, rural, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Bachelor).

On July 3, 2013, the Chinese government decided to strengthen the 1996 law on the “protection of the rights and interests of the elderly”, which institutionalizes the duty of assistance and support by children and their spouses to their parents and in-laws over 60 years old (LQBF, 2012). According to the law, children not only have a duty to provide financial support to their parents in need, but also to visit them regularly. These legal provisions transform filial piety from a moral duty into a legal obligation. As with Article 21 of the 1981 Marriage and Family Law, it is no longer only sons who have the duty to be filial, but also daughters. Historically, this duty fell to sons because the family inheritance was theirs. Even in the poorest families, it was socially expected that sons fulfill this obligation of filial piety. Breaking this norm and disrupting family harmony exposed them to severe social sanctions. The Chinese character *xiao*, which means filial piety, is significant in this respect. It is made up of two characters: the character *lao*, which means old, is on top, and the character *zi*, which can be translated as son, is located below. Symbolically, the ideogram shows that the elder patriarch is above his son and that the latter supports the former (Ikels, 2004).

The intergenerational contract was concluded in different terms for daughters. They were expected to contribute to the family economy until their marriage. Once married, they were expected to contribute to the family economy of their husband’s family. Passing on all or part of the family inheritance to them would have been seen, according to the Indian proverb, as “watering the neighbor’s garden”. In other words, it would have been envisioned as a loss since the women would eventually leave their family of origin. In contrast, expenses made by families for their sons were appreciated as an investment since the sons would not only remain within the family lineage, but they would also perpetuate it (Ikels, 1993).

Number of studies carried out after the country’s opening-up to the market economy point out a weakening of family solidarities. The growing individual mobility is said to have contributed to uprooting young adults from their communities of origin. Consequently, they find it easier to distance themselves from the social pressures enjoining them to comply with filial piety obligations (Ikels, 2004; Yan, 2003a, b). The most recent research nuances this thesis (Cockain, 2012; Fong, 2004; Liu, 2020). Like in this book, they identify a form of renegotiation of the intergenerational contract. The interviews I conducted indicate that once married it is not only sons who remain filial, but also daughters. Moreover, it appears that the practice of filial piety takes different forms depending on the economic and family situation of the respondents. Han shared with me:

> “*If I had an older brother or a younger brother, it is certain that it would not be up to me to take care of my parents. But many families, like mine, having only a daughter, by force of circumstances, the situation evolves. Today, in my home village it is common that once married, daughters continue to support their parents. I think that today the Chinese do not have*

> *a determined practice that would only oblige sons to take care of their elderly parents.*[1] *Because today the situation is no longer the same as before. Many people do not have sons. Moreover, I think that more and more people are wondering why only sons should be responsible for the elderly. I think that it is quite a lot of pressure for them. It is possible that they sometimes do not feel capable and try to avoid it. There are also cases where sons do not fulfill their filial obligations towards their parents because they have been too spoiled by them. I think this is the case in families where the parents had several daughters before finally being able to have a son. In this case, it is usually the daughters who take the place of their brother to help their parents. For me, filial piety is not only a duty, it is also a responsibility that I have. This is related to morality (daode). You cannot disregard the elderly*" (born in 1989, rural, Jilin *hukou* at birth, Bachelor).

Gezi, who is also of rural origin and has a sister, declared:

> "*Once married, I will certainly continue to help my parents. It is certain that my spouse will not oppose it since I will have chosen him. A person's values (renpin) are very important*" (born in 1988, rural, Henan *hukou*, College).

Xiaocui, who is also of rural origin but has a sister and a brother, also decided to continue helping her parents once married. On Chinese New Year, they offer both families *hongbao*. She explains that her sister, who is married, still helps her parents. She often offers gifts to her parents in secret because she fears her husband's reaction if he finds out. For the Chinese New Year, she and her husband give the same amount of money to both families. For Xiaocui, filial piety was an important criterion in the choice of her spouse because:

> "*a person who does not show filial piety towards his parents, even though they have brought him up for many years, if he does not even support his parents, it is certain that he will not be generous with other people*".

As the discussion continued, Xiaocui explained that she considers it her obligation or duty (*yiwu*) to look after her parents (born in 1986, rural, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Bachelor).

These interview excerpts reveal the transformation of values and practices in terms of family solidarity in the countryside. Regardless of their level of education, the composition of their siblings and their financial situation, it is not conceivable, once married, for these young women not to support morally and financially their parents. The interviews conducted with these women who have migrated to the capital do not indicate the existence of a "crisis of filial piety" as observed by Yan Yunxiang in the late 1990s (Yan, 2003a, b:189). They testify to its evolution. Filial

[1] In 2003 the NRCMS is defined as: "[It] provides mutual help and benefit, mainly focusing on and curing severe diseases. It is organized, led and supported by the government and with voluntary participation of the farmers. The system is financed jointly by individuals, collectives and government," "*Guanyu jianli xinxing hezuo yiliao zhidu yijian*" ("Opinions about the introduction of NRCMS"), Guobanfa, No. 3 (16 January 2003), http://www.jswst.gov.cn/dfnewsdisplay.php?newsid=436, cited in Klotzbücher, Sascha; Lässig, Peter; Qin, Jiangmei; and Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, Susanne, 2010,"What is New in the "New Rural Co-operative Medical System"? An Assessment in One Kazak County of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region", *The China Quarterly*, 201, March, p. 38.

piety is no longer unconditional. It is now based on a logic of reciprocity. The intensity of the relationship and the level of solidarity offered by the children to their parents depends on the generosity and attitude of the latter. For example, after getting married Xiaocui scaled down the level of solidarity she intended to offer to her parents. She did not express it directly this way, but when I analyzed the interviews, which ran from June 2012 to August 2014, I noticed a change in tone or rather a disappointment. She recounted:

> "*At my brother's wedding, my parents had given him all the hongbao they had received. At my wedding, they kept them all. They did this because he is a boy, and I am a girl. My parents also helped my brother to buy a house, although they are not going to help me*".

When I asked her why, she answered with weariness: "*because I am a girl*". I insisted and asked her what she meant by that. She added: "*It's because my parents are hoping my brother's will look after them once they get old. They plan to go live with him*". Asking her if she finds this situation unfair, she replied: "*I find it normal, I do not find it unfair, because once my parents are old, if my brother does not take care of them, they will go to a nursing home that they will pay for themselves, as they have given a lot of money to my brother and not to me, I think it's clear in my parents' minds*" (born in 1986, rural, Heilongjiang *hukou*, Bachelor).

Xiaocui did not directly blame her parents for their behavior, but her words indicate that she does not endorse it. Before her wedding, the support she considered giving to her parents was unconditional. Afterwards, her words reflect a change in position. She no longer feels as much indebted as before to her parents since they have decided not to support her financially in planning her wedding and buying a home. These were two significant milestones in her transition to adulthood and, for the second, it will be very difficult for her to achieve it without family support.

As for urban single daughters, it is inconceivable for them to favor their in-laws at the expense of their parents. Weiwei is aware that providing support and assistance to her parents is a legal obligation. However, she declares that this is not the reason why she does it, it's because she feels close to her parents. Like all the urban respondents, her parents receive a pension. Weiwei's parents also own their home. Therefore, she does not need to support them financially. However, she needs to provide them with physical and moral support when they need it (born in 1982, urban, Beijing *hukou*, Bachelor).

The letters that circulate on Chinese websites illustrate the tensions at the heart of the renegotiation of intergenerational solidarities.[2] A number of young women write that they do not refuse to help their in-laws as long as they show gratitude and do not take it for granted. In this sense, they do not question the notion of filial piety and the idea of solidarity between generations. However, they believe that relationships must be reciprocal and demonstrate mutual respect. Since the reforms, research shows that emotional ties have become tighter in both rural and urban areas

[2] Op.cit., Li, Huaiyin, p. 325.

(Evans, 2010; Shen, 2013; Yan, 2023). As the interviews reveal, young women who grew up in such an environment find it difficult to accept hierarchical relationships devoid of reciprocity and mutual respect once they get married. It is also unthinkable for them to break the strong ties that bind them to their parents.

9.2 Elective Intergenerational Solidarities Revolving around the Family Nucleus

The majority of respondents born in the 1980s do not to cohabit with their parents, even after the birth of a child (Fig. 9.1). The analyses reveal that at the age of 27, most urban and rural respondents are not living with their parents or in-laws after becoming parents (in orange, Fig. 9.1). All other things being equal and as expected, Beijingers are significantly more likely to cohabit with their parents or in-laws than other respondents.

The individualization of living arrangements stems from the desire of young adults to preserve their privacy and avoid conflicts with their parents, but it does not necessarily lead to a decrease in family solidarity. The discourse and practices of the respondents express, on the contrary, a very strong sense of responsibility towards

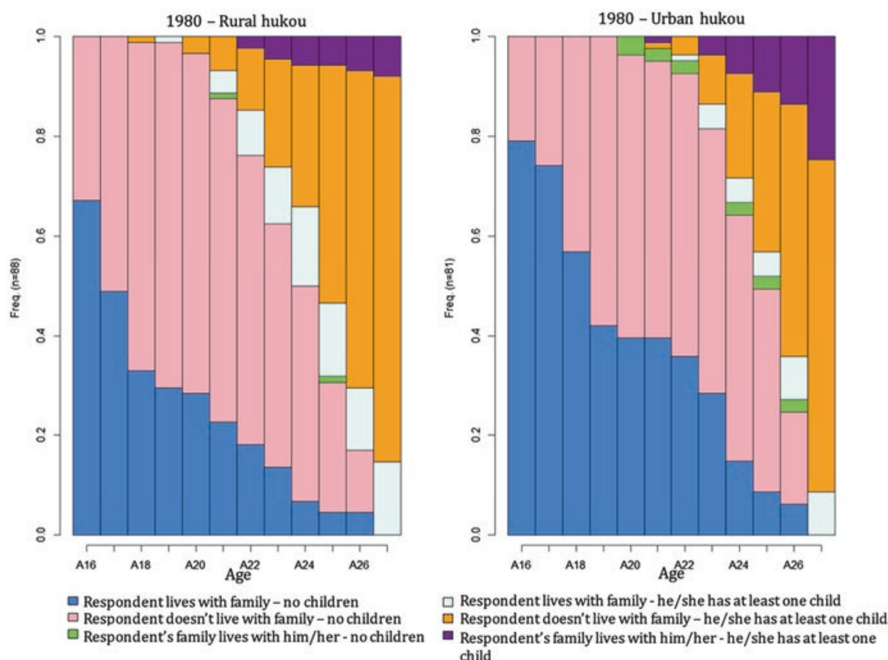


Fig. 9.1 Intergenerational cohabitation with parents and/or in-laws, respondents born between 1980 and 1985 with at least one child

Variables	*Received financial assistance within one year of marriage*
	Odds ratio (SE Coef.)
Sex	*Not in the model*
Male (ref.)	
Female	
Type of hukou (2012)	*Not in the model*
Rural (ref)	
Urban	
Hukou registration at birth	
Not in Beijing (ref.)	1
In Beijing	1,913** (0,252)
Education	
Low education (ref.)	1
Medium education	2,041* (0,298)
High education	3,203*** (0,287)
Chi-square	24,731***
Df	3
Cox & Snell R square	0,067
N	358

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 (Wald test)

Fig. 9.2 Financial support for marriage received by respondents born between 1980 and 1985 – Logistic regression models (*odds ratio*)

their parents. The nuclear family plays a crucial role, as it is the main source of support that young adults and their parents can rely on to respond to social, economic, and personal uncertainties as well as the risks that comes along the process of individualization. For the young adults who took part in this research, their family – they mean by this the parent-child nucleus – forms a small collective unite around which family solidarities revolve. A third of the respondents said that they had received financial help from their parents a year before getting married or in the year of the marriage. Young adults from Beijing are significantly more likely to benefit from this type of support than other respondents. The analyses also suggest that the greater likelihood of receiving financial support is correlated with the respondents' level of education. The higher the level of education, the more likely they are to have received financial aid from their parents before getting married (Fig. 9.2).

Half of the respondents who have become homeowners received financial aid from their parents either the previous year, the same year, or the following year. Among the young adults I met, those of urban origin and Beijingers were significantly more likely to have received family support to become homeowners (Fig. 9.3). For instance, Han explained during the interview that her mother is going to give her money when she gets married so that she can contribute (along with her spouse) to

Variables	***Received financial assistance within one year of purchase***
	Odds ratio (SE Coef.)
Sex	*Not in the model*
Male (ref.)	
Female	
Type of hukou (2012)	
Rural (ref)	1
Urban	4,772** (0,539)
Hukou registration at birth	
Not in Beijing (ref.)	1
In Beijing	2,393** (0,333)
Education	*Not in the model*
Low education (ref.)	
Medium education	
High education	
Chi-square	17,498***
Df	2
Cox & Snell R square	0,097
N	172

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 (Wald test)

Fig. 9.3 Family financial aid for the purchase of a home in the paths of respondents born between 1980 and 1985—Logistic regression models (*odds ratio*)

the purchase of a home. She points out that she will not need to pay back her mother because it will not be a loan, but rather a gift. These findings corroborate sociologist Serge Paugam's thesis that family solidarities have the effect of reinforcing social inequalities rather than reducing them, since this type of support remains weak among the most deprived population groups (Paugam, 2008).

Family solidarities are not only a matter of financial support. Over 70% of respondents with children received non-financial support from their family. Other kind of family support might not depend on the family's socioeconomic background. However, logistic regressions did not reveal any significant explanatory variables. According to research conducted in the 1990s, relationships between grandparents and preschool-aged grandchildren were frequent. This was due to the proximity between generations. The mismatch between supply and demand in the urban housing stock had the effect to encourage multigenerational cohabitation. Moreover, a relatively large proportion of young children were entrusted to the care of their grandparents at the latter's home (Chen, 2014). This configuration reflects the family network (Widmer & Jallinoja, 2008). Relationships between

non-co-resident grandparents, their children and their grandchildren are not only frequent, but the adults share significant family responsibilities. While respondents would consider their parents and in-laws coming to live with them for a few months to help them look after their child(ren), they all insist on the limited duration of such arrangements. This is, for example, what Suzhi's mother did to help her after the birth of her son. Despite her modest financial means and social disapproval, she came from the countryside to support her daughter in her home, staying for several months or weeks at a time. At the time, her daughter lived as a single mother in an accommodation paid for them by her son's father, who was meanwhile living with his wife and child in the same city (born in 1978, rural, Hebei *hukou*, College).

Findings highlight that family solidarities tend to reverse over time. The older young adults get, the more their responsibilities towards their parents increase. In both rural and urban areas, they tend to provide financial and emotional support whenever they can. The findings further reveal that by the age of 22-23, financial support becomes predominant compared with the other forms of help given to parents (in light blue on Fig. 9.4).

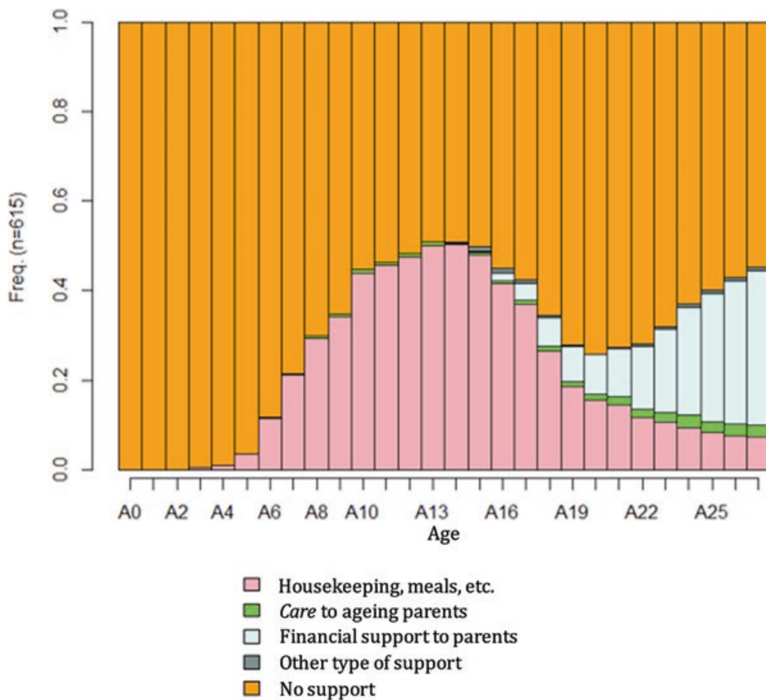


Fig. 9.4 Support provided by young adults born between 1980 and 1985 to their parents (cross-sectional representation)

The concentration of family solidarities around the nuclear family is a source of stress for young adults, particularly for those who are only children. Many of them, like Tingting (an only child), regret not having a brother or sister with whom to share this responsibility. Barely 20 years old, he laments:

> "*With brothers and sisters, we could share the responsibility of taking care of our parents. But with the one-child policy, we really have a heavier burden than before. I have already thought about this problem. When I get my job, if my parents are ill, who is going to look after them? Parents in China need their children when they retire. They need someone to be with them, to talk to them, to distract them. And as only children, we have a greater responsibility than the generations before us*" (born in 1993, urban, Shanghai *hukou*, Bachelor).

According to Han, the mental and financial burdens borne by members of her generation are "gigantic" (born in 1989, rural, Jilin *hukou* at birth, Bachelor). While they are caught in the whirlwind of their professional and family life, which often require them to work long hours and migrate to other localities, they must, according to the law, find time to regularly visit their parents. The respondents often want to do so, but how to reconcile the irreconcilable? They lack time! That is why they tend to prefer financial support to their parents over emotional support or care. However, as it was often stated in interviews, in the event that their parents are dependent for a decent living on the financial support they provide, this puts young adults under "*heavy economic pressure*". Once they are married, they may have up to four parents to support in addition to other spendings, such as: bringing up their children and providing for them, mortgage or rent, etc. All of this, in a context where the cost of living keeps rising due to inflation. If in urban areas only children find themselves alone in fulfilling their filial obligations, their parents often benefit from better medical cover and pension benefits than in the countryside. Han uses the image of an hourglass (*shalou*) to describe the heavy pressure felt by young adults (born in 1989, rural Jilin *hukou* at birth, Bachelor). The Chinese media refer to this phenomenon as the "sandwich generation" (*jiaxin zu*).

Young adults born in the 1980s are the first birth cohort to have to cope with longer life expectancy. As long as their parents are in good health, the situation is relatively manageable, but acute problems arise when the elderly lose their autonomy. The failures of the welfare state means that these risks are *de facto* shouldered by individuals and their families. In the absence of robust social insurance schemes for the entire population and a lack of subsidized specialized facilities to care for the elderly and preschool-aged children, the pressure on young adults is increasing as the years go by. The precariousness of working conditions makes this pressure even stronger. Against this backdrop, Yan Yunxiang has recently observed a tendency for parents of young adults to go out of their way to support their children and grandchildren, putting their own needs second. He describes this transformation of intergenerational solidarity dynamics as an inversion of the family hierarchy (Yan, 2021).

Bibliography

Chen, F. (2014). Patterns of grandparents caring for grandchildren in China. In P. Dudley, S. Y. Wen, & N. F. Demetrea (Eds.), *The family and social change in Chinese societies*. Springer.

Cockain, A. (2012). *Young Chinese in urban China*. Routledge.

Evans, H. (2010). The gender of communication: Changing expectations of mothers and daughters in urban China. *The China Quarterly, 204*, 980–1000.

Fong, V. L. (2004). Filial nationalism among Chinese teenagers with global identities. *American Ethnologist, 31*, 631–648.

Ikels, C. (1993). Settling accounts: The intergenerational contract in an age of reform. In D. Davis & S. Harrell (Eds.), *Chinese families in the post-Mao era*. University of California Press.

Ikels, C. (2004). *Filial piety. Practice and discourse in contemporary East Asia*. Stanford University Press.

Kong, S. (2008). Family matters: Reconstructing the family on the Chinese television screen. In Y. Zhu, M. Keane, & R. Bai (Eds.), *TV drama in China*. Hong Kong University Press.

Liu, F. (2020). *Modernization as lived experiences: Three generations of young men and women in China*. Routledge.

LQBF. (2012). 'Elderly rights protection law (*Laonianren Quanyi Baozhang Fa,* Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly)'.

Paugam, S. (2008). *Le Lien Social*. Presses Universitaires de France.

Shen, Y. (沈奕斐). (2013). *iFamily: Individuals, family, and state in the process of urban modernization in China*. Shanghai Sanlian Bookstore.

Widmer, E., & Jallinoja, R. (2008). *Beyond the nuclear family: Families in a configurational perspective*. Peter Lang.

Yan, H. (2003a). Neoliberal governmentality and Neohumanism: Organizing Suzhi/value flow through labor recruitment networks. *Cultural Anthropology, 18*, 493–523.

Yan, Y. (2003b). *Private life under socialism*. Stanford University Press.

Yan, Y. (2021). The inverted family, post-patriarchal intergenerationality, and neo-Familism. In Y. Yan (Ed.), *Chinese families upside down: Intergenerational dynamics and neo-Familism in the early 21st century*. Brill.

Yan, Y. (2023). Familial affections vis-à-vis filial piety: The ethical challenges facing eldercare under neo-familism in contemporary China. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology, 10*(5), 1–21.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

Chapter 10
Conclusion

Contents

Bibliography.. 151

This book, which stems from my doctoral thesis defended in 2017, was born out of a questioning of the impact of the dismantling of collectivist-type social policies on the dynamics of inequalities formation over the life-course. In contemporary societies, it seems that the field of possibilities for young adults has never been so open. Individual risk-taking, self-realization, personal fulfillment, capacity development, mobility and change are highly valued, while failures in life-course increasingly take the form of individual crises. Being assimilated to personal failures, systemic problems are deprived of their political dynamics. The diversification of the paths towards adulthood has the effect of making invisible the logics underlying the construction and reproduction, or even the intensification, of inequalities over the life-course. The young adults' paths tend to be interpreted as the result of personal choices. However, such an interpretation conceals the role played by institutions in the construction of social inequalities.

China constitutes a particularly interesting case study since the country has undergone an extremely rapid transition from a collectivist welfare system to an individualization of the social protection system. In the early 1950s, Marxist and Maoist ideologies supplanted the logic of market. It gave birth to a new social organization based on a collectivist model. As described in this book, barely thirty years later, without naming it, the Party-State rejected this form of social organization, which had only partially succeeded. The opening-up to market economy led the country towards profound changes. The allocation of jobs and means of subsistence to individuals by work units or people's communes, in return for their participation in the socialist model of societization, gave way to individualization in the economic, social and, to some extent, private spheres. From the 1990s onwards, individuals were enjoined to "liberate" (*jiefang*) their individual capacities, to "rely on themselves" (*kao ziji*) and no longer "depend on the State" (*kao guojia*) (Ong & Zhang, 2008). The pursuit of personal profit and self-enterprising were also valued.

© The Author(s) 2024

S. V. Constantin, *A Life Course Perspective on Chinese Youths*, Life Course Research and Social Policies 17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57216-6_10

The popular view is that young adults are now free to seize lives with both hands, as well as all the new opportunities offered by market economy. However, this process of individualization comes with constraints. The individualization is partial. It is not only regulated and structured by the State, but it also carries social inequalities.

The analyzes produced in this book are unique in that they examine the dynamics of individualization through the prism of the transition to adulthood of two birth cohorts that are emblematic of the reforms carried out in China: The first made most of its journey to adulthood in collectivist China, while the second made its way to adulthood in post-collectivist China. The respondents had been living in Beijing for at least six months at the time the research was conducted. Among 615 respondents born between 1980 and 1985, three types of paths to adulthood stood out: The first one is centered on relatively early financial independence (28% of respondents), the second one on a relatively long period of studies (43% of respondents) and the third one on relatively late decohabitation (29% of respondents) (Fig. 10.1).

Young adults who achieve financial autonomy relatively early (cluster 1 “Relatively early financial autonomy”) tend to live with their parents until they start working, around the age of 17 (yellow). By the age of 19, almost all members of this group are working and no longer live with their families (pink). From the age of 21 onwards, they begin to live with a partner or get married (turquoise) and move towards parenthood (purple) while remaining professionally active.

The later entry into the labor market of some respondents can be explained by their educational background (cluster 2 “Relatively long period of study “). These young adults continued their training in higher education after high school (orange). They began to enter the labor market around the age of 20 (pink). By the age of 23,

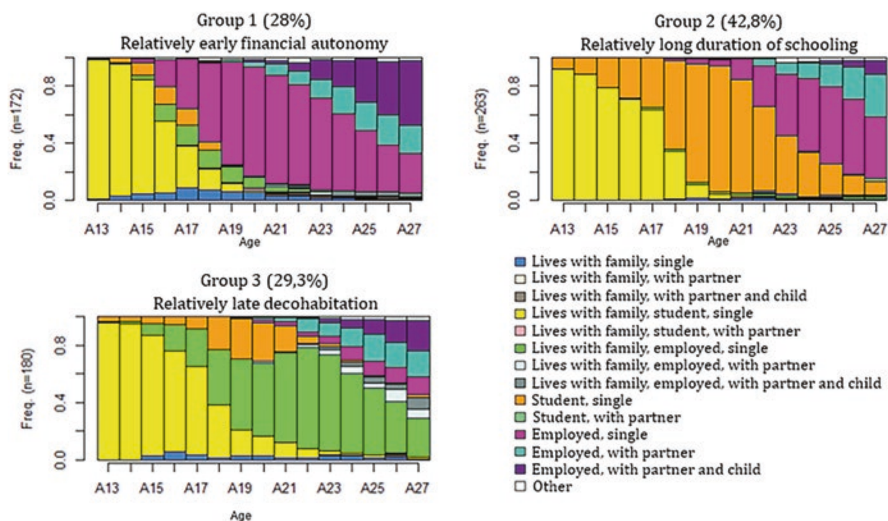


Fig. 10.1 Cross-sectional representation of the three types of transition to adulthood for young people born between 1980 and 1985

most young adults in this cluster are professionally active. They start living with a partner (turquoise) and a few years later some become parents (purple) (Fig. 10.1).

The path followed by young adults in the third cluster "Relatively late decohabitation", in other words, who leave the parental home relatively late, is very similar to that of the young adults in the first group. The majority of them continue to live with their parents after graduating from high school. By the age of 22, almost all of them made their professional transition (green). At this age, they begin to live with a partner and have a child. For some, this means continuing to live under the same roof as their parents or parents-in-law (Fig. 10.1).

This cluster analysis reveals a limited diversification of the paths to adulthood followed by the young adults. The analyses highlight social determinisms and the normative relevance of education in young adults' life-course. School achievement is the main factor that significantly explains age differences in access to financial autonomy. Indeed, young adults who are not coming from Beijing and who did not go on to higher education have a greater propensity to leave the family home quickly after post-compulsory schooling to work in order to achieve financial autonomy. In this specific situation, early family decohabitation is often explained by the constraints of the labor market that leads them to be mobile to find a job.

The third cluster is made up mainly of young adults with a Beijing *hukou*. With the same level of education as the previous group, these young adults tend to stay with their parents even though they have a job that provides them with financial autonomy.

Sequence analyses reveal a clear intra-cohort standardization of the pathways to adulthood since the temporality of state sequences is almost uniform for women and men who share the same type of *hukou*. The analyses also reveal that the school system has a strong normative influence on the temporality of the transition to adulthood (Fig. 10.2). Although the residence booklet policy (*hukou*) has been slightly relaxed and access to higher education has been expanded in post-collectivist China, the comparison of the paths of young rural and urban people, originally from Beijing or elsewhere in China, of women and men with high and low education levels indicates that the *hukou* retains its deterministic effect on people's life paths.

The emergence of this new life stage in the young adults' life-course should be considered in the context of the official rhetoric on social and economic progress and the discourse on the "quality" of the population. In 2001, a reform of the primary school system was implemented. The objective of this reform was to move from "exam-oriented education" (*yingshi jiaoyu*) to "quality education" (*suzhi jiaoyu*) (Chicharro, 2010:183). According to a member of the Ministry of Education, the reform aimed to "*prepare a new generation of "quality" citizens capable of serving China in its modernization*" (Chicharro, 2010:184). The ambition to shape a new type of citizen has always involved educational reform in China. Even after the Communist Party came to power, one of the slogans of this period was "*fight illiteracy, shape a new man*". Unlike the Maoist period, today the aim of the CCP is to no longer to encourage social homogeneity and political fervor. It is about shaping a type of person who corresponds to what post-collectivist China needs to achieve the country's dream of "national rejuvenation". The balance is difficult to find between, on the one hand, encouraging the development of individualities,

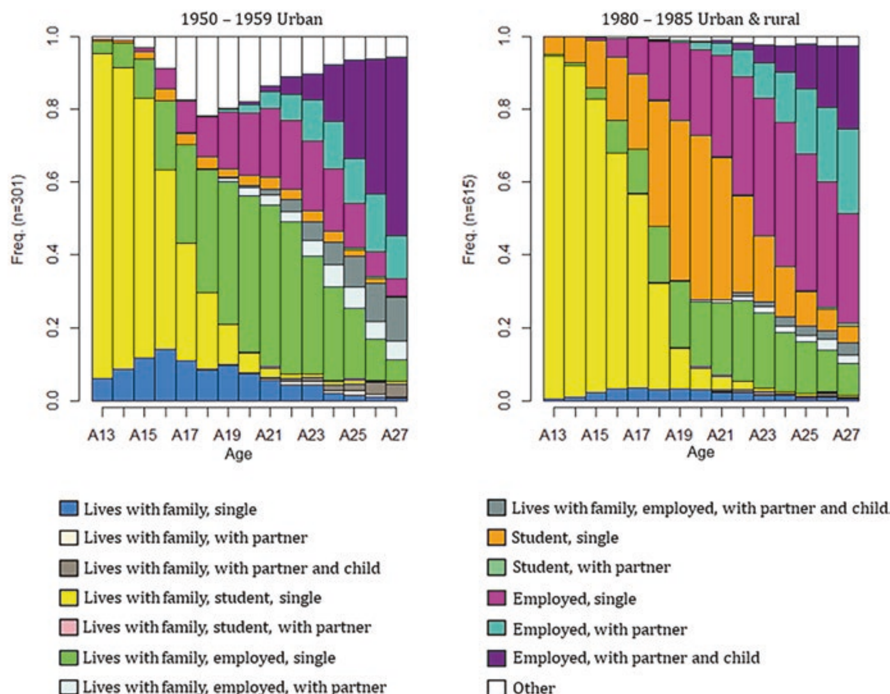


Fig. 10.2 Cross-sectional representation of intergenerational changes in the sequence of the transition to adulthood (1950–1959 and 1980–1985)

shaping autonomous young adults who are capable of taking personal initiatives but, on the other hand, who remain patriotic and do not destabilize the CCP. In this political project, the professional success of young people contributes to increase the country's economic power and international prestige.

The analyses carried out for this book also indicate that the journey of young people towards adulthood does not always coincide with the representation they have of the transition to adulthood. It is particularly interesting to observe that home ownership as a prerequisite for marriage or the birth of a child is a new norm reappropriated in the discourse of young people, but which in reality only applies to a privileged fringe of the population. Homeowners are mainly young Beijingers who have an urban *hukou* or who have attended University. All other things being equal, the discrete time logistic regression model (GLM) indicates that young people who have become homeowners are significantly more likely to have experienced all the stages constituting the transition to adulthood (Fig. 10.3).[1] In this sense, access to home ownership, which constitutes a specific element of the transition to adulthood in China, can make the process smoother or, on the contrary, sometimes generate stress.

[1] Chan, Kam Wing, and Buckingham, Will, 2008, "Is China "Abolishing the Hukou System?", *The China Quarterly,* 195, September, p. 602.

Variables	Gone through all transitions to aldulthood
Sex	*Odds ratio (SE Coef.)*
Male (ref.)	1
Female	0,578*** (0,165)
Type of hukou (2012)	
Rural (ref.)	1
Urban	0,246*** (0,172)
Property owner (variable in time)	
Never owned a property (ref.)	1
Owned a property	6.553*** (0,196)
Chi-square	126,04***
Df	3
Cox & Snell R square	0,0077

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 (Wald test)

Fig. 10.3 Discrete time logistic regression model

While, like elsewhere, the transition to adulthood in China has been lengthening over time (Fig. 10.2), one of the major contributions of this research is to reveal, through the respondents' discourse, the importance of the place of the family and family obligations in this stage of the life-course. Family responsibilities and marriage constitute a structuring norm in their pathways. Contrary to what has been observed in Western countries, marriage and parenthood, which confer on young adults new social roles and personal attributes, are not disconnected in the respondents' minds. For the respondents, there is not a unique experience that marks the passage towards adulthood. These are multiple events and the gradual accumulation of experiences that accompany the transitions that enable them to feel adults. They attach individualistic attributes to these transitions, such as accepting new responsibilities (*you zeren xin*), in other words, the ability to take responsibility for their actions. In particular, respondents mention professional responsibilities and family responsibilities towards their parents and their own family; or once married, towards their parents-in-laws. Autonomy is also mentioned. This refers to the ability to "make decisions by themselves" (*ziji zixing*) and to "solve problems independently" (*duli jiejue wenti*) without the help of parents. They identify financial autonomy, associated with employment and access to home ownership as a condition for their transition to marriage and parenthood. They attach to these transitions, which confer upon them new social roles and personal attributes, the blooming of a sense of responsibility towards others. They also envision the transition to adulthood as a process of psychological development towards maturity.

The findings presented suggest that regardless of the social origin and level of education of the respondents, the family continues to play a significant role in the lives of young adults. This is particularly true in terms of intergenerational solidarity. Both parties are legally bound by intergenerational solidarity obligations, but it

is no longer only men who can count on their parents' support or who must be filial to them. Changes in family law are not the only factor driving this trend towards neo-familialization. The dismantling of the collectivist welfare state, which has yet to find a substitute, is another factor that explains this process. The social assistance system is still rudimentary and is designed for people who are physically unable to carry out a professional activity and/or who find themselves without descendants. Furthermore, since the end of 2016, President Xi Jinping has explicitly placed the family at the center of the national project of rejuvenation in a series of speeches. By emphasizing that respect for family traditions benefits not only individuals and their family, but the society as a whole, the Party-State promotes a process of neo-familialization which bounds individualization in family relations.

As highlighted in this book, individualization is a complex phenomenon. Social policies and changes in the legal framework support a high degree of individualization in the labor market but limit the depth of the process in the family sphere. Intergenerational solidarity obligations are firmly engraved in the law. These two forms of individualization take place concurrently and interact to address the problems of inequality and social anomy that result from China's rapid entry into the globalized market economy. As socioeconomic supports provided by the family depends on its resources, the resort to family solidarities contributes *in fine* to reinforcing social inequalities rather than reducing them. The same applies to gender inequalities, since women are still the majority of those who take on the tasks of *care*.

The recent emphasis in TV dramas, magazines and mainstream discourses on traditional Confucian culture and women's role as virtuous wives and mothers once married are characteristic of the differentialist ideology diffused in post-collectivist China. In contrast with communist slogans, such as "what men can do, women can do too" mobilized to favor gender equality and women's participation in productive activities, today's China is permeated by the idea that a difference in nature exists between women and men. As depicted in the TV drama "Ant's struggle", the main character, Chuchu, resigns from her job after becoming involved with Rongsheng. Once married, she devotes herself to their new home. She is portrayed as not hesitating to sacrifice financially and emotionally for her husband and child. These qualities, valued by the narrative and the scenography, reflect those associated with the ideal of the virtuous woman in Confucian thought. In the corpus of TV series analyzed in this book, the articulation between work and family life is always pictured as a female dilemma. The latter dimension is systematically emphasized in the life-course of young women. Women are portrayed as belonging to the domestic sphere. The narratives encourage them to devote time and energy to their family responsibilities, rather than to pursue a flourishing career. This essentialist view of men and women' social roles reinforce gender inequality.

This rhetorical shift, that has been intensifying since 2007, should be seen against a backdrop of rising youth unemployment, which mainly affects young graduates from "ordinary" higher education institutions (*putong gaoxiao*). The Party-State discourse enjoining women to marry before 27 years old, to give birth and to "return to family life" carrying forward "the traditional virtues of Chinese nation, establish a good family tradition, and create a new trend of family civilization" echoes the

State discourse on “women returning home”. This narrative emerged in the 1990s, in a context where unemployment rate was rising due to the dismantling of the *danwei* system. It was a strategic response from the State, inviting women to quit their job and devote themselves to care responsibilities, to contain the surge of unemployment. This insistence on women’s domestic role is a departure from gender equality. With the dismantling of the collectivist Welfare State, nowadays public spendings for pre-school childcare facilities and raising children are not sufficient. Through this narrative the Party State is turning on women to assume the tasks of care and to offset the decline in family policy.

Young women may not be keen to go down this path without resistance. Despite the raise since May 2021 of the legal limit on the number of children per couple from two to three, young people appear to delay childbirth, as well as buying a home amid a faltering economy and rampant unemployment. This emerging social phenomenon is known as the “young refuseniks”. They reject the traditional fourfold path to adulthood: finding a mate, marriage, mortgages and raising a family.

Bibliography

Chicharro, G. (2010). *Le Fardeau Des Petits Empereurs*. Société d’ethnologie.
Ong, A., & Zhang, L. (2008). *Privatizing China. Socialism from Afar*. Cornell University Press.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Timeline of the History of Contemporary China

- 1644–1911: Qing Dynasty (Manchu), last Chinese dynasty
- 1839–1842: First Opium War
- August 1842: China cedes Hong Kong to the United Kingdom following the Treaty of Nanjing + specify other concessions
- 1856–1860: Second Opium War (France and United Kingdom allied against China), Beijing is sacked by Franco-British troops
- 1851–1864: Taiping rebellion
- 1881–1885: Franco-Chinese war, France takes over Indochina
- 1894–1895: First Sino-Japanese War, China cedes notably control over Korea and Taiwan
- 1896–1899: "The carving up of China" by foreign powers who are granted mining areas, railway lines, and spheres of influence
- 1899–1901: Boxer Rebellion (55 days in Beijing), China is overwhelmed by the alliance of the Eight Nations
- 1905: Foundation of the Tong Meng Hui in Tokyo by Sun Yat Sen (Sun Yixian). This is the precursor of the Guomindang (国民党), the republican nationalist party
- 1908: Death of Cixi, the young child Puyi ascends to power. He will be the last Emperor the country has known
- 1912: Proclamation of the Republic of China on January first in Nanjing, Sun Yat Sen becomes provisional president. On January 12, the last Manchu emperor, Puyi, abdicates. General Yuan Shi-Kai pushes Sun Yat Sen out and establishes an authoritarian regime
- 1912: Mongolian leaders declare independence in Ulan Bator
- 1913: Tibet declares its independence. Yuan Shi-Kai, supported by a Western consortium, establishes a dictatorial regime

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2024

S. V. Constantin, *A Life Course Perspective on Chinese Youths*, Life Course Research and Social Policies 17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57216-6

- 1915: China recognizes the independence of Mongolia
- 1916–1927: Period of turmoil called “the Warlords”
- May 4, 1919: Nationalist movement led by young progressive intellectuals and directed against Japanese domination
- 1921: Creation of the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai by 13 people including Mao Zedong
- 1925: Sun Yat Sen, who began to reunify the country, dies on March 12. Chang Kai Chek (Jiang Jieshi) takes over the Guomindang
- 1926–1927: “The Northern Expedition” by which the Guomindang, associated with the CCP, overthrows most of the warlords
- 1927: The Guomindang breaks in April with the communists. This is followed by bloody repressions in Shanghai (April) and Canton (December). In August, another uprising gives birth to the Red Army
- 1928: The Guomindang has completed reunification, Chang Kai Chek is the president, Nanjing is the capital
- 1931: In November, Mao Zedong proclaims the Soviet Republic of China in Jiangxi
- 1932: The Japanese, who occupy Manchuria, create the protectorate of Manchukuo (the Land of the Manchus), independent of China
- 1932–1934: Military campaign of the Guomindang to annihilate the communists. At the same time, the Japanese are gaining ground in northern China and are approaching Beijing
- October 1934–October 1935: The Long March, the Communists are driven out by the Guomindang and take refuge in the province of Shaanxi. Mao Zedong emerges as the leading figure of the CCP, and the People’s Republic of Yanan
- December 1936: Xian agreement, which will lead to the second united front between the Guomindang and the Communist Party to counter the Japanese
- 1937–1945: Sino-Japanese war within the framework of the Second World War
- 1938–1940: The nationalist government loses the south and east of the country to the Japanese. Chang Kai Chek is supported by the Flying Tigers, American aviators who create an air bridge between India and Chongqing. On their side, the Communists form guerrillas in the occupied area of the country. The main cities and coasts are controlled by the Japanese army
- December 1937–February 1938: Massacre of Nanjing by the Japanese army
- 1940: Constitution in Nanjing of a pro-Japanese government on March 20
- 1943: British and Americans renounce the privileges born from unequal treaties during the “Carving up of China” at the beginning of the century
- 1945: Japan’s surrender, Stalin recognizes the Chinese nationalist government, which is one of the founding members of the UN
- 1946: Negotiations between the Guomindang and the CCP under the supervision of the United States
- 1947: Resumption of the civil war between the nationalists of the Guomindang and the communists. The latter launch agrarian reform in the territories they control

- 1948: Defeat of the Guomindang in Manchuria and notably at Shenyang (Mukden)
- 1949: In January, the Communists occupy most of the country and enter Beijing
- October 1, 1949: Foundation of the People's Republic of China by Mao Zedong. He is the president of the CCP, President of the State, President of the military affairs commission of the Central Committee
- The nationalists of the Guomindang, and their leader Chang Kai Chek, take refuge in Taiwan. Supported by the United States in a context of "Cold War", the Guomindang retains control of the archipelago and presents itself as the real legitimate Chinese power
- 1949–1954: Establishment of communist power
- February 14, 1950: Sino-Soviet treaty of friendship, alliance and mutual assistance
- 1950: Law on family and marriage aimed at ending the patriarchal family and ensuring legal equality between men and women. It also aims to increase the available workforce by subtracting women from their kitchens. The marriage law sets the marriage age at 20 years for men and 18 years for women (Marriage Law, section six (婚姻法，第六条规定, *hunyinfa, di liu tiao guiding*), http://www.hbdj.gov.cn/service/service_info_view.php?sid=4&ty=1&id=515)
  Agrarian Reform Law that generalizes the distribution of land from large landowners to landless peasants and those who lack it (this practice was already widespread in communist communities before 1949). Entry of Chinese troops into Tibet, over which China asserts its sovereignty. Sending troops to Korea. China's support for the Viet Minh in the Indochina War against France
- 1951: Chinese and North Korean forces take Seoul. The system of agricultural cooperatives is put in place: December 1951 adoption of the resolution on mutual aid teams and the resolution on agricultural cooperatives (peasants can join cooperatives on a voluntary basis). In order to ensure the maintenance of cohesion and social peace[1], the government established in 1951 measures to control the population movements. The Public Security Bureau is created, it records population movements for periods longer than 3 days
- 1953–1957: 1st five-year plan
- 1953: Armistice between the two Koreas. China's prestige is enhanced by its role in the conflict. November 19, 1953, adoption of a unified system of buying and selling cereals (state monopoly on the trade of cereals, peasants are no longer free to sell directly on the market their production). 1st population census
- September 1954: First constitution adopted by the People's National Assembly. Maoist ideology is placed above everything
- 1954: Presence at the Geneva conference (representation by Zhou Enlai) which puts an end to the Indochina War
- 1955: Participation in the Bandung conference. Mao Zedong wants to accelerate the collectivization of land and increase the number of agricultural cooperatives:

[1] http://english.gov.cn/official/2005-07/29/content_18346.htm. Accessed on May 3, 2010.

Mao Zedong gives a speech to accelerate the march towards collectivization and compares "the cadres who refuse to do so to women with bound feet who trot on the road of history seeing a tiger in front and a dragon behind"[2].

- 1956: Deng Xiaoping becomes general secretary of the Central Committee. The CCP defines agricultural cooperatives as "agricultural organizations that collectivized land and large-sized farm tools. Members [...] received income only according to their needs"[3]. This is a foretaste of what the people's communes will be in 1958. first birth control campaign whose ideological justification is order vs anarchy
- 1957: Hundred Flowers campaign encouraging the expression of opinions. In May 1957, students, teachers and intellectuals sharply criticize the cadres and the regime. Their perceived discontent as a threat to the Party, this movement is followed by an anti-rightist repression. Communist ideology is henceforth imposed as the only viable one
- 1958–1962: 2nd five-year plan
- 1958: Foundation of the people's communes and launch of the "Great Leap Forward" by Mao Zedong. While the figures vary according to historical sources, it will be a huge fiasco leading to the death of several tens of millions of people through famine and malnutrition. Although the plan is officially abandoned in 1962, as of 1960 it is unofficially no longer effective... Institutionalization of the *hukou* system by the Standing Committee of the National People's Assembly (NPA). From then on, every "household" has a booklet recording various sociodemographic information about each of its members.
- 1959: Repression against an uprising in Tibet. The Dalai Lama goes into exile in India. Liu Shaoqi replaces Mao Zedong as President.
- 1960: China distances itself from the USSR, which had previously suspended its aid to the Asian country.
- 1962: Conflict between India and China over the Himalayan border. India's defeat. Following the great famine resulting from the Great Leap Forward, the government once again prioritizes agricultural production in the countryside. 2nd birth control campaign following the demographic boom resulting from the great famine linked to the Great Leap Forward.
- 1964: France is the first Western country to recognize the People's Republic of China. First Chinese atomic test. The simplification of Chinese characters is adopted and applied in mainland China. 2nd population census.
- 1966–1970: 3rd five-year plan.
- 1966: Start of the Cultural Revolution. The "Red Guards" defend communist ideals and attack the reformists of the Party. A large part of the cultural and intellectual heritage is destroyed, the elites and moderates are targeted.

---

[2] People's Daily (*Renmin ribao*), March 6, 2004.

[3] No. 1 central document issued: http://english.gov.cn/index.htm; and interviews with the peasants of the Danian commune.

- 1968: “End of the Cultural Revolution” on the intervention of the army. Liu Shaoqi is sidelined as is Deng Xiaoping. Mao Zedong has managed to regain control of power.
- 1968–1980: Up to the mountains and down to the countryside movement
- 1969: Border incident with the USSR.
- 1970: First Chinese satellite. Birth control policy of 2 children per couple.
- 1971–1975: 4 th five-year plan.
- 1971: The People’s Republic of China replaces the Republic of China (Taiwan since 1949) on the United Nations Security Council.
- 1972: The President of the United States, Ronald Nixon, visits Beijing. Start of the normalization of relations with Japan.
- 1973: Return of Deng Xiaoping to the Central Committee. China-Japan economic relations intensify. 3 rd birth limitation campaign: 晚稀少, *wanxishao*
- 1974: Discovery of the terracotta army in Xian.
- 1975: Zhou Enlai launches the 4 modernizations (army, science, (agriculture and industry) and a new constitution is adopted by the People’s National Assembly
- January 8, 1976: Death of Zhou Enlai
- April 6, 1976: Death of Mao Zedong, Hua Guofeng takes over the Party and the government. The last members of the “Gang of Four”, responsible for the Cultural Revolution, are arrested
- 1976–1980: 5th five-year plan
- 1977–1978: Return of Deng Xiaoping to power who will launch economic reforms, official proclamation of the end of the Cultural Revolution at the XIth Party Congress. He promulgates the doctrine of the “four fundamental principles” (the dictatorship of the proletariat, the dominant role of the CCP, Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong thought, and the socialist path). He also promulgates the “four modernizations” (agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense) proposed as early as 1964 by Zhou Enlai and again in 1975
- 1978: Movement of the “Democracy Wall”
- 1979: Creation of special economic zones to attract foreign investments. By adopting a moderate line and focusing on economic progress, China enters an era of rapid economic growth. 4th birth control campaign: implementation of the one-child policy
- 1979–1984: De-collectivization of land and opening to international trade. Creation of 5 SEZs
- 1980–1985: 6th five-year plan
- 1980: Marriage law sets the marriage age at 22 years for men and 20 years for women (Marriage Law, section six, article 2 (婚姻法，第六条规定, *hunyinfa, di liu tiao guiding*), http://www.hbdj.gov.cn/service/service_info_view.php?sid=4&ty=1&id=515
- 1982: Adoption of a 4th Constitution according to which the Party is theoretically no longer above the law. The Family Law and the Constitution make the practice of birth limitation mandatory: “Both husband and wife have the duty to practice family planning”, article 49 of the Constitution. third population census

- 1983–1985: Some relaxations to allow temporary migration (for studies and to provide cheap labor to new businesses)
- 1984: Opening of 14 coastal cities to foreign investments. End of the state monopoly on the sale and purchase of agricultural products. The economic reform generalizes, prices are liberalized, people's communes are abolished. Relaxation of the one-child policy for peasants and minorities: 2 children allowed and even 3 for certain minorities, Document 7 of the Central Committee
- 1985: Decentralization policy that gives local governments responsibility for their finances. Dismantling of popular communes. The government encourages the creation of TVE (Town and Village Enterprises). Abolition of ration tickets. Introduction of the identity card.
- 1986–1990: 7th five-year plan
- 1986: Compulsory Education Law (中华人民共和国义务教育法, zhonghua renmin gongheguo yiwu jiaoyu fa), 9 years of instruction become mandatory (primary and middle school, from 6 to 15 years old), http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?lib=law&id=1166&CGid =
- 1988: Publication of Document 13 which replaces Document 7 and reaffirms the implementation of the one-child policy due to fears that the policy of openness and reforms may be threatened by the population growth. And at the same time, the CCP's desire to reaffirm its power.
- 1988–1989: Relations normalize with the USSR, India and Vietnam
- 1989: "Beijing Spring" and bloody repression of Tiananmen by the army against students demanding more freedoms.
- 1990: 4th population census.
- 1991–1995: 8th five-year plan
- 1991: Local officials are made responsible for the implementation of the one-child policy.
- 1993: Jiang Zemin becomes president and controls the army, the State and the Party. Establishment of a "socialist market economy", all those who oppose it are removed from the CCP. He worked for the dismantling of state-owned enterprises and the development of the private sector with the theory of "three represents" (scientists, lawyers and entrepreneurs are henceforth admitted to the CCP to prevent them from forming a separate and contesting political class).
- 1994: Labor Law (中华人民共和国劳动法, *zhonghua renmin gongheguo laodong fa*, The Labor Law of the PRC)
- 1995: fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing
- 1996–2000: 9th five-year plan
- 2000: 5th population census
- 1996: Promulgation of the law on the obligation for children to take care of elderly parents (Law on the Protection and Interests of Elderly People, http://www.china.org.cn/government/laws/2007-04/17/content_1207404.htm)
- February 19, 1997: Death of Deng Xiaoping
- July 1, 1997: Handover of Hong Kong to China by the United Kingdom
- 1997: Prenatal sex selection becomes illegal, art. 37 of the law on maternal and child health (中华人民共和国母婴保健法， *zhonghua gongheguo muying baojian fa*), http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/xinwen/dfrd/tj/2011-02/15/content_1620647.htm

- 1998: Law to regulate blood donations (following the scandal of contaminated blood sales). Law on the *hukou*, fathers can now also pass their *hukou* to their children.
- 1999: Macao reverts to Chinese control following the handover by Portugal
- 2000: Jiang Zemin's drive to develop the country's center and not just the coastal areas[4]
- 2001–2005: 10th Five-Year Plan: risk of frustrations and disturbances that could threaten the country's smooth progress towards growth and development; thus, it devotes the third part of its tenth five-year plan to the economic and social development of the countryside[5]
- 2001: China's accession to the WTO (effective entry took place in 2002). In July, the organization of the 2008 Olympic Games is awarded to Beijing. The government launches a nationwide health insurance system in rural areas: The "New Rural Cooperative Medical System" (NRCMS) or 新型农村合作医疗制度 (xinxing nongcun hezuo yiliao zhidu)[6]. The government abolishes the grain tax in kind throughout the country[7]. Farmers no longer have to sell a portion of their grain to the state at a price set by it and therefore generally below the market price. Taxes in the countryside are abolished, only the agricultural tax remains. The capital of Hebei, Shijiazhuang, has decided to relax the conditions for access to its labor market for migrant farmers[8].
- 2002: Hu Jintao becomes general secretary of the CCP, and will later become president in 2003. He emphasizes the "construction of a harmonious society" by fighting against poverty and socioeconomic inequalities. This policy also has the underlying objective of combating any risk of imbalance and social tensions that could arise from the differential level of development and economic resources between cities and countryside.
- 2002: Law on population and birth planning prohibits selective abortion (art.36) and protects women and little girls (art.22), http:// www.women.org.cn At the same time, the central government strengthens the one-child policy. With Hu Jintao in power, he launches a new slogan advocating the construction of a "harmonious society" (和谐社会, *hexie shehui*).
- 2003: Regulation on the prohibition of prenatal sex determination and selective abortion for non-medical purposes (关于禁止非医学需要的胎儿性别鉴定何选择性别的人工终止妊娠的规定, *guanyu jinzhi fei yixue xuyao de taier xingbie jianding he xuanze xingbie de rengong zhongzhi renshen de guiding*). China is 6th in the world economy, first manned Chinese space flight, SARS epidemic,

---

[4] http://english.gov.cn/official/2006-03/14/content_227248.htm. Retrieved on May 3, 2010.

[5] No. 1 central document issued: http://english.gov.cn/index.htm.

[6] "A ministry report said 12 places, including Hebei, Liaoning, Shandong provinces, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Chongqing Municipality, had launched pilot programs to experiment with a system that narrowed differentiation between rural and urban residents." Article appeared in the China Daily on March 31, 2007: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-03/31/content_840877.htm. Retrieved on May 5, 2010.

[7] Mun, Young Cho. (2010). On the Edge between "the People" and "the Population": Ethnographic Research on the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee. *The China Quarterly, 201* (March), 20-37.

[8] People's Daily (*Renmin ribao*) of April 15, 2010; *China Daily* of April 16-18, 2010.

Wen Jiabao becomes prime minister, start of the controversial construction of the Three Gorges Dam. State directive[9] aimed at facilitating the employment of the rural population in the city and eliminating discriminatory policies or arbitrary taxes against them.

- 2004: Jiang Zemin retires from his last post, the leadership of the army. The government tackles the reform of Agricultural Credit Cooperatives, a Maoist legacy[10]. These were very fragmented and not viable; the leaders' goal is to bring them together and make them financially healthier so they can meet the financing demands of peasants, and thus enable them to invest in the economic and social development of their villages or communes.
- 2005: Revision of the law on maternal and child health which sets in art.5 a deadline (if abortion after more than 14 weeks, enhanced control), (中华人民共和国母婴保健法， *zhonghua gongheguo muying baojian fa*), http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/xinwen/dfrd/tj/2011-02/15/content_1620647.htm. Abolition of the agricultural tax: peasants no longer pay tax[11], they receive subsidies for growing certain cereals.
- 2006–2010: 11th five-year plan: the economic, social and cultural progress of the rural world becomes, for the first time in the history of the PRC, the government's priority over industry, cities and the army[12]. Each year since 2006, the budget allocated by the government for the socioeconomic development of the countryside has grown.
- 2006: Inauguration of the railway line between Beijing and Lhasa in July. In December, China opens its market to foreign banks. Amendment to the compulsory education law: all children, in the city as well as in the countryside, natives or migrants, whether they have a *hukou*, can benefit from 9 years of education at a strictly regulated cost (free except for school supplies and insurance). The government announces its intention to create "a new socialist countryside"[13]. Rural schools have running water, electricity and are beginning to be computerized. Removal of restrictions on the jobs that migrants can hold in the city
- 2007: Official warming of relations between China and Japan. Anti-satellite missile test conducted by China. Abolition of tuition fees for primary and middle school (amendment to the compulsory education law), tuition fees must be covered by local governments. Hospital childbirth made mandatory. The policy of easing the *hukou* is in effect in 12 provinces and municipalities of the country, notably in Shanghai[14]. Easing of the one-child policy: couples where both the man and the woman are themselves only children can give birth to a second child

[9] China Daily of March 5, 2010.

[10] China Daily of March 15, 2010.

[11] Document No. 1 of the CPC Central Committee promulgated at the end of January 2010.

[12] http://english.gov.cn/official/2006-03/14/content_227248.htm. Consulté le 3 mai 2010. Retrieved on May 3, 2010.

[13] http://english.gov.cn/index.htm: No. 1 central document issued.

[14] «A ministry report said 12 places, including Hebei, Liaoning, Shandong provinces, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Chongqing Municipality, had launched pilot programs to experiment with a system that narrowed differentiation between rural and urban residents.», China Daily,

- 2008: Beijing Olympic Games, crisis in Tibet. Government subsidy to build houses with concrete foundations and tiles in villages to prevent the risk of fire. Labor contract law
- 2009: Reform to raise the salary of teachers in rural areas. Introduction of a minimum income in the countryside (低保, *dibao*) and compensation for elderly people who no longer have sons to support them. It is the local authorities, the commune and the Cadres in the villages who decide who can or cannot benefit from these aids. Often it is not the unemployed who receive the *dibao* but physically disabled people[15]
- 2010: Revision of the law on the health of mothers and children (中华人民共和国母婴保健法， *zhonghua gongheguo muying baojian fa*), http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/xinwen/dfrd/tj/2011-02/15/content_1620647.htm. National plan for medium and short term reform and development of education (2010–2020) highlights children's education (国家中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要, *guojia zhongchangqi jiaoyu gaige he fazhan guihua gangyao*), http://www.moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/zhuanti/2010zqyj/zqyjg.htm. Announcement in Beijing that children who do not have a *hukou* from the capital will be admitted within three to five years to schools located near their place of residence[16] without having to pay additional fees or "donations". An amendment stipulating that the proportion of elected deputies to represent the people should be the same for the urban and rural parts of the country[17] was proposed at the beginning of the session and adopted on Sunday, March 14, 2010[18]. Reform of the *hukou* to allow rural migrants to settle permanently in small and medium-sized cities (less than 500,000 inhabitants) and to have access to the same public services as the urban population with a permanent residence permit[19]. sixth population census
- 2011: 3rd national action plan for the development of children (2011–2020), 中国儿童发展纲要, *zhongguo ertong fazhan gangyao*)
- 2011–2015: 12th five-year plan
- 1st July 2013: Implementation of the law on the "protection of the rights and interests of the elderly", this law has 9 clauses that define the duties and obligations of children towards the spiritual needs of their parents (中华人民共和国老年人权益保障法, *zhonghua renmin gongheguo laonianren quanyi baozhang fa,* http://www.gov.cn/flfg/2012-12/28/content_2305570.htm)
- 2013: National relaxation of the birth control policy: if at least one of the spouses is an only child, the couple can have a second child (我国启动实施一方是独生子女夫妇可生育二胎政策 (wo guo qidong shishi yifang shi dusheng zinü fufu ke shengyu ertai zhengce, http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2013-11/16/content_2528410.htm)

March 31, 2007: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-03/31/content_840877.htm. Retrieved on May 5, 2010.

[15] Mun, Young Cho. (2010). On the Edge between "the People" and "the Population": Ethnographic Research on the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee. The China Quarterly, 201(March), 20–37.

[16] 人民日报 (Renmin ribao), April 15, 2010; China Daily, April 16-18, 2010.

[17] China Daily, March 5, 2010.

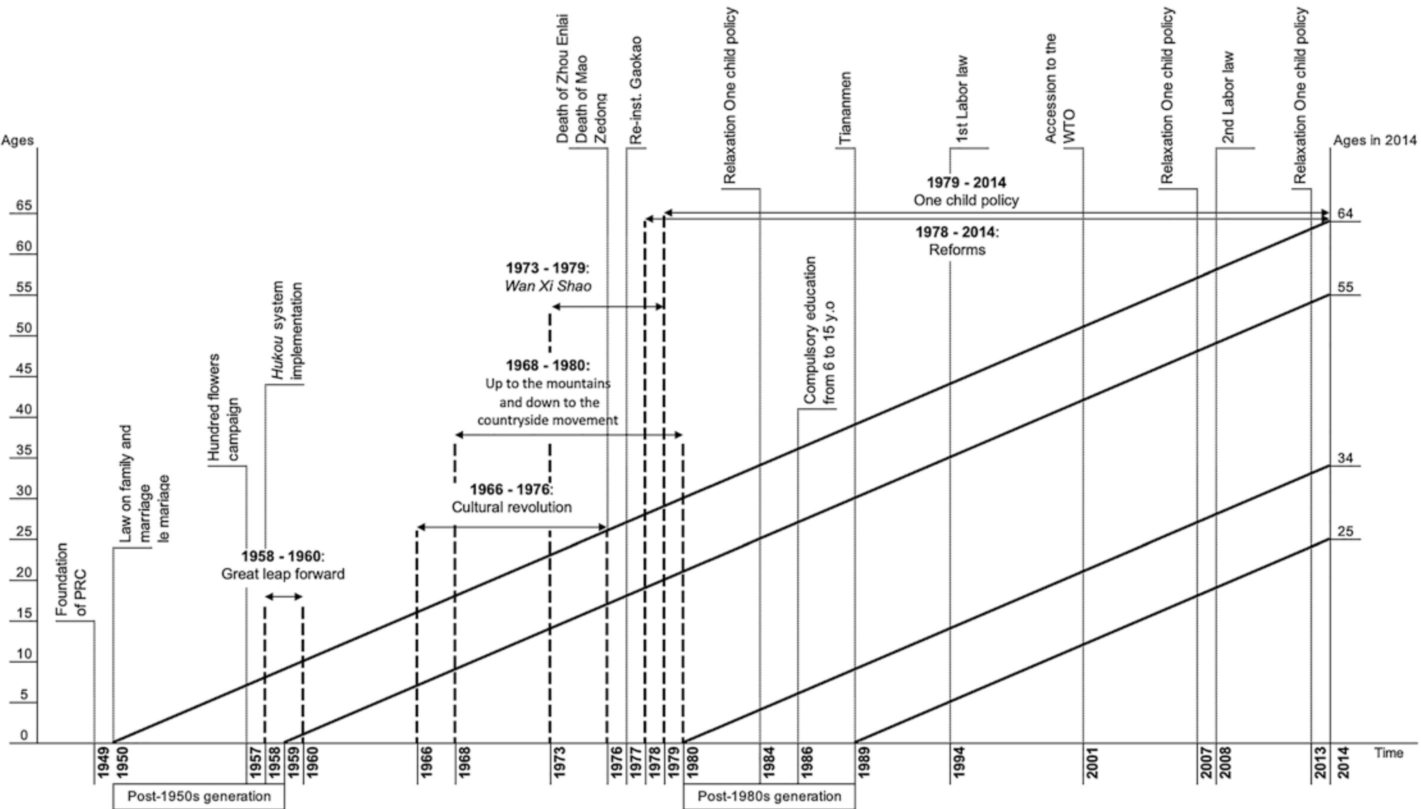
[18] China Daily, March 5, 2010.

[19] Document No. 1, CCP Central Committee, promulgated at the end of January 2010.

- 2015: Abolition of the one-child policy nationwide at the meeting to establish the 13th five-year plan (29/10/15). The number of births is limited to two children per couple (http://politics.caijing.com.cn/20151029/3997804.shtml)
- 2016–2020: 13th five-year plan
- 2021: Three-child policy. Couples are allowed to have three children (http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-05/31/c_1127513067.htm)

Appendix 2: Administrative Division of the Municipality of Beijing

Appendix 3: Lexis Diagram Representing the Two Birth Cohorts and Major Socio-Historical Changes in the PRC



Appendix 4: Quantitative Convenience Sample Stratified by Quota - Birth Cohort 1980–1985 (Targeted Number of People)

Population with an urban *hukou* registered in Beijing (210)	Niveau 1 Primary school (小学)	Niveau 2 Junior high school (初中)	Niveau 3 High school (高中)	Niveau 4 Short-cycle tertiary education (大学专科)	Niveau 5 Bachelor (大学本科)	Niveau 6 Master (研究生)	No schooling
Males 105	1	40	20	15	22	7	0
Females 105	1	34	19	18	25	8	0

Population with a rural *hukou* registered in Beijing (46)	Niveau 1 Primary school (小学)	Niveau 2 Junior high school (初中)	Niveau 3 High school (高中)	Niveau 4 Short-cycle tertiary	Niveau 5 Bachelor (大学本科)	Niveau 6 Master (研究生)	No schooling
Males 24	1	9	4	3	5	2	0
Females 22	0	7	4	4	5	2	0

Population with an *urban* hukou registered outside Beijing (235)	Niveau 1 Primary school (小学)	Niveau 2 Junior high school (初中)	Niveau 3 High school (高中)	Niveau 4 Short-cycle tertiary	Niveau 5 Bachelor (大学本科)	Niveau 6 Master (研究生)	No schooling
Males 123	1	47	23	17	26	9	0
Females 112	2	36	20	19	27	8	0

Population with a rural *hukou* registered outside Beijing (109)	Niveau 1 Primary school (小学)	Niveau 2 Junior high school (初中)	Niveau 3 High school (高中)	Niveau 4 Short-cycle tertiary	Niveau 5 Bachelor (大学本科)	Niveau 6 Master (研究生)	No schooling
Males 62	1	24	11	9	13	4	0
Females 47	1	15	8	8	11	4	0

The distribution of quota in each category was calculated according to the 2010 Beijing population census.

Appendix 5: Quantitative Convenience Sample Stratified by Quota - Birth Cohort 1950–1959 (Targeted Number of People)

Population with an urban *hukou* registered in Beijing		Population with an urban *hukou* registered outside Beijing	
248		52	
Males	Females	Males	Females
120	128	27	25

Niveau 1 Primary school (小学)		Niveau 2 Junior high school (初中)		Niveau 3 High school (高中)		Niveau 4 Short-cycle tertiary education (大学专科)		Niveau 5 Bachelor (大学本科)		Niveau 6 Master (研究生)		Niveau 7 No schooling	
46		138		55		32		20		2		7	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
18	28	72	66	26	29	17	15	11	9	1	1	2	5

The distribution of quota in each category was calculated according to the 2010 Beijing population census.

Appendix 6: Detailed Description of the Qualitative Sample (1978–1993)

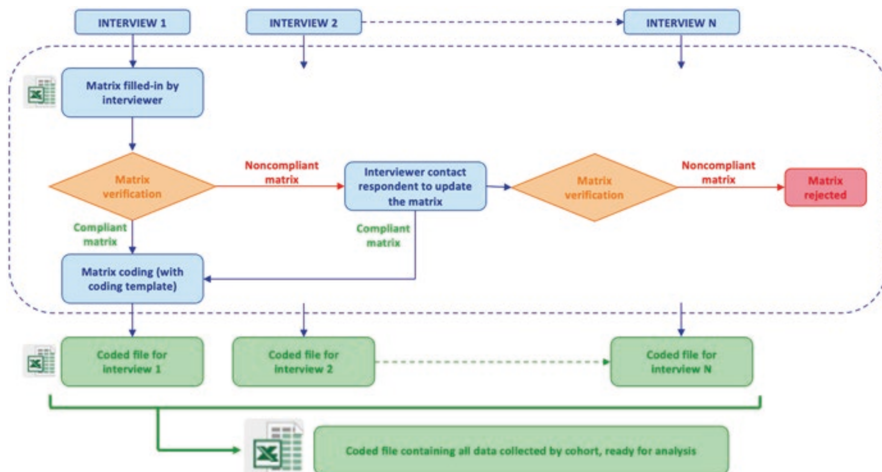
Sample 1 N1=30	1978-1985															
Sex	Females								Males							
Hukou	Urban				Rural				Urban				Rural			
	Ju	1985	Shandong	Short-cycle tertiary education	Kaishi	1985	Henan	Secondary non-tertiary education	Chang	1985	Beijing	Bachelor	Hu	1983	Sichuan	Secondary non-tertiary education
	Li	1985	Beijing	Bachelor	Lili	1984	Hubei	Secondary non-tertiary education	Guangwei	1981	Heilongjiang	Secondary non-tertiary education	Lixin	1983	Jiangsu	Master
	Min	1981	Shanxi	Short-cycle tertiary education	Suzhi	1978	Hebei	Secondary non-tertiary education	Guo	1980	Shaanxi	Bachelor	Wanheng	1980	Shanxi	Secondary non-tertiary education
	Niuniu	1982	Beijing	Bachelor	Wang	1983	Shandong	Secondary non-tertiary education	Lü	1985	Beijing	Short-cycle tertiary education	Yan	1984	Hebei	Secondary non-tertiary education
	Shujuan	1984	Hunan	Secondary non-tertiary educationn	Xiaolin	1981	Sichuan	Secondary non-tertiary education	Niu	1982	Hebei	Secondary non-tertiary education	Zhiqiang	1982	Henan	Short-cycle tertiary education
	Sun	1985	Shandong	Secondary non-tertiary education	Xiaoyan	1982	Gansu	Secondary non-tertiary education	Peng	1983	Xinjiang	Secondary non-tertiary education				
	Weiwei	1982	Beijing	Bachelor	Yanxia	1984	Hebei	Short-cycle tertiary education	Qian	1982	Jilin	Doctoral level				
	Wei	1981	Heilongjiang	Master					Shen	1984	Beijing	Short-cycle tertiary education				
	Xia	1982	Shaanxi	Short-cycle tertiary education					Xiaoguang	1981	Shanxi	Secondary non-tertiary education				

Sample 2 N2=9	1986-1990															
Sex	Females								Males							
Hukou	Urban				Rural				Urban				Rural			
	Ruyue	1990	Guizhou	Bachelor	Gezi	1988	Henan	Secondary non-tertiary education	Qi	1989	Guizhou	Bachelor				
	Shasha	1986	Tianjin	Bachelor	Han	1989	Jilin	Bachelor	Taole	1989	Jiangsu	Bachelor				
	Yu	1992	Beijing	Master	Jin	1990	Guangxi	Bachelor								
					Xiaocui	1986	Heilongjiang	Bachelor								

Sample 3 N3=6	1990s															
Sex	Females								Males							
Hukou	Urban				Rural				Urban				Rural			
	Jiali	1993	Jiangsu	Bachelor	Lina	1993	Jiangsu	Bachelor	Laozi	1993	Beijing	Bachelor				
									Tingting	1993	Shanghai	Bachelor				
									Yule	1993	Yunnan	Bachelor				

Répondents followed during 12 months

Appendix 7: Functional Diagram of the Matrix Control Procedure



Bibliography

Anagnost, A. (2004). The corporeal politics of quality (Suzhi). *Public Culture, 16*, 189–208.
Andreas, J. (2009). *Rise of the red engineers. The cultural revolution and the origins of China's new class*. Stanford University Press.
Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist, 55*, 469–480.
Arnett, J. J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood. The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*. Oxford University Press.
Arnett, J. J., & Galambos, N. (Eds.). (2003). *New directions for child and adolescent development: Exploring cultural conceptions of the transition to adulthood* (Vol. 2003, pp. 91–98). Wiley, Jossey-Bass.
Arnett, J. J., & Tanner, J. L. (2006). *Emerging adults in America: Coming of age in the 21st century*. American Psychology Association.
Aron, R. (2002). *Le Marxisme de Marx*. Editions de Fallois.
Attané, I. (2011). *Au Pays Des Enfants Rares. La Chine Vers Une Catastrophe Démographique*. Fayard.
Attané, I., Zhang, Q., Li, S., Yang, X., & Guilmoto, C. Z. (2013). Bachelorhood and sexuality in a context of female shortage: Evidence from a survey in rural Anhui, China. *The China Quarterly, 215*, 703–726.
Badger, S., Nelson, L. J., & Barry, C. M. N. (2006). Perceptions of the transition to adulthood among Chinese and American emerging adults. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 30*, 84–93.
Bao, L. (包蕾萍). (2005). 'Temporal exploration of the life-course theoretical perspective (Shengming Licheng Lilun de Shijianguan Tanxi)'. *Sociological Research,* 120–133.
Bao, L (包蕾萍). (2012). Life-course of China's only children: A view of the institutional choice on the family-state relationship (Zhongguo Dushengzinü Shengming Licheng: Jia Guo Shiyexia de Yizhong Zhiduhua Xuanze)'. *Social Science*, 90–101.
Baudelot, C., & Establet, R. (2000). *Avoir 30 ans en 1968 et en 1998*. Seuil.
Bauman, Z. (2001). *The individualized society*. Polity Press/Blackwell Publishers.
Beck, U. (2008). *La Société du Risque. Sur la Voie d'une Autre Modernité*. Flammarion.
Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1995). *The normal chaos of love*. Polity Press.
Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2010). Varieties of individualization. In M. H. Hansen & R. Svarverud (Eds.), *iChina. The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies.
Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2011). *Individualization. Institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences*. SAGE.

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2024

S. V. Constantin, *A Life Course Perspective on Chinese Youths*, Life Course Research and Social Policies 17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57216-6

Beck, U., & Grande, E. (2010). Varieties of second modernity: The cosmopolitan turn in social and political theory and research. *The British Journal of Sociology, 61*, 409–443.

Béja, J.-P. (2011). Introduction. In X. Liu (Ed.), *La philosophie du porc et d'autres essais* (pp. 10–42). Editions Gallimard.

Belli, R. F., Sherman, J. A., Van Hoewyk, J., & Alcser, K. H. (2009). The implementation of a computerized event history calendar questionnaire for research in life-course epidemiology. In R. F. Belli, F. P. Stafford, & D. F. Alwin (Eds.), *Calendar and time diary. Methods in life-course research*. SAGE.

Bergère, M.-C., Bianco, L., & Domes, J. (Eds.). (1989). *La Chine Au XXe Siècle. D'une Révolution à l'autre, 1895–1949*. Fayard.

Bergère, M.-C., Bianco, L., & Domes, J. (Eds.). (1990). *La Chine Au XXe Siècle. De 1949 à Aujourd'hui*. Fayard.

Berlin, G., Furstenberg, F. F., & Waters, M. C. (2010). Introducing the issue. *The Future of Children, 20*, 3–18.

Bernstein, T. P. (1977). *Up to the mountains and down to the villages: The transfer of youth from urban to rural China*. Yale University Press.

Bertaux, D. (2013). *The life story*. Armand Colin.

Bian, Y., & Logan, J. R. (1996). Market transition and the persistence of power: The changing stratification system in urban China. *American Sociological Review, 61*, 739–758.

Bianco, L. (2005). *Peasant uprisings and revolution in 20th century China*. Editions de la Martinière.

Bidart, C. (2006). Les Transitions Vers l'âge Adulte: Différenciations Sociales et Culturelles. In C. Bidart (Ed.), *Devenir adulte aujourd'hui. Perspectives internationales* (pp. 9–20). L'Harmattan.

Billari, F. C., & Liefbroer, A. C. (2010). Towards a new pattern of transition to adulthood. *Advances in Life-course Research, 15*, 59–75.

Billeter, J.-F. (1987). Le Système Des "Statuts de Classe" En République Populaire de Chine. *Revue Européenne Des Sciences Sociales, 25*, 141–197.

Blanchet, A., & Gotman, A. (2007). *L'entretien*. Armand Colin.

Blayo, Y. (1998). *Des Politiques Démographiques En Chine*. Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques (INED).

BMBS, (Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics). (2022). *Beijing statistical yearbook*. Survey office of the National bureau of statistics in Beijing.

BNS, 国务院人口普查办公室，国家统计局人口和就业统计局司编 (State Council Population Census Office, National Bureau of Statistics Population and Employment Statistics Division). (2012). 中国*2010*年人口普查资料 *(China 2010 Population Census Data), Tabulation on the 2010 Population Census of the People's Republic of China* . Vol. 上册 (Volume I), Book I.

BNS, (National Bureau of Statistics). (2019). *China statistical yearbook*. China Statistics Press.

Bonnin, M. (2004). *Lost Generation. The Movement of Sending Educated Youth to the Countryside in China, 1968–1980*. Editions of the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences.

Bonoli, G. (2005). The politics of the new social policies: Providing coverage against new social risks in mature welfare states. *Policy & Politics, 33*(3), 431–439.

Booth, A., Crouter, A. C., & Shanahan, M. J. (1999). *Transitions to adulthood in a changing economy: No work, no family, no future?* Praeger.

Bourdieu, P. (2007). *La Distinction. Critique Sociale Du Jugement*. Les Editions de Minuit.

Bray, D. (2005). Social space and governance in urban China. In *The Danwei system from origins to reform*. Stanford University Press.

Brückner, H., & Mayer, K. U. (2005). De-standardization of the life-course: What it might mean? And if it means anything, whether it actually took place? In R. Macmillan (Ed.), *The structure of the life-course: Standardized? Individualized? Differentiated?* (Advances in life-course research) (Vol. 9, pp. 27–53). Elsevier.

Buchmann, M., & Kriesi, I. (2011). Transition to adulthood in Europe. *Annual Review of Sociology, 37*(23), 1–23.

Cabestan, J.-P. (1994). *Le Système Politique de La Chine Populaire*. Presses Universitaires de France.
Cabestan, J.-P. (2014). *Le Système Politique Chinois. Un Nouvel Équilibre Autoritaire*. Presses de Sciences Po.
Cai, F. (2011). The Hukou reform and unification of rural-urban social welfare. *China & World Economy, 19*, 33–48.
Cain, L. D., Jr. (1964). Life-course and social structure. In R. el Faris (Ed.), *Handbook of modern sociology*. Rand McNally.
Castel, R. (1994). *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale: Une chronique du salariat*. Gallimard.
Castel, R. (2009). *La montée des incertitudes. Travail, protections, statut de l'individu*. Editions du Seuil.
Castel, R. (1995). *Les Métamorphoses de La Question Sociale: Une Chronique Du Salariat* (Vol. 2, pp. 97–102). Gallimard.
Cavalli, A., & Galland, O. (1993). *L'allongement de La Jeunesse*. Actes Sud.
Chan, K. W., & Li, Z. (1999). The Hukou system and rural-urban migration in China: Processes and changes. *The China Quarterly, 160*, 818–855.
Chan, C. K., Ngok, K. L., & Phillips, D. (2008). *Social policy in China: Development and well-being*. The Policy Press.
Chang, L. T. (2008). *Factory girls. From village to city in a changing China*. Spiegel & Grau.
Chai, Y. (柴彦威). (2009). 中国城市单位居民的迁居：生命历程方法的解读 (Zhongguo chengshi danwei jumin de qianju: Shengminglicheng fangfa de jiedu. The Residential Mobility of Urban Danwei Residents: A Life Course Approach). 国际城市规划 (Guoji Chengshi Guihua, International City Planning), 24, 7–14.
Chan, K. W. (2010). The household registration system and migrant labor in China: Notes on a debate. *Population and Development Review, 36*, 357–364.
Chen, Y. (1999). Lost in revolution and reform: The socioeconomic pains of China's red guards generation, 1966–1996. *Journal of Contemporary China, 21*, 219–239.
Chen, F. (2014). Patterns of grandparents caring for grandchildren in China. In P. Dudley, S. Y. Wen, & N. F. Demetrea (Eds.), *The family and social change in Chinese societies*. Springer.
Chen, F. (2005). Residential patterns of parents and their married children in contemporary China: A life course approach. *Population Research and Policy Review, 24*, 125–148.
Chen, F., & Korinek, K. (2010). Family life course transitions and rural household economy during China's market reform. *Demography, 47*, 963–987.
Cheng, A. (1997). *Histoire de La Pensée Chinoise*. Editions du Seuil.
Cheng, Y. (2009). *Creating the 'new man'. From enlightenment ideals to socialist realities*. University of Hawaii Press.
Cherlin, A. (2004). The deinstitutionalization of American marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66*, 848–861.
Chicharro, G. (2010). *Le Fardeau Des Petits Empereurs*. Société d'ethnologie.
Cockain, A. (2012). *Young Chinese in urban China*. Routledge.
Connelly, R., & Zheng, Z. (2007). Educational access for China's post-cultural revolution generation: enrollment patterns in 1990. In E. Hannum & A. Park (Eds.), *Education and reform in China* (pp. 64–80). Routledge.
Constantin, S. V. (2016). Reforms, individualisation and informal employment in urban China. In S. Routh & V. Borghi (Eds.), *Workers and the global informal economy* (Interdisciplinary perspectives). Routledge.
Constantin, S. V. (2017). *L'individualisation de la société chinoise: emploi, famille et genre au prisme des parcours de vie de jeunes adultes à Beijing*. https://doi.org/10.13097/archive-ouverte/unige:101801
Constantin, S. V. (2018). Increasing employment precariousness in post-socialist China: Everyone equal in a world of uncertainty? *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research, 26*(4), 278–294. https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2018.1534139

Constantin, S. V. (2021). Devenir Adulte Dans La Société Chinoise Postsocialiste. Une Quête de Sens Au Prisme Des Parcours de Vie de Jeunes Adultes Résidant à Beijing. *Revue Jeunes et Société, 6*(2), 54–78.

Cook, S. (2000). *After the iron Rice bowl: Extending the safety net in China*. Institute of Development Studies.

Corcuff, P. (2003). *La Question Individualiste*. Editions Le Bord de l'Eau.

Cosmo, H. (2007). *Contested individualization. Debates about contemporary personhood*. Palgrave Macmillan.

CPCNews. (2016). Xi Jinping emphasizes the construction of cadre family style, promotes excellent family traditions, and sets a good social example (*Xi Jinping Qiangdiao Ganbu Jiafeng Jianshe Hongyang Youliang Jiafeng Zuohao Shehui Biaoshuai,* xi Jinping insists on the promotion of family traditions by cadres so that beautiful family traditions serve as a model for the construction and development of society)'. (China Communist Party News Network*,* Zhongguo Gongchandang Xinwen Wang*, Online Information Of The Chinese Communist Party)*.

Croll, E. (1981). *The politics of marriage in contemporary China*. Cambridge University Press.

d'Epinay, L., Christian, J.-F. B., Cavalli, S., & Spini, D. (2005). Le Parcours de Vie: Émergence d'un Paradigme Interdisciplinaire. In J.-F. Guillaume (Ed.), *Parcours de vie. Regards croisés sur la construction des biographies contemporaines* (pp. 187–210). Les Editions de l'Université de Liège.

Davis, D. S. (2000). *The consumer revolution in urban China*. University of California Press.

Davis, D. (2002). When a house becomes his house. In P. Link, R. Madsen, & P. Pickowicz (Eds.), *Popular China. Unofficial culture in a globalizing society*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Davis, D., & Harrell, S. (1993). *Chinese families in the post-Mao era*. University of California Press.

De Beer, P., & Rocca, J.-L. (1995). *La Chine à La Fin de l'ère Deng Xiaoping*. Le Monde-Editions.

Delman, J., & Yin, X. (2008). Individualisation and politics in China: The political identity and Agency of Private Business People. *European Journal of East Asian Studies, 7*, 39–73.

Du Bois-Reymond, M., & Blasco, A. L. (2003). Yo-Yo transitions and misleading trajectories: Toward integrated transition policies for young adults in Europe. In A. Lopez Blasco, W. McNeish, & A. Walther (Eds.), *Young people and contradictions of inclusion* (Towards integrated transition policies in Europe). Policy Press.

Duan, C. (段成荣), Yang, G. (杨舸), & Ma, X. (马学阳). (2012). Research on China's floating population 2011 (*Zhongguo Liudongrenkou Yanjiu 2011*). China Population Publishing House (zhongguo renkou chubanshe).

Ehrenberg, A. (1995). *L'individu Incertain*. Calmann – Lévy.

Ehrenberg, A. (2010). *Le Culte de La Performance*. Fayard/Pluriel.

Elder, G. H. (1999). *Children of the great depression. Social change in life experience*. Westview Press.

Elder, G. H. (埃尔德). (2002). *Children of the great depression (Daxiaotiao de Haizimen, children of the great depression)*. Lin Publishing House (lin chubanshe).

Elder, G. H., Johnson, M. K., & Crosnoe, R. (2003). The emergence and development of life-course theory. In J. T. Mortimer & M. J. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the life-course* (pp. 3–19). Kluwer.

Elias, N. (1991). *La Société Des Individus*. Fayard.

Evans, H. (2008). *The subject of gender: Daughters and mothers in urban China*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Evans, H. (2010). The gender of communication: Changing expectations of mothers and daughters in urban China. *The China Quarterly, 204*, 980–1000.

Fairbank, J. K. (1989). *La Grande Révolution Chinoise. 1800–1989*. Flammarion.

Fairbank, J. K., & Goldman, M. (2010). *Histoire de La Chine. Des Origines à Nos Jours*. Editions Tallandier.

Fei, X. (费孝通). (1992). *From the soil. The foundations of Chinese society* . University of California Press.

Fielding, N. (2008). Analytic density, postmodernism and applied multiple method research. In M. M. Bergman (Ed.), *Advances in mixed methods research. Theories and applications*. SAGE.

Hong Fincher, L. (2014). *Leftover women: The resurgence of gender inequality in China*. Zed Books.

Fong, V. L. (2004a). Filial nationalism among Chinese teenagers with global identities. *American Ethnologist, 31*, 631–648.

Fong, V. L. (2004b). *Only Hope. Coming of age under China's one-child policy*. Stanford University Press.

Friedman, S. L. (2006). Intimate politics. *Marriage, the market, and state power in Southeastern China*.

Friedman, S. L. (2010). Women, marriage and the state in contemporary China. In E. J. Perry & M. Selden (Eds.), *Chinese society. Change, conflict and resistance*. Routledge.

Friedman, E., & Lee, C. K. (2010). Remaking the world of Chinese labour: A 30-year retrospective. *British Journal of Industrial Relations, 48*, 507–534.

Froissart, C. (2008). *Le Système Du Hukou: Pilier de La Croissance Chinoise et Du Maintien Du PCC Au Pouvoir* (Vol. 149). Centre d'études et de recherches internationales, Sciences Po.

Fukuda, S. (2013). The changing role of women's earnings in marriage formation in Japan. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 107–128.

Fulda, B. E., Nauck, B., & Ren, Q. (2019). The transition to adulthood in China, Germany and the US: Prevalence and timing in private and professional life. *Chinese Journal of Sociology, 5*(2), 193–213.

Fuligni, A., & Zhang, W. (2004). Attitudes toward family obligation among adolescents in contemporary urban and rural China. *Child Development, 75*, 180–192.

Furlong, A., & Cartmel, F. (2007). *Young people and social change. New perspectives*. Open University Press.

Furstenberg, F. F. (2010). On a new schedule: Transitions to adulthood and family change. *The Future of Children, 20*, 67–87.

Furstenberg, F. F., Rumbaut, R. G., & Settersten, R. (2008). On the frontier of adulthood. In R. Settersten, F. F. Furstenberg, & R. G. Rumbaut (Eds.), *On the frontier of adulthood. Theory, research, and public policy* (pp. 3–27). The University of Chicago Press.

Gabadinho, A., Ritschard, G., Müller, N. S., & Studer, M. (2011). Analyzing and visualizing state sequences in R with TraMineR. *Journal of Statistical Software, 40*, 1–37.

Gallagher, M. E., & Dong, B. (2011). Legislating harmony: Labor law reform in contemporary China. In M. E. Gallagher, C. K. Lee, & S. Kuruvilla (Eds.), *From iron Rice bowl to informalization*. Cornell University Press.

Gallagher, M. E., Lee, C. K., & Kuruvilla, S. (2011). Introduction and argument. In S. Kuruvilla, C. K. Lee, & M. E. Gallagher (Eds.), *From iron Rice bowl to informalization*. Cornell University Press.

Galland, O. (2000). Entrer Dans La Vie Adulte: Des Étapes Toujours plus Tardives Mais Resserrées. *Economie et Statistique, 337–338*, 13–36.

Galland, O. (2009). *Les Jeunes*. La Découverte.

Gao, Q., Evans, M., & Garfinkel, I. (2013). Social benefits and income inequality in post-socialist China and Vietnam. In D. J. Besharov & K. Baehler (Eds.), *Chinese social policy in a time of transition* (pp. 48–67). Oxford University Press.

Gauthier, J.-A., Widmer, E., Bucher, P., & Notredame, C. (2010). Multichannel sequence analysis applied to social science data. *Sociological Methodology, 40*, 1–38.

Giddens, A. (2007). Living in a post-traditional society. In U. Beck, A. Giddens, & S. Lash (Eds.), *Reflexive modernization. Politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order*. Polity Press.

Giddens, A. (2015). *The consequences of modernity*. Polity Press.

Giele, J. Z., & Elder, G. H. (1998). *Methods of life-course research. Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. SAGE.

Girard, A. (2012). *Le Choix Du Conjoint. Une Enquête Psychologique En France*. Armand Colin.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research* (Vol. 17, p. 364). Aldine.

Gonçalo, S., & Harrell, S. (Eds.). (2017). *Transforming patriarchy: Chinese family in the twenty-first century*. University of Washington Press.
Greenhalgh, S. (2003). Science, modernity, and the making of China's one-child policy. *Population and Development Review, 29*, 163–196.
Greenhalgh, S. (2010). *Cultivating global citizens. Population in the rise of China*. Harvard University Press.
Greenhalgh, S. (2011). Governing Chinese life. From sovereignty to biopolitical governance. In E. Zhang, A. Kleinman, & W. Tu (Eds.), *Governance of life in Chinese moral experience. The quest for an adequate life* (pp. 146–162).
Greenhalgh, S., & Winckler, E. A. (2005). *Governing China's population. From Leninist to neoliberal biopolitics*. Stanford University Press.
Grossetti, M. (2015). Note Sur La Notion d'encastrement. *Sociologies*, 1–11.
Guo, Y., & Chang, A. (2006). Life cycle and social security: A sociological exploration of the life-course of laid - off workers. *Social Sciences in China, 27*, 19–33.
Hannum, E., & Liu, J. (2005). Adolescent transitions to adulthood in reform-era China. In C. B. Lloyd, J. R. Behrman, N. P. Stromquist, & B. Cohen (Eds.), *The changing transitions to adulthood in developing countries* (pp. 270–319). The National Academies Press.
Hansen, M. H., & Pang, C. (2008). Me and my family: Perceptions of individual and collective among young rural Chinese. *European Journal of East Asian Studies, 7*, 75–99.
Hansen, M. H., & Pang, C. (2010). Idealizing individual choice: Work, love and family in the eyes of young, rural Chinese. In M. H. Hansen & R. Svarverud (Eds.), *iChina. The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).
Hansen, M. H., & Svarverud, R. (2010). *IChina: The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. NIAS Press.
Hantrais, L. (2004). *Family policy matters*. Policy Press.
Heinz, W. R. (2009). Youth transition in an age of uncertainty. In A. Furlong (Ed.), *Handbook of youth and young adulthood. New perspectives and agendas*. Routledge.
Heinz, W. R., & Marshall, V. W. (2003). *Social dynamics of the life-course. Transitions, institutions, and interrelations*. Walter de Gruyter.
Heinz, W. R., Huinink, J., & Weymann, A. (2009). *The life-course reader. Individuals and societies across time*. Campus Verlag.
Hershatter, G. (2007). *Women in China's long twentieth century*. University of California Press.
Hogan, D. P., & Astone, N. M. (1986). The transition to adulthood. *Annual Review of Sociology, 12*, 109–130.
Hou, J. (侯佳伟). (2010). *Beijing migrant population aggregation: Trends, patterns and influencing factors* (Beijing Shi Liudong Renkou Juji Di: Qushi, Moshi Yu Yingxiang Yinsu *, The Study on Migrants Agglomeration in Beijing: Current, Pattern and Determinants*). Guangming Daily Publishing House (guangmin ribao chubanshe).
Hsu, F. L. K. (1971). *Under the ancestors' shadow. Kinship, personality & social mobility in China*. Stanford University Press.
Hsu, C. L. (2007). *Creating market socialism. How ordinary people are shaping class and status in China*. Duke University Press.
Huang, P. C. (1972). *Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and modern Chinese liberalism*. University of Washington Press.
Huang, L.-W. W. (2013). The transition tempo and life-course orientation of young adults in Taiwan. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 69–85.
Hukou. (1958). *People's Republic of China household registration regulations (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Hukou Dengji Tiaoli, regulations on the household registration system in the PRC)*.
Hwang, K.-K. (1999). Filial piety and loyalty: Two types of social identification in Confucianism. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 2*, 163–183.
HYF. (1981). Marriage law (Hunyinfa*,* Law on Marriage) .
Ikels, C. (1993). Settling accounts: The intergenerational contract in an age of reform. In D. Davis & S. Harrell (Eds.), *Chinese families in the post-Mao era*. University of California Press.

Ikels, C. (2004). *Filial piety. Practice and discourse in contemporary East Asia*. Stanford University Press.

Ishida, H. (2013). The transition to adulthood among Japanese youths: Understanding courtship in Japan. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 86–106.

Jacka, T. (2009). 'Cultivating citizens: Suzhi (quality) discourse in PRC. In *Positions: East Asia cultures critique* (Vol. 17, pp. 523–535).

Jacka, T., Kipnis, A., & Sargeson, S. (2013). *Contemporary China. Society and social change*. Cambridge University Press.

Javornik, J. (2014). Measuring state De-Familialism: Contesting post-socialist exceptionalism. *Journal of European Social Policy, 24*(3), 240–257.

Ji, Y. (2013). Negotiating marriage and schooling: Nepalese Women's transition to adulthood. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 194–213.

Ji, Y., & Yeung, W.-J. J. (2014). Heterogeneity in contemporary Chinese marriage. *Journal of Family Issues, 35*, 1662–1682.

Jones, G. W., & Yeung, W.-J. J. (2014). Marriage in Asia. *Journal of Family Issues, 35*, 1567–1583.

Jones, G. W., Hull, T. H., & Mohamad, M. (2011). *Changing marriage patterns in Southeast Asia. Economic and socio-cultural dimensions*. Routledge.

Kane, D., & Li, K. (2021). Gendering a new marker of adulthood: Home ownership in Southwest China. *Sociological Forum, 36*(3), 668–688.

Kelliher, D. (1992). Peasant power in China. In *The era of rural reform, 1979–1989*. Yale University Press.

King, A. Y. C. (1996). The individual and group in confucianism: A relational perspective. In D. Munro (Ed.), *Individualism and holism: Studies in confucian and taoist values*. Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan.

Kipnis, A. (2006). Suzhi: A keyword approach. *The China Quarterly, 186*, 295–313.

Kohler, H.-P., Billari, F. C., & Ortega, J. A. (2002). The emergence of lowest-low fertility in Europe during the 1990s. *Population and Development Review, 28*(4), 641–680.

Kohli, M. (2007). The institutionalization of the life-course: Looking back to look ahead. *Research in Human Development, 4*, 253–271.

Kohli, M. (2009). The world we forgot: A historical review of the life-course. In W. R. Heinz, J. Huinink, & A. Weymann (Eds.), *The life-course reader. Individuals and societies across time* (pp. 64–90). Campus Verlag.

Kong, S. (2008). Family matters: Reconstructing the family on the Chinese television screen. In Y. Zhu, M. Keane, & R. Bai (Eds.), *TV drama in China*. Hong Kong University Press.

Lash, S. (2011). Individualization in a non-linear mode. In U. Beck & E. Beck-Gernsheim (Eds.), *Individualization*. SAGE.

Laugier, S. (2022). Taking TV series seriously. *Open Philosophy, 5*, 250–253.

Laugier, S. (Ed.). (2023). *Les Séries: Laboratoires d'éveil Politique*. CNRS Editions.

LDF. (1995). *People's Republic of China labor law* (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Laodong Fa, The Labor Law of the PRC) .

LDF. (2008). *People's Republic of China labor contract law* (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Laodong Fa, The Labor Law of the PRC).

Le Bart, C. (2008). *L'individualisation*. Presses de la fondation national des sciences politiques.

Leitner, S. (2003). Varieties of Familialism. The caring function of the family in comparative perspective. *European Societies, 5*(4), 353–375.

Lelièvre, E. (2005). Introduction à Une Approche Quantitative Des Parcours de Vie. Analyse et Collecte Des Données. In J.-F. Guillaume (Ed.), *Le parcours de vie: émergence d'un paradigme interdisciplinaire* (pp. 177–185). Les Editions de l'Université de Liège.

Lesthaeghe, R. (2010). The unfolding story of the second demographic transition. *Population and Development Review, 36*(2), 211–251.

Li, S. (1988). A review of the study of the quality of the rural population (Nongcun Renkou Suzhi Yanjiu Gaishu). *Population Studies (Renkou Yanjiu), 2*, 59–61.

Li, M. (2010). Collective symbols and individual options: Life on a state farm for returned overseas Chinese after decollectivization. In M. H. Hansen & R. Svarverud (Eds.), *iChina. The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).

Li, C. (李成). (2013a). The Rise of the Middle Class in China (Zhongguo Zhongchan Jieji de Xingqi). In C. (李成) Li (ed.), 'Middle Class' China: Beyond economic transformation, the emerging Chinese middle class (*'zhongchan' zhongguo: chaoyue jingji zhuanxing de xinxing zhongguo zhongchanjieji*). Shanghai Translation Publishing House (Shanghai yiwen chubanshe).

Li, C. (李春玲). (2013b). Experience, attitudes and social transition: A sociological study of the post-80's generation (*Jingyu, Taidu Yu Shehui Zhuanxing: 80 Hou Qingnian de Shehuixue Yanjiu*). Social Sciences Academic Press (shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe).

Li, B., & Walder, A. (2001). Career advancement as party patronage: Sponsored mobility into the Chinese administrative elite (1949–1996). *American Journal of Sociology, 106*, 1371–1408.

Li, Q. (李强), Deng, J. (邓建伟), & Xiao, Z. (晓筝). (1999). 'Social change and individual development: The paradigm of life-course research and its methods (Shehui Bianqian Yu Geren Fazhan: Shengming Licheng Yanjiu Yanjiu de Fanshi Yu Fangfa)'. Sociological Research (*Shehui Yanjiu*), 1–18.

Lian, S. (2009). 蚁族*:*大学毕业生聚居村实录 *(yizu: daxue biyesheng jujucun shilu, Fourmis: Rapport sur leurs conditions d'habitation).* 广西师范大学出版社 (Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe).

Lian, S. (2010). 蚁族*:*谁的时代 *(yizu: shei de shidai, Fourmis: l'époque de qui?*). 中信出版社 (zhongxin chubanshe).

Liefbroer, A. C., & Toulemon, L. (2010). Demographic perspectives on the transition to adulthood: An introduction. *Advances in Life-course Research, 15*, 53–58.

Lin, K.-C. (2011). Enterprise reform and wage movements in Chinese oil fields and refineries. In S. Kuruvilla, C. K. Lee, & M. E. Gallagher (Eds.), *From iron rice bowl to informalization*. Cornell University Press.

Lin, Q. (2013). Lost in transformation? The employment trajectories of China's cultural revolution cohort. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 172–193.

Lister, R. (1990). Women, economic dependency and citizenship. *Journal of Social Policy, 19*(4), 445–467.

Liu, Z. (2005). Institution and inequality: The Hukou system in China. *Journal of Comparative Economics, 33*, 133–157.

Liu, F. (2011). *Urban youth in China: Modernity, the internet and the self*. Routledge.

Liu, F. (2020). *Modernization as lived experiences: Three generations of young men and women in China*. Routledge.

Liu, W., & Zhang, X. (2001). *Harvard girl – Liu Ying – Documentary on quality training*. Writers Publishing House.

LQBF. (2012). 'Elderly rights protection law (*Laonianren Quanyi Baozhang Fa,* Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly)'.

Lü, X., & Perry, E. J. (1997). *Danwei. The changing Chinese workplace in historical and comparative perspective*. M.E Sharpe.

Ma, G. (麻国庆). (1999). 家与中国社会结构 *(Jia Yu Zhongguo Shehui Jiegou, The family and the structure of Chinese Society)*. Cultural Relics Publishing House (wenwu chubanshe).

Man, Y. (满燕云). (2013). '中国的住房改革与崛起的中产阶级 (Zhongguo de Zhufang Gaige Yu Jieqi de Zhongchan Jieji, China's Housing Reform and Emerging Middle Class)'. In C. (李成) Li (Ed.),'中产'中国*:*超越经济转型的新兴中国中产阶级 *('zhongchan' zhongguo: chaoyue jingji zhuanxing de xinxing zhongguo zhongchanjieji, China's emerging Middle Class)*. Shanghai Translation Publishing House (Shanghai yiwen chubanshe).

Mao, Z. (2001). *Selected works of Mao Tse-Tung*. University Press of the Pacific.

Marshall, V. W., & Mueller, M. M. (2003). Theoretical roots of the life-course perspective. In W. R. Heinz & V. W. Marshall (Eds.), *Social dynamics of the life-course. Transitions, institutions, and interrelations*. Aldine De Gruyter.

Martuccelli, D., & de Singly, F. (2010). *Les Sociologies de l'individu*. Armand Colin.

Mayer, K. U. (2001). The paradox of global social change and national path dependencies. In A. Woodward & M. Kohli (Eds.), *Inclusions and exclusions in European societies* (pp. 89–110). Routledge.

Mayer, K. U. (2004). Whose lives? How history, societies, and institutions define and shape life-courses. *Research in Human Development, 1*, 161–187.

Mayer, K. U., & Schoepflin, U. (2009). The state and the life-course. In W. R. Heinz, J. Huinink, & A. Weymann (Eds.), *The life-course reader. Individuals and societies across time* (pp. 121–138). Campus Verlag.

Meng, X., & Gregory, R. G. (2002). The impact of interrupted education on subsequent educational attainment: A cost of the Chinese cultural revolution. *Economic Development and Cultural Change, 50*, 935–959.

Mills, C. W. (2006). *L'imagination Sociologique*. Editions la Découverte.

Mills, M. (2011). *Introducing survival and event history analysis*. SAGE.

Min, A., Duo, D., & Landberger, S. R. (2003). *Chinese propaganda posters*. Taschen.

Mitchell, B. A. (2006). The boomerang age from childhood to adulthood: Emergent trends and issues for aging families. *Canadian Studies in Population, 33*, 155–178.

Modell, J., Furstenberg, F. F., & Hershberg, T. (1976). Social change and transitions to adulthood in historical perspective. *Journal of Family History, 1*, 7–32.

Monteil, A. (2010). *Emploi Informel et Gestion Des Inégalités Sociales En Chine Urbaine. Les Politiques de Promotion de "l'emploi Communautaire" Parmi Les "Groupes Vulnérables" à Chengdu (2006–2009)*. Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales.

Mühlhahn, K. (2010). "Friendly pressure": Law and the individual in modern China. In M. H. Hansen & R. Svarverud (Eds.), *iChina. The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).

Murphy, R. (2002). *How migrant labor is changing rural China*. Cambridge University Press.

Murphy, R. (2004). *Turning peasants into modern Chinese citizens: "population quality" discourse* (p. 177). Demographic Transition and Primary Education'. The China Quarterly.

Nahar, Q., Xenos, P., & Abalos, J. (2013). The changing transition to adulthood across Southeast Asia: A census approach to cross-national comparisons*, 646*, 42–68.

Naughton, B. (1995). *Growing out of the plan: Chinese economic reform (1978–1993)*. Cambridge University Press.

Naughton, B. (2007). *The Chinese economy. Transitions and growth*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Nelson, L. J., & Chen, X. (2007). Emerging adulthood in China: The role of social and cultural factors. *Child Development Perspectives, 1*, 86–91.

Neugarten, B. L., Moore, J. W., & Lowe, J. C. (1965). Age norms, age constraints, and adult socialization. *American Journal of Sociology, 70*, 710–717.

Oi, J. C. (1989). *State and peasant in contemporary China. The political economy of village government*. University of California Press.

Ong, A., & Zhang, L. (2008). *Privatizing China. Socialism from Afar*. Cornell University Press.

Ostner, I. (2004). "Individualisation" – The origins of the concept and its impact on German social policies. *Social Policy & Society, 3*(1), 47–56.

Oyserman, D., Coon, H. M., & Kemmelmeier, M. (2002). Rethinking individualism and collectivism: Evaluation of theoretical assumptions and meta-analyses. *Psychological Bulletin, 128*, 3–72.

Park, H. (2013). The transition to adulthood among Korean youths: Transition markers in productive and reproductive spheres. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 129–148.

Park, A., & Cai, F. (2011). The Informalization of the Chinese labor market. In S. Kuruvilla, C. K. Lee, & M. E. Gallagher (Eds.), *From iron Rice bowl to informalization*. Cornell University Press.

Paugam, S. (2008). *Le Lien Social*. Presses Universitaires de France.

Peng, X. (彭希哲). (2009). *2006 China's informal employment development report: A re-examination of the labor market*. Chongqing Publishing House.

Perelli-Harris, B. (2008). Family formation in post-soviet Ukraine: Changing effects of education in a period of rapid social change. *Social Forces, 87*(2), 767–794.

Pun, N. (2005). *Made in China. Women factory Workers in a Global Workplace*. Duke University Press.

Quivy, R., & Van Campenhoudt, L. (1995). *Manuel de Recherche En Sciences Sociales*. Dunod.

Ren, Q., & Zhu, X. (2014). Education in China: Uneven progress. In I. Attané & B. Gu (Eds.), *Analysing China's population. Social change in a new demographic era* (pp. 51–75). Springer.

Riley, M. W. (1979). Introduction: Life-course perspectives. In M. W. Riley (Ed.), *Aging from birth to death: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (Vol. 1). Westview Press.

Rocca, J.-L. (2016). *The making of the Chinese middle class: Small comfort and great expectations*. Spinger.

Rofel, L. (2007). *Desiring China. Experiments in neoliberalism, sexuality, and public culture*. Duke University Press.

Rolandsen, U. M. H. (2008). A collective of their own: Young volunteers at the fringes of the party realm. *European Journal of East Asian Studies, 7*, 101–129.

Rosen, S. (2004). The state of youth/youth and the state in early 21st-century China. The triumph of the urban rich? In P. H. Gries & S. Rosen (Eds.), *State and society in 21st-century China. Crisis, contention, and legitimation*. Routledge Curzon.

Roux, A. (2006). *China in the 20th century*. Armand Colin.

RTSCT. (1986). *Provisional regulations on institution of labour contract system in state-owned enterprises* (Guoying Qiye Shixing Laodong Hetong Zanxing Guiding).

Sapin, M., Spini, D., & Widmer, E. (2007). *Les Parcours de Vie. De l'adolescence Au Grand Âge*. Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes.

Saraceno, C. (2016). Varieties of Familialism: Comparing four southern European and East Asian welfare regimes. *Journal of European Social Policy, 26*(4), 314–326.

Sartoretti, N. (2014). *Mediating power: The self in Chinese and Indian popular media*. Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID).

Schatzmann, L., & Strauss, A. (1973). *Field research: Strategies for a natural sociology*. Prentice-Hall.

Schell, O., & Delury, J. (2013). *Wealth and power. China's long march to the twenty-first century*. Random House.

Schoeni, R. F., & Ross, K. E. (2008). Material assistance from families during the transition to adulthood. In R. Settersten, F. F. Furstenberg, & R. G. Rumbaut (Eds.), *On the frontier of adulthood. Theory, research, and public policy* (pp. 396–416). The University of Chicago Press.

Settersten, R., & Ray, B. E.. (2010). *Not quite adults*.

Settersten, R., Furstenberg, F. F., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2008). *On the frontier of adulthood. Theory, research, and public policy*. The University of Chicago Press.

Shanahan, M. J. (2000). Pathways to adulthood in changing societies: Variability and mechanisms in life-course perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26*, 667–692.

Shen, Q. (沈千帆). (2011). *Study on the social integration of the floating population in Beijing*. Peking University Press.

Shen, Y. (沈奕斐). (2013). *iFamily: Individuals, family, and state in the process of urban modernization in China*. Shanghai Sanlian Bookstore.

Sheng, X., & Settles, B. H. (2006). Intergenerational relationships and elderly care in China: A global perspective. *Current Sociology, 54*, 293–313.

Sigley, G. (2009). Suzhi, the body, and the fortunes of Technoscientific reasoning in contemporary China. *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique, 17*, 537–566.

Singly (de), François. (2011). *L'individualisme Est Un Humanisme*. Editons de l'Aube.

Singly (de), François. (2012). *Sociologie de La Famille Contemporaine. 4e Édition*. Armand Colin.

SSPTW. (2012). *Social security programs throughout the world: Asia and the Pacific*, 2012. China.

Studer, M. (2012). 'Étude des inégalités de genre en début de carrière académique à l'aide de méthodes innovatrices d'analyse de données séquentielles. https://doi.org/10.13097/archive-ouverte/unige:22054.

Sun, P. (孙沛东). (2013). *Who will marry my daughter?* China Social Sciences Press.

Sun, F. (孙福滨), & Li, H. (李怀祖). (2015). Definition of migrant and floating population in China. *Journal of Xi'an Jiaotong University*.

Svarverud, R. (2010). Individual self-discipline and collective freedom in the minds of Chinese intellectuals. In M. H. Hansen & R. Svarverud (Eds.), *iChina. The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).

Swider, S. (2011). Permanent temporariness in the Chinese construction industry. In S. Kuruvilla, C. K. Lee, & M. E. Gallagher (Eds.), *From iron Rice bowl to informalization*. Cornell University Press.

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). Foundations of mixed methods research. *Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences*.

Thogersen, S., & Ni, A. (2008). "He is he, and I am I": Individual and collective among China's rural elderly. *European Journal of East Asian Studies, 7*, 11–37.

Thorton, A., & Philipov, D. (2008). Sweeping changes in marriage, cohabitation and childbearing in central and Eastern Europe: New insights from the developmental idealism framework. *European Journal of Population, 25*, 123–156.

Tian, F. F. (2016). Transition to adulthood in China in 1982−2005: A structural view. *Demographic Research, 34*(16), 451–466.

Tomba, L. (2009). Of quality, harmony, and community: Civilization and the middle class in urban China. *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique, 17*, 592–616.

Tomba, L. (2013). The real estate effect: The making of China's social distinctions. In C. (李成) Li (Ed.), *'Middle Class' China: Beyond economic transformation's emerging Chinese middle class*. Shanghai Translation Publishing House.

Tong, X. (佟新). (2009). *China's labor relations. Research report*. China's Real Speech Publishing House.

Unger, J. (1982). *Education under Mao: Class and competition in Canton schools, 1960–1980*. Columbia University Press.

Utomo, A., Reimondos, A., Utomo, I. D., MacDonald, P., & Hull, T. (2013). Female migrants and the transition to adulthood in greater Jakarta. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 648*, 70–86.

Van de Velde, C. (2008). *Devenir Adulte. Sociologie Comparée de La Jeunesse En Europe*. Presses Universitaires de France.

Wang, F. (2005). *Organizing through division and exclusion. China's Hukou System*. Stanford University Press.

Wang, P. (王培安). (2010). *Comprehensive report on the floating population: Theory and policy*. China Population Publishing House (zhongguo renkou chubanshe).

Wang, F. (王发运), & Ding, Y. (丁谊). (2012). The advancement of social security system in China, 2012. In P. (李培林) Li, & G. (陈光金) Chen (Eds.), Society of China analysis and forecast, 2013 , Blue book of China's society (pp. 61–73). Social Sciences Academic Press.

Wang, B. (王伯庆), & Guo, J. (郭娇). (2012). 年中国大学生就业报告 (2012 nian zhongguo daxuesheng jiuye baogao. Rapport annuel sur l'emploi des diplômés de l'université, 2012). 社会科学文献出版社 (shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe).

Wedell-Wedellsborg, A. (2010). Between self and community: The individual in contemporary Chinese intellectuals. In M. H. Hansen & R. Svarverud (Eds.), *iChina. The rise of the individual in modern Chinese society*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).

Whyte, M. K. (2010). *One country, two societies. Rural-urban inequality in contemporary China*. Harvard University Press.

Widder, N. (2004). Foucault and power revisited. *European Journal of Political Theory, 3*, 411–432.

Widmer, E., & Jallinoja, R. (2008). *Beyond the nuclear family: Families in a configurational perspective*. Peter Lang.

Woronov, T. E. (2009). Governing China's children: Governmentality and "education for quality". *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique, 17*, 567–589.

Wu, X., & Xie, Y. (2003). Does the market pay off? Earnings returns to education in urban China. *American Sociological Review, 68*, 425–442.

Xenos, P., Sulistinah, A., Hui, S. L., Ping, K. L., Chai, P., Corazon, R., & Shyam, T. (2007). Delayed Asian transition to adulthood. A perspective from National Youth Surveys. *Asian Population Studies, 2*, 149–185.

Xie, Y., & Hannum, E. (1996). Regional variation in earnings inequality in reform era urban China. *American Journal of Sociology, 101*, 950–992.

Xinhua News. (2023). *Xi stresses organizing, motivating women to contribute to Chinese modernization.* https://english.news.cn/20231031/2d38b8241a39479cb29a1a7199c52e3b/c.html

Yan, B. (阎蓓). (1999). New era Chinese population migration (*Xin Shiqi Zhongguo Renkou Qianyi*). Hunan Education Publishing House (Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe).

Yan, H. (2003a). Neoliberal governmentality and Neohumanism: Organizing Suzhi/value flow through labor recruitment networks. *Cultural Anthropology, 18*, 493–523.

Yan, Y. (2003b). *Private life under socialism*. Stanford University Press.

Yan, Y. (2009a). The individual and transformation of bridewealth. In Y. Yan (Ed.), *The individualization of Chinese society*. Berg.

Yan, Y. (2009b). *The individualization of Chinese society*. Berg.

Yan, Y. (2010). The Chinese path to individualization. *The British Journal of Sociology, 61*, 489–512.

Yan, Y. (2021). The inverted family, post-patriarchal intergenerationality, and neo-Familism. In Y. Yan (Ed.), *Chinese families upside down: Intergenerational dynamics and neo-Familism in the early 21st century*. Brill.

Yan, Y. (2023). Familial affections vis-à-vis filial piety: The ethical challenges facing eldercare under neo-familism in contemporary China. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology, 10*(5), 1–21.

Yang, C. (杨聪敏), & Yang, L. (杨黎源). (2009). Investigation of the scale of contemporary Chinese rural migrant Workers' migration (Danddai Zhongguo Nongmingong Liudong Guimo Kaocha, examination of the extent of contemporary migrations of peasants-workers). *China Sociology Network* (Zhongguo Shehuixue Wang, Chinese Sociology Internet Site).

Yeung, W.-J. J., & Alipio, C. (2013). Transitioning to adulthood in Asia: School, work, and family life. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 6–41.

Yeung, W.-J. J., & Hu, S. (2013). Coming of age in times of change: The transition to adulthood in China. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 149–171.

Zhang, Z. (2000). Mediating time: The "Rice bowl of youth" in fin de Siècle urban China. *Public Culture, 12*, 93–113.

Zhang, Q. F. (2004). Economic transition and new patterns of parent-adult child Coresidence in urban China. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66*, 1231–1245.

Zhang, L. (2008). Private homes, distinct lifestyles. Performing a new middle class. In L. Zhang & A. Ong (Eds.), *Privatizing China. Socialism from afar*. Cornell University.

Zhang, L. (2011). The paradox of labor force dualism and state-labor-capital relations in the Chinese automobile industry. In S. Kuruvilla, C. K. Lee, & M. E. Gallagher (Eds.), *From iron rice bowl to informalization*. Cornell University Press.

Zhong, J., & Arnett, J. J. (2014). Conceptions of adulthood among migrant women workers in China. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 38*(3), 255–265.

Zhao, Z., & Chen, W. (2008). Changes in household formation and composition in China since the mid-twentieth century. *Journal of Population Research, 25*, 267–286.

Zhou, X. (2004). *The state and the life chances in urban China. Redistribution and stratification, 1949–1994*. Cambridge University Press.

Zhou, X., & Hou, L. (1999). Children of the cultural revolution: The state and the life-course in the People's Republic of China. *American Sociological Review, 64*, 12–36.

Zhou, X., & Moen, P. (2001). Explaining life chances in China's economic transformation: A life-course approach. *Social Science Research, 30*, 552–577.

Zhou, X., Tuma, N. B., & Moen, P. (1997). Institutional change and patterns of job shifts in urban China, 1949–1993. *American Sociological Review, 62*, 339–365.

Zhou, X., Moen, P., & Tuma, N. B. (1998). Educational stratification in urban China: 1949–1994. *Sociology of Education, 71*, 199–222.

Zhu, Y. (2008). *Television in Post-Reform China. Serial dramas, Confucian leadership and the global television market*. Routledge.

Zhu, Y., Keane, M., & Bai, R. (2008). *TV Drama in China*. Hong Kong University Press.