Leaving home from Chaohu: patterns and meanings of migration of educated young people

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Leaving Home From Chaohu:
Patterns and Meanings of Migration of Educated Young People

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Prof. LI Si Ming

Hong Kong Baptist University

March 2015
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work which has been done after registration for the degree of PhD at Hong Kong Baptist University, and has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation submitted to this or other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

Signature: __________________

Date: March 2015
ABSTRACT

A large and growing body of literature has been published on migration in China. This thesis has identified several challenges, namely, the destination-biased framework of migration, the neglect of heterogeneity of migrants, the relative dearth of research on the intersection of mobility and place attachment, and the suppression of the significance of the migrant subject. This research responds to these challenges by adopting a native-place perspective and a life-course/biographical approach and using mixed methods to explore the patterns and meanings of migration among educated young adults from peripheral China. The data come from a life-history questionnaire survey and biographical interviews with university and college graduates, who were born and raised in Chaohu and received higher education outside Chaohu. Firstly, it analyses educated young people’s migration pathways from home to university and onwards to current place of residence, and develops a four-fold typology of spatial mobility (Stick-in, Move-down, Move-up, and Re-entry) from migration trajectories data. Secondly, it explores how spatial mobility is implicated in the process of bonding with places by examining educated young adults’ place attachment and belonging. Four types of migrants (Translocals, Departers, Aliens, and Settlers) and three types of returnees (the Trapped, the Bonded, and the Rooted) are classified. Thirdly, through the lens of agency as a socially situated process, it explores how migration decision-making reflects socially structured patterns, how agency interplays with social structure, and how agency operates in a differentiated and dynamic way. Meanwhile, through its attention to migration aspirations, it further explores the potential for meaningful experiences of geographical mobility to change migrants’ subjectivities and considers the emotional dynamics involved in the intersection of identity with senses of place. This thesis contributes to the field of youth migration by providing a mapping of the spatial patterns for migration of educated young people and addressing the complexities and dynamics of spatial mobility with a case study. Also, the present work highlights the importance of a biographical approach that allows us to appreciate the significance of the migrant subject and to investigate the ongoing nature of migration processes.
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I became exposed to the topic of internal migration in China when I studied as an MPhil student at Hong Kong Baptist University. My PhD research extends my ongoing interest in migration and migrants and focuses on educated young migrants. My interest in young people was ignited when I was conducting fieldwork for MPhil thesis. I was touched by my interviewees’ migration stories, especially those of young migrants. Should I stay or should I go? It is a dilemma many youngsters in small towns or villages might face. As a young researcher, I myself experience migration and witness my peers negotiating their migration decisions in the transition to adulthood. I have been constantly fascinated by the following questions: What does it mean to be a young person in China today? Why do some young emigrants return to their hometown while others move on? What helps and what gets in the way? These questions are what this thesis is trying to answer. This thesis marks the end of my PhD journey, for which I feel deeply indebted to so many people who are by my side along the way.

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1 Introduction

This introductory chapter provides a brief overview of the thesis. It begins by identifying several challenges facing research on migration in China, then goes on to raise research questions addressed in this thesis. Next it discusses the rationales for studying a cohort of educated young migrants from peripheral China. Finally, the thesis outline is summarised at the end of the chapter.

1.1 Background

With the unprecedented economic growth, China has witnessed increased mobility and large-scale internal migration in particular over the last decades. A large amount of quality research uses aggregated data of migration volume or rate to describe the overall pattern and trend in migration at the national level from a macro perspective, exploring the intersection between migration and the hukou institution, urbanisation and regional development (Chan, 1994; Liang and White, 1997; Liang, 2001; Li, 2004; Fan, 2005). Because of shortcomings in data systems, such research based on census data offers only a cross-sectional picture on inter-provincial or intra-provincial migration, representing a population at a specific point in time. It is arguably only a snapshot of internal migration in China; a large proportion of spatial mobility goes hidden. Also, it is necessary to be aware that the differences between places become almost invisible at a more general level of analysis, given the fact that China has such a huge volume of migrant population in a vast geographical extent. As noted by Li (1997), place is crucial for the understanding of the massive process of transformation in China.

Whilst there has been considerable research undertaken at a local scale, much of the literature addresses only the destinations of place like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou and applies advanced modelling techniques to city wide survey data for analysing immigrants’ occupational attainment, income, and access to housing (Fan, 2001; Fan, 2002; Wu, 2002; Wang et al., 2010). Another main stream of research comes from scholars interested in migrant communities, known as
villages-in-the-city, in the above-mentioned three cities and concerns with the bond between people and their native place as well as the host place (Ma and Xiang, 1998; Zhang, 2001; Xiang, 2005; Du and Li, 2010, 2012). As existing literature has demonstrated, the power of place is manifested in native-place ties and host-place sentiments, affecting migration decision, spatial movement patterns, and their stay-leave intention.

Those from a native-place perspective are very limited and they have only looked at urban-to-rural return migration (Murphy, 2000; Ma, 2001; Zhao, 2002; Wang and Fan, 2006). Still, a complete picture of outmigration from a native-place perspective is absent. This lack of recognition is inherent in the current framing of migration when attention is predominantly focused on the destination places. In the urban-centric mapping of migration, the sending areas are devoid of localities and become abstract and homogenised. Another reason arises from the limitations in data collection for out-migration. Given the mobile nature of the research subjects, it is much more difficult to trace individual emigrants from the same place of origin than to seek immigrants living in the same place of destination. Thus there is a general lack of reliable and consistent micro-data on out-migration. Together, the destination-biased framework of migration and the inherent difficulty in data collection make out-migration under-researched in China.

Secondly, there is a surprising lack of attention paid to age in literature on migration and migrants in China. Compared to the study of hukou (Chan and Zhang, 1999) and gender (Fan and Huang, 1998; Fan, 1999; Yang and Guo, 1999; Roberts, 2002; Fan, 2003) in studies on migration in China, the work on age is still relegated. Migration studies usually lump together people of different age groups, or treat age only as an independent variable. Since young adults typically have a high above-average migration rate, studies on migration of overall population would suffer from aggregation bias. Comparative research on first and second generation of migrant workers (Yue et al., 2010) has also shown that young migrants are different from their parent generations in many ways. It is thus necessary to distinguish between migrants of different age intervals.

The neglect of age has come at a time when the presence of a large flow of young migrants is acknowledged. Many migrants originate from relatively less
developed areas of China, and a large proportion of them are young people. In fact, about 80 per cent of the 2.36 billion migrants in 2012 are agricultural population (NHFPC, 2013a) and more than half of the working-age migrants are the new generation born after 1980 (NHFPC, 2013b). Three distinct groups of young migrants in China have received attention only recently: migrant children, second generation of migrant workers, and college graduate migrants. Of the available literature to date the majority is quantitative research, centres on places of destination, and has specific interest in some issues (for instance, migrant children’s education and psychological well-being, labour and class action regarding second generation of migrant workers). Young people’s voices are seldom heard, with a few exceptions (Woronov, 2004; Zhang, 2013; Pun and Lu, 2010; Hu, 2012). Relatively less work has been done on college graduate migrants, although Lian’s (2009) book has become popular with the public. He created the term ‘the ant tribe’ (yizu) to describe a group of college graduate migrants in villages-in-the-city in large cities of China, but an in-depth analysis as well as engagement with the literature is yet to be done.

Thirdly, despite a substantial literature on internal migration in China, there is limited understanding about the impact of mobility on place attachment and identity. Does place matter during increasingly mobile times in contemporary China? How can we conceptualise practices and processes of belonging and attachment that can be observed in different locales? What we know about place attachment of migrants in China is largely based upon empirical studies that are conducted in large cities and on non-hukou migrants (Du and Li, 2010; Qian et al., 2011; Qian and Zhu, 2014). Existing research suggests that non-hukou migrants’ bonding with either the receiving city or the local community is at a moderate level, but it is lower than the average level of the total population in the city (Du and Li, 2010). To them, the functional dimension of the host city, in terms of employment, leisure activities and socialisation, is not significantly related to emotional feelings like attachment and identification (Qian and Zhu, 2014). To explain this, they have argued that the emotional significance of the host city is largely compromised by their attachment to the hometown.

However, migrants’ bonding with their place of origin appears not to have been thoroughly investigated. The emphasis on the destination place has made it
difficult to conceptualise the full relationship between individuals and places, and between attachment and mobility, as well as to identify potential compatibilities and conflicts. At the same time, within the perspective of the destination place, attachment to the native place has implicitly been assumed fixed and stable. Such a perspective has obscured the ways in which migrants during the migration process have reactivated and restructured their attachment and belonging to the place they have left behind. Moreover, within the heterogeneous population of internal migrants (in terms of hukou or registered residency status, gender, age, education, place of origin, etc.), their spatial mobility and place experiences could be very diverse, which will rework the bonding with places in different ways. This again addresses the aforementioned two issues in the literature on migration and migrants in China.

Fourthly, in the migration literature, structuralism (a macro approach) dominates while human agency (a micro approach) has been underestimated in many studies. Most micro approaches (e.g. the rational choice model) idealise human agency and lack realism in their assumptions. Over two decades ago, Halfacree and Boyle (1993) recognised that migration research, largely based upon positivistic behavioural approaches, was in danger of being left behind by developments in social theory. This is very much the case in studies on migration in China today. Emphasis is given to the empirical outcomes, the push and pull factors, and the rational migration decision-making processes. Stemming from an unsatisfactory conceptualisation of human agency, the migrant subject is greatly neglected, for instance, their aspiration to move, the choice to move, the contingencies of migration, the disjuncture between desire and reality, the biographical significances of migration, etc.

The background section has identified several challenges facing research on migration in China, namely, the destination-biased framework of migration, the neglect of heterogeneity of migrants (age, education, place of origin, etc.), the relative dearth of research on the intersection of mobility and place attachment, and the suppression of the significance of the migrant subject.
1.2 Research questions

This research will respond to the above problems by adopting a native-place perspective and a life-course/biographical approach and using mixed methods to explore the patterns and meanings of migration among educated young adults originating from a same place in peripheral China. In particular I address in this study young people’s spatial mobility, place attachment and belonging, migration decision-making and migration aspirations by answering the following questions:

(1) What patterns characterise migration of educated young people from peripheral China?

What spatial patterns can be identified from their migration trajectories? How important is return migration and onward migration? What factors influence their migration? How are the moves related to changes in personal circumstances?

(2) How is geographic mobility implicated in the process of bonding with place?

Are there any differences in place attachment and belonging among migrants and returnees, and among migrants with varying mobility? How is attachment or belonging to the native place different from that to the destination place? Are there any forms of place attachment that might characterise this group? Are different forms of place attachment characterised by different socio-demographic and psychological profiles?

(3) To what extent do educated young adults aspire and decide (or not) to migrate (or to stay)?

How do young people exercise personal agency in their migration decision-making? What features might emerge? What personal and external factors influence their decision to migrate (or to stay)?

What is the role of mobility aspirations in young people's migration? What patterns of mobility aspirations can be identified? How is mobility shaped by, and how does it shape individuals’ mobility aspirations and attitudes towards the home place?
1.3 Justifications for this research

The rationales for studying a cohort of educated young adults from peripheral China are as follows. Firstly, this population is important in terms of contemporary size. Large-scale migration of tertiary-educated young people has become an important component of internal migration in China over the last decade. Since the 1980s, the central government has launched a series of reforms in higher education. As a result of the significant expansion in tertiary enrolment starting in 1999, the national enrolment in regular institutions of higher educations increased from 1.08 million in 1998 to 6.39 million in 2009: students enrolled in universities for Bachelor’s degrees increased from 0.77 to 3.26 million; students enrolled in colleges for diplomas increased from 0.32 to 3.13 million (Ministry of Education of P.R.C., 1999, 2010). Because of less developed economies and less diversified labour markets in peripheral areas, educated young people are more likely to move out the native place for upward mobility. Arguably, out-migration of educated young people is one of the most prevailing demographic features of villages, townships, and small cities throughout less developed regions of China.

Secondly, different from rural migrant workers, these highly educated young adults are believed to have greater mobility and have higher aspirations and more capabilities to migrate on a permanent basis. Their attachment to either the native place or the destination place may also appear to be at variance with that of rural migrant workers. These young people firstly leave the home place for higher education and may return, stay, or move on after graduation. Still, many have difficulties in obtaining the local *hukou*, although some do not. To date, the spatial and social complexity of this phenomenon is underexplored. As a result, the impacts of migration pathways from home to university and onwards to the labour market have been overlooked. For individuals, the migration experiences in their young adulthood have great potential to shape their lives, their subjectivities and their future.

Thirdly, the specific need for research on educated young migrants arises not only from the significance for individuals, but also from the implications for the wider society. Indeed, they have greater capacity to influence the economy, culture,
society, and the future. On the one hand, young people’s migration has the power to transform the social and cultural fabrics of places. Such migration flows impact local and regional population redistribution, employment markets, housing markets, and other societal processes. On the other hand, social change and social continuity can be easily seen through the migration and transition experiences of young people.

Furthermore, the participants under study originate from the same place and share very similar social, economic and cultural frameworks of reference; meanwhile, they are contemporaneously experiencing the life stage of young adulthood. It thus allows us to identify and examine the differentiation of the group, with age, education, and place of origin controlled for. This native-place perspective is useful to map the spatial distribution pattern of migrants and returnees, to trace their ongoing migration trajectories, and to identify the relative importance of various factors with regard to migration. Also, by observing attachment and belonging among migrants and returnees, the full picture can thus be captured. For returnees, though ascribed from the place of origin, their attachment and belonging to some extent need to be re-established after home-coming. For migrants, their attachment and belonging to the destination place have to be acquired; their attachment and belonging to the place of origin also develop and change through migration.

1.4 Outline of the thesis

The rest of the thesis is organised as follows.

Chapter Two reviews literature on migration of educated young people, the conceptualisation and measurement of place attachment and its relation with mobility, structure and agency in youth transitions and migration.

Chapter Three introduces the overall methodological approaches in this research, the setting in which the study was conducted, the data collection procedure, the measures and the analytical procedures.
The next three chapters present the empirical findings. Specifically, Chapter Four analyses educated young people’s migration pathways from home to university and onwards to current place of residence, and develops a four-fold typology of spatial mobility (Stick-in, Move-down, Move-up, and Re-entry) from migration trajectories data.

Chapter Five explores how spatial mobility is implicated in the process of bonding with places by examining educated young adults’ place attachment and belonging. Four types of migrants (Translocals, Departers, Aliens, and Settlers) and three types of returnees (the Trapped, the Bonded, and the Rooted) are classified.

Chapter Six uses a biographical approach focusing on educated young adults’ narratives of mobility. Through the lens of agency as a socially situated process, it first explores how migration decision-making reflects socially structured patterns, how agency interplays with social structure, and how agency operates in a differentiated and dynamic way. Through its attention to migration aspirations, it then investigates how and to what extent mobility and migration-related life experiences are shaped by, and shape young people’s migration aspirations and attachment to the home place.

The final chapter concludes the thesis.
2 Literature Review

This research investigates the migration of educated young people from peripheral areas in their transition to adulthood, which intersects with the literature on youth transition and youth migration. Also relevant is literature concerning the nexus between mobility and place attachment. This chapter will provide a review of literature on youth transition, youth migration, structure and agency in youth transition and migration, place attachment and its relation with mobility.

2.1 Youth transition

The topic of young people in transition to adulthood is mostly situated within the research framework of life course. A developmental perspective has had a pervasive and enduring impact in life course study, though the notion of rigid life stages had not been formalised by scholars until the twentieth century and has been constantly subject to revision afterwards (Jeffrey, 2010). Western theorists maintain that youth as a distinct biographical state is an outcome of the differentiation of the status of child from the status of adult, and progressive institutionalisation of childhood, especially the expansion of full-time mass education, is crucial in the consolidation of youth as a standardised life stage (Buchmann, 1989). It may be that the consolidation of life stages gradually results in the standardisation of the transition to adulthood. According to developmental theory, traditional criteria to define an adult status include leaving school, leaving the parental home, establishing financial independence, getting married, becoming a parent for the first time, etc.

The modernisation of societies is generally considered as the underlying process driving long-term trends, which on the one hand standardises the life course by the rationalisation of the economy and polity, and on the other hand promotes variability in the sequencing and overlap among these transition markers (Shanahan, 2000). It is often thought that the transition to adulthood has become markedly more diversified, differentiated and individualised since the 1960s. According to Buchmann (1989), larger transformation of structural and cultural
setting - like the de-structuring of youth-specific spheres and modes of experience, the intrusion of the adult culture, and the extension of time needed for stable integration into the labour force - leads to the increasing individualisation of the life stage youth.

The time dimension is predominant when thinking of transition; space is largely ignored. Yet, transitions from childhood to adulthood are bound up with geographies and are contained within wider structures such as the family, the education system, the labour market, consumer culture and so on (Valentine, 2003). Since 1990s, a growing body of geographical work on youth has been carried out by European, British and North American scholars (for instance, James, 1990; Camstra, 1997; Skelton and Valentine, 1998; Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Aitken, 2001; Evans, 2008; Hopkins, 2010). Though it is fragmented and spreads across a wide range of topics and sub-disciplinary areas at an earlier stage (Valentine, 2003), young people’s geographies has well developed and has grown as a distinct area of human geography since then.

Youth as a role category is established in modern China, who are expected to accomplish their mission at a time of national crisis. The radical youth disappears and revolutionary youth as an outcome of political socialisation appears in Mao's era. In reform era, youth as a role category begins to disintegrate; youth is simply regarded as an age cohort or a social category (Chen, 2007). To stimulate economic growth and promote incentives of individuals, the 1978 market-oriented reforms emancipated individuals from the constraints of the collectives. Deng Xiaoping's talk on his inspection tour to South China in 1992 further promoted liberation of market forces. People gain more freedom to migrate freely within China, to find their own jobs and to change jobs. The mainstream media encourages young people to leave the office job and go into business (xiaihai). A large number of migrant workers and talents flow to the Pearl River Delta. At the same time, the privatisation of housing, the marketisation of education and medical care force individuals to engage in competition, assuming more responsibilities and more risks (Kleinman et al., 2011). The expansion of higher educational enrolment since 1999 provides more education opportunities to young people; but graduates face more and more severe employment problem. Since the 1990s, the employment system of graduates in China has reformed from the
guarantee of employment of the state to the self-choice employment of the graduates. The educational outcome became increasingly uncertain.

Arguably, work on young people in China has been largely overlooked or implicit in geographical literature. Little attention has been paid to young people’s actions in different domains, e.g., home, school, neighbourhood, public space, etc. While young migrants have received attention recently, the importance of how their lives are impacted by space has not been sufficiently recognised. The position (western, central or eastern region) and scale (villages, towns, small cities, second and third-tier cities or major cities) of places could have different effects upon Chinese young people’s transitions to adulthood: the availability and access to resources, the out- and in- migration culture at local area, and even the location choice of migration. Migration as a state of transition is more likely to be experienced by educated young people brought up in non-metropolitan areas of China. The journey of young people going away from their home places should be seen as a process that shapes them throughout the life course and should be comprehended in both its temporal and spatial dimensions.

\[ \text{2.2 Youth migration} \]

Migration of educated young people is not unique to China but a worldwide phenomenon. This section reviews some key aspects of youth migration, including youth exodus, graduate migration, skilled migration, and migration aspirations. It then goes on to discuss the relevance in the Chinese context.

Out-migration of young people from peripheral areas (whether non-metropolitan, inland, remote, or rural) is not a new phenomenon. Research into what has been popular known as ‘rural exodus’ or ‘rural flight’ has showed that young people in transitions into adulthood are more likely to ‘vote with their feet’ to seek upward mobility. The quantitative demographic approach taken by geographers, sociologists, and economists dominates rural population studies in North America (e.g., Tremblay, 2001; Mills and Hazarika, 2001). Tremblay (2001) discusses rural youth migration in Canada between 1971 and 1996, suggesting that all
provinces lost youth from their rural areas, urban areas gained youth in almost all provinces, and the migration was permanent rather than temporary. In their study on the migration of young people (14-21 years of age) from non-metropolitan area in the US in 1979, Mills and Hazarika (2001) find that the probability of migration increased with schooling; expected gains in initial earnings was a strong incentive; and the migration to other non-metropolitan counties was a viable and frequently employed alternative to "non-metropolitan to metropolitan" area migration. Place-based qualitative studies in the field of youth exodus are apparent in the UK (Jones, 1999; Jamieson, 2000; Stockdale, 2002), Australia (Gabriel, 2002; Eacott and Sonn, 2006; Easthope and Gabriel, 2008) and elsewhere (Kloep et al., 2003; Horvath, 2008; Crivello, 2011; Berg, 2014). Drawing on the perspectives of young people, these qualitative studies (some use mixed methods) have provided ‘thick descriptions’ of youth out-migration in relation to place attachment and identity (Jones, 1999; Jamieson, 2000; Eacott and Sonn, 2006; Easthope and Gabriel, 2008), culture of migration (Easthope and Gabriel, 2008; Horvath, 2008), education and youth transition (Crivello, 2011; Berg, 2014).

Based on a national longitudinal survey of an entire cohort of young people in the United States from 1979 to 1996, Kodrzycki (2001) finds that the majority (more than 60 per cent) of college graduates are living in the state of their high school or college after graduation; graduates who have gone to college out-of-state are more likely to be out-of-state five years after college graduation and are more likely to move post-graduation; college graduates tend to move away from states with poorer job attributes, but individual characteristics are more important than the regional job opportunities. By drawing attention to the initial migration for higher education and the second migration for employment, Faggian et al. (2006) classify five types of graduates in the United Kingdom, individuals who graduated from higher education between 1998 and 2001: repeat migrants (migrants who move away from the native place for higher education and then move again to enter employment in a place different from both the native place and education area), return migrants (migrants who leave the native place for higher education and then return for employment), stickers (migrants who enter higher education and employment in the same place), late movers (migrants who stay in the native
place for higher education but then move away to another place for employment), and stayers (non-migrants who stay in the native place for both higher education and employment). It is found that, after controlling for a range of variables relating to personal and regional economic characteristics, graduates with higher grades and qualifications are less likely to be stayers or return migrants.

Research on migration of educated young adults has flourished in international migration studies, which has long been known as “brain drain” – the migration of highly skilled people from the “peripheral” or poor economies to the “core” or more developed economies since the end of WWII. The traditional core-periphery understanding of the relation between developed and developing economies is challenged in an era of global labour mobility. The late nineties and the 21st century witness return migration and circular movement of skilled labour across nations; the concept of “brain circulation” (Saxenian, 2005; Robertson, 2006) or “talent flow” (Carr et al., 2005) is thus put forward and gains popularity. In their research on youth brain drain from Central and Eastern Europe to the EU, Baláz et al. (2004) argue that there are strong links between initial temporary migration (brain circulation) and intended permanent migration (brain drain), yet the former is driven by non-economic goals while the latter is dominantly motivated by economic considerations.

Although relatively neglected in migration studies, the desires and aspirations of the migrant subject have begun to be examined recently. The mobility aspirations of young people, as suggested by Stockdale (2002), reflect the local employment and housing opportunities, individuals’ educational attainment, their sense of community belonging, and the valued attached to family and social networks. Recognising the tension between the aspirations and the (in)ability to migrate, Carling (2002) distinguishes involuntary non-migrants from voluntary non-migrants and argues that migration aspirations are formed in the interplay between people’s individual characteristics and the emigration environment (including the social construction of the meaning of emigration). Based on personal interests and investments and external constraints or opportunities, Ferro’s (2006) study presents a typology of migratory aspirations of highly skilled workers: committed aspiration to mobility, disheartened aspiration and aborted mobility, unexpected and desired aspiration, and satisfied immobility. These studies (Carling, 2002;
Ferro, 2006) embody Canzler et al.’s (2008) concept of motility (the capacity of an actor to move socially and spatially), which can be break down into three components: accessibility (available resources and conditions under which one may make use of them), competencies (qualities or skills that make movement possible), and appropriation (perceptions and values on the possibilities of mobility to which the actors have access). Other researchers consider the politics of mobility and aspiration. For instance, in their study on international students and Asian regionalism in Singapore, Collins et al. (2014) bring aspiration and governmentality into a theoretical dialogue and find a dance between institutionalised governmental will and embodied desires that perform, resist, transcend, or escape it. The topic of migration aspirations thus brings together the nexus between higher education, place attachment, migration intentions and behaviours, and opens possibilities for researchers to engage with current thinking on mobilities.

The multiple engagements (Smith, 2007; Mibourne, 2007) enrich our understanding of the spatial and the socio-cultural complexities of youth out-migration and offer insights for studies in other context, such as China. Indeed, out-migration of young people from peripheral China has become an especially distinctive phenomenon. For rural students, attending college is still an important stepping stone to urbanisation. In 2011, 61 per cent of the freshmen were from rural areas (Tang, 2012). After graduation, these highly educated may stay, or move back, or move on. According to the data from five nationwide surveys conducted between 2003 and 2011, large and mid-size cities in China are favoured by most college and university graduates: about 80 per cent work in cities, 16 per cent in counties, 4 per cent in towns and only 0.5 per cent in countries (Bao and Li, 2012). This raises questions about graduate migration: who moves, who stays, and why? Following Faggian et al. (2006), Yue (2010) investigates the migration behaviours of graduates from 28 colleges and universities in 14 provinces in China based on survey data collected in 2009. The results show that the majority are stayers (54.3 per cent); the main destinations of repeat migrants and late movers are located in coastal regions; graduates from key universities and postgraduates are much less likely to be stayers than college graduates. Notably, migration trajectories beyond first employment are absent in
these studies. As argued by Sage et al. (2013), the preoccupation with migration to first employment has masked the complexity of the patterns and ongoing processes of graduate migration and the impact of this complexity on migrants.

Arguably, the leading urban areas along the east and south coast of China have benefited from the migration of the highly educated (known as “kong que dong nan fei” in Chinese) since the advent of reform. Yet, return migration of the highly educated is observed in recent years, such as educated young adults fleeing from the first tier cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou (so-called “tao li bei shang guang” as created by the media). The media soon reports stories on some moving again to the first tier cities after a short-interval return move. This raises questions about the relevance of brain drain (permanent migration) and brain circulation (temporary migration) at the national level and the local level. In the Chinese context, hukou is a huge barrier to permanent settlement and becomes one of the most important reasons behind return migration of the highly educated. And yet, the desires and aspirations of the migrant subject as driving forces in migration have been severely neglected. There are many unanswered questions about educated young adults’ aspirations to migrate (or return), for instance, how such aspirations relate to external constraints or opportunities as well as internal factors, how they are involved in ongoing processes of transforming the self through mobility, etc.

2.3 Structure and agency in youth transition and migration

This section discusses agency and structure in youth transitions and migration. In the social sciences literature, the former generally refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices, while the latter are those recurrent patterned arrangements in society which influence or limit an agent. Structuralism (emphasising the importance of societal structure) dominates in classical sociology, while the introduction of the concept of agency is relatively recent. It is necessary to clarify exactly what is meant by agency as well as structure in the present study. The definition of agency, which is close to those of Rudd and Evans (1998) and Evans (2002, p.248), refers to “input from
young adults as individuals (to transitional processes), emphasising those aspects of social engagement which are predominantly individual, creative, proactive and involve resisting external pressures”. A related concept is control beliefs (Flammer, 1997), referring to the subjective representation of one’s capabilities to exercise control. Flammer (1997) distinguishes between contingency beliefs (beliefs about the degree to which outcomes are dependent on personal ability and effort, or external factors, or unknown factors) and competence beliefs (beliefs about the degree to which the self is capable of achieving a desired outcome). The term structure, in contrast, refers to inputs from social systems (including economic system, political system, cultural system, and others), the effects of locality (including labour markets, housing markets and other markets as well as cultures, values, and norms), and influences of ascribed characteristics (such as hukou, gender, and family background) as well as acquired characteristics of education and qualification.

From a risk society perspective, Beck (1992, p. 135) claimed that “each person’s biography is removed from given determinations and placed in his or her own hands”. The relationship between individual and society has changed: the influence of collective structures like family, class, ethnicity and gender recedes into the background; individuals have to "rely on themselves and their own individual (labour market) fate with all its attendant risks, opportunities, and contradictions" (Beck, 1992, p. 92). Such a shift is connected to some evolving trends: the intensification of competition and mobility, the decline in collective structures, greater emphasis on personal education (Beck, 1992), market-oriented policies and consumption-based lifestyles. Consequently, individualisation becomes a multifaceted process involving transformation in education, employment, family structure, and personal relationships. Education emphasises individualistic problem solving and self-improvement; labour market demands a more mobile and flexible workforce; the family has reached new levels of instability, individualistic values are glorified.

However, such a thesis has been criticised as emphasizing only the agency and downplaying structure. Empirical study has indicated that life biographies, though no longer rigidly determined by, remain strongly influenced by class, gender, age, and locale. Since the structural side of life is more often expressed in the silence,
and people cannot make sense of the connections between the personal lives and
the structural forces, withdrawing into the private realm becomes an option many
choose (Brannen and Nilsen, 2005). Faced with a proliferation of opportunities,
young people can reflexively construct their biographies. Mass consumption may
bring an illusion of equality; high mobility may bring a sense of freedom;
personal planning in life trajectories may bring an illusion of individuality. But
opportunities also come with increased risks; both are not evenly distributed. To
disadvantaged young people, such a process of individualisation may bring
feelings of uncertainty and stress, or guilt and blame if they make inappropriate
choices and become marginalised (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Valentine, 2003).
When the structural and external forces become invisible, there is no one to blame
but oneself. The ideology of individualisation is thus thought to disempower those
whose lives are more at the mercy of structural constraints than others (Brannen
and Nilsen, 2005).

Yan (2009) argues that the rise of the individual in post-Mao era, especially since
the late 1990s, has greatly altered the structure of social relations and resulted in
the individualisation of Chinese society. In his study on China’s educated
millennial youth, Moore (2005) has identified several forces driving the
individualisation process, such as the retreat of the state from the private lives of
Chinese, the encouragement of profitable economic activity, the rapid rise in
household incomes, the availability of consumer goods, and the accessibility of
Western popular culture. Kleinman et al. (2011, pp.3-4) introduce the concept of
"enterprising self" in their work, implying that "market competition and social
mobility encourage and even force the individual to be proactive, rationally
calculating about self-interest, and competitive". While many have highlighted
young people’s agency, we need to acknowledge the social structures that shape
Chinese young people’s lives. Recent research has confirmed that the life of the
college educated is highly influenced by structural difference, e.g., gender, hukou
and class. Based on national college graduate surveys conducted in 2003, 2005,
2007 and 2009, Bao and Li (2012) observe that more than a quarter of college
graduates go unemployed after graduation; female, rural origin and poor family
background are significantly negative. Li and his colleagues (2012) conducted a
national college graduate survey in 2010; they examined the relation between
parental political capital and college graduates' first job offer and found that the wage premium of having a cadre parent is 13 per cent.

Modern social theorists (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984) seek to resolve the antinomy between structuralism and methodological individualism. Arguing for a middle ground theory in explaining youth transition, Evans (2002, p.262) suggests that “agency operates in differentiated and complex ways in relation to the individual’s subjectively perceived frames for action and decision”, recognising that “a person’s frame has boundaries and limits that can change over time, but that have structural foundations”. Thus she develops the concept of bounded agency to recognise agency as a socially situated process, which is influenced but not directly determined by structures and can be converted from external influences and constraints through a process of internalisation. This makes a conceptual advance in discarding the dualistic treatments of structure and agency and acknowledging the agency-structure interfusion. Evans’s idea parallels Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of habitus, which emphasises the embodiment of social structure within human practice. According to the concept of habitus, each of us acquires habits, values, and dispositions as a result of embodying social structures and reproduces them through preferences and actions for future embodiment. Habitus allows us to navigate social environments by acting and thinking in a certain way, without consciously realising it. Also closely related are Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration, which recognises that the repetition of the acts of individual agents reproduces or subverts the social structure, and the notion of structured individualisation (Roberts et al., 1994), which is developed from Beck’s (1992) thesis of individualisation. While the idea of bounded agency places agency centre stage, structured individualisation focuses on the operation of structures and the structuration theory gives primacy to neither.

2.4 Place attachment: conceptualisation and measurement

The purpose of this section is to review the literature on place attachment. It is first necessary to distinguish two uses of the term place attachment. A broader perspective has been adopted by some scholars (Low and Altman, 1992) who hold
the view that place attachment “is a complex phenomenon that incorporates several aspects of people-place bonding” and “has many inseparable, integral, and mutually defining features, qualities, or properties” (p.4). Within this holistic context, it makes sense to pursue taxonomic analysis, with attention given to affect, cognition (thought, knowledge, and belief), and practice (action and behaviour) (Low and Altman, 1992). Giuliani and Feldman (1993) question the appropriateness of such a broad conceptualisation, which in their eyes fails to acknowledge the distinction between affective and cognitive qualities of people-place relation, as well as the dynamics within affective bonds. Place attachment, in a narrow sense, refers to people’s emotional or affective bonds with the material environment. In this research I follow a more specific and narrower conception of place attachment, i.e., I am only concerned with the affective quality of place attachment instead of the cognitive and behavioural qualities. When defined in a narrow way, as Williams (2014) points out, it is likely to measure individual differences in a relatively consistent manner.

A concept closely related to place attachment is place identity. As a sub-structure of the self-identity, or the ‘environmental past’ of the person, place identity conceived by Proshansky et al. (1983) is “a complex cognitive structure which is characterised by a host of attitudes, values, thoughts, beliefs, meanings and behaviour tendencies that go well beyond just emotional attachments and belonging to particular places” (p. 62). A narrow and operational definition of place identity in empirical studies focuses on identification with or belonging to a particular place. Some seem to make no distinction between place attachment and place identity and use the two terms interchangeably. For example, Cuba and Hummon (1993) operationalise the term place identity as a sense of attachment or home. Stedman (2002) operationalises place attachment as consistent with definitions of place identity. However, using different samples of natives and non-natives, Hernández et al. (2007) argue that place attachment and place identity are distinguishable yet interrelated bonds and suggest that place attachment precedes place identity. The difference and relationship between the two are later confirmed in a confirmatory factor analysis (Ruiz et al., 2011) and in a different context (Vidal et al., 2010).
One can find in the literature a multitude of instruments measuring place attachment (see Giuliani, 2003; Hernández et al., 2014, for reviews). Three different measures can be identified – proxy measures, multidimensional measures, and unidimensional measures. Rather than directly measuring affective bonds, attachment is usually assessed in early work via proxy measures or behavioural indicators such as organisational involvement, neighbourhood ties, kinship and friendship in neighbourhood, length of residency, frequency of visit, homeownership, plan for future, and so forth (Gerson et al., 1977; Riger and Lavrakas, 1981; Taylor et al., 1985; McAndrew, 1998). Multidimensional measures combine two or more different but related subordinate concepts or dimensions. Williams and colleagues (Williams and Roggenbuck, 1989; Williams et al., 1992) design one of the first psychometric instruments to measure place attachment, which has been widely adopted or adapted by others. Still, place-related emotions are not directly assessed; instead, place attachment is reflected by two subordinate concepts – place identity and place dependence (instrumental bonds with place, see Stokols and Shumaker, 1981, for a detailed discussion).

Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) question the multidimensional meaning of the concept and use four emotion-related items to measure place attachment (relaxation, happiness, favour, nostalgia). Even if we focus only on measures of emotion-related items, the mostly frequently identified in unidimensional measures, they vary greatly in detail. The scales can be classified into two groups: emotions produced by staying in the place and emotions evoked by leaving the place. Both can be positively or negatively valenced. Emotions or affect produced by staying in a place include relaxing or feeling at ease (Feldman, 1996; Harris et al., 1996; Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001; Lewicka, 2008, 2010; Vidal et al., 2010), pleasure (Brown and Werner, 1985; Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001), security (Brown and Werner, 1985; Harris et al., 1996; Lewicka, 2008, 2010), pride (Brown and Werner, 1985; Mesch and Manor, 1998; Lewicka, 2008, 2010), care and concern (Feldman, 1996), responsibility (Brown and Werner, 1985; Shamai, 1991), belonging or embeddedness (Shamai, 1991; Feldman, 1996), etc. Emotions or affect produced by leaving a place mainly incorporate desire or feel bad to move out (Harris et al., 1996; Mesch and Manor, 1998; Lewicka, 2010; Vidal et
Affective bonds to places may be universal, but its strength could vary among different cultures and historical periods (Tuan, 1977). I agree with Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) that researchers in different contexts need to be attentive to the applicability of theory and methods, and contextualise them to better reflect the uniqueness. In their study on Chinese familism, Yeh and Yang (1997) develop a tripartite model of cognitions, affects, and behavioural intentions towards a person’s family and validate it in a sample of college students and adults in Taiwan. The affective component comprises feelings of familiar unity, belonging, concern, responsibility, security, and pride. Though operating at a small scale, the same measures can apply to a larger scale. Analogous to questions asked about the affects towards the family or home, in this study I ask a number of questions concerning people’s affective bonds to particular places.

Places differ in scale and attachment may occur at different territorial levels. Analysis of place attachment is largely associated with residential settings, with a large part of focus on neighbourhood or community, followed by home and city, and much less on places of larger-scale like region, country, and continent (Lewicka, 2010). Previous studies (Shamai, 1991; Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001; Lewicka, 2010) suggest that attachment to a city is higher than to a smaller scale (apartment and neighbourhood) and a larger scale (province and nation-state). Among these scales, cities have visual and conceptual prominence: on one hand, cities have delineated boundaries and distinctive skylines; on the other, cities have names and labelling in atlases (Tuan, 1975). This research will only focus on the intermediate level; however, the intermediate level includes but is not limited to the city. This is due to the mismatch between the conventional meaning of city and its meaning in the Chinese context.

Cities in the Chinese context have different levels. Since the 1980s, there are three levels of city divisions in China, i.e., provincial-level city division (including 2 special administrative regions and 4 municipalities), prefectural-level city division (including 15 sub-provincial cities and 271 prefectural-level cities), and county-level city division. Yet a sub-provincial city or a prefecture-level city is closer to a
city-centred region rather than a city in the conventional sense, and refers to a relatively large and continuous urban settlement. Typically, this administrative unit covers a main central urban area (city in the conventional sense, usually sharing the same name with the prefecture-level city) and a larger surrounding rural area containing county-level cities, counties, towns, and villages. Among them 15 sub-provincial cities are given greater autonomy and play a crucial role in regional and national economic development; their status is thus above other prefectural-level cities.

2.5 Attachment/Belonging and mobility

Stemming from the debate with respect to the decline of community and to residential mobility, earlier research on place attachment typically investigates the link between community attachment and residential mobility, in particular the negative psychological effects of forced relocation (Giuliani and Feldman, 1993). In a mobile society, different forms of mobility – daily commuting, long-distance travel, residential mobility, and international migration – are differentially associated with sense of belonging on different territorial levels (Gustafson, 2009). This section provides a review of some studies on attachment/belonging and migration.

Tuan (1977) claims that attachment to the homeland is a common human emotion. It is not necessarily the landmarks of high visibility and public significance that encourage awareness of and identification with place; it could also be quiet: “Attachment of a deep though subconscious sort may come simply with familiarity and ease, with the assurance of nurture and security, with the memory of sounds and smells, of communal activities and homely pleasures accumulated over time” (p. 159). In contrast with the visitor who has a viewpoint, the native “has a complex attitude derived from his immersion in the totality of his environment”, which “can be expressed by him only with difficulty and indirectly through behaviour, local tradition, lore, and myth” (Tuan, 1974, p. 63). This phenomenological view is shared by Hay (1998) who observes that tourists and transients have a superficial sense of place; long-term campers, holiday home
owners, and resident children have a partial sense of place; whereas natives have an ancestral or cultural sense of place. Between those with very limited residency and those being raised in the place or lived there for generations, there are the residents and immigrants, who can develop a personal sense of place in their new ‘home’.

Place in their work (Tuan, 1974, 1977; Hay, 1998) is understood as a stable, bounded and historically continuous entity, corresponding to a traditional, conservative view of society; on the other hand, place can be a source of potential social interactions, which probably better describes the features of the globalised world spaces of today (Lewicka, 2011a). When place is understood in the ‘classic’ way, migration and mobility usually have negative psychological implications and are often associated with uprootedness and placelessness. Place attachment and mobility in this sense are viewed as opposite and/or mutually exclusive phenomena (Gustafson, 2006). Similarly, traditional migration research understands migration as a unidirectional movement; the assimilation theory assumes a one-way process of becoming part of the ‘mainstream’ society. Transnational migration research (Schiller et al., 1992) since the 1990s offers a new perspective on people’s relations to place: transmigrants create fluid and multiple identities grounded both in the place of origin and in the place of settlement. While some identify more with one society than the other, others maintain two or more identities simultaneously.

In his qualitative study, Gustafson (2001) demonstrates that people see the relationship between place attachment and mobility in different ways: some regard them as contradictory and feel compelled to choose one; some view them as opposite but try to find equilibrium; some see them as complementary and enjoy both. By combining attachment to the country of origin (measured with visits to the home country, remittances, contact with family or friends, homeownership and investments in the country of origin, etc.) and attachment to the country of destination (measured with employment status, contact with local people, participation in local organisations, speak local language, follow local news, have local bank account, etc.), Engbersen et al. (2013) obtain a four-fold typology of migrants: circular migrants, bi-nationals, footloose migrants, and settlers. The authors’ interest is not directed to the affective aspects of the
relationship with place, but rather to certain behaviours that are relevant to social involvement, among which some are predictors of place attachment, some are consequences or correlates.

Pollini (2005) also believes that place attachment and socio-territorial belonging are not incompatible with spatial mobility in the sense that mobility can multiply local attachment. Alongside the more traditional form of ‘belonging ascribed by birth and residence’, he also identifies three non-traditional forms of ‘belonging ascribed by birth alone’, ‘belonging acquired by residence’, and ‘elective belonging’. ‘Belonging ascribed by birth alone’ is associated with emigration, where emigrants have a sense of nostalgia for the place of birth and have no attachment to the place of residence. People connect with the past environment through memories of the place they inhabited, either autobiographical memories that have personal meanings (Marcus, 1992), or collective memories that belong to the history of the place and are shared by groups or societies (Lewicka, 2008). Such place memories provide the individual with a sense of selfhood. In contrast, ‘belonging acquired by residence’ is linked to immigration, where immigrants could be attached to the place of destination through the process of symbolic-social acquisition in long-term residence, independent of any ecological-territorial element (Pollini, 2005). In the aforementioned study, Hay (1998) has found a progression of intensity of sense of place resulting from length of residence among residents and immigrants.

Migration as a state of transition is more likely to be experienced by young people brought up in rural or peripheral areas. Compared with non-rural counterparts, rural adolescents report a greater prevalence of potential conflict between perceived importance of staying close to family and moving away from the home place (Hektner, 1995). In a study of young people in rural communities, Jones (1999) argues that the stayer with fixed socio-spatial identity is a product of traditional societies while the migrant is the product of modernity; she further identifies among migrants those who retain a nostalgic affection for the rural communities and those who have no sense of spatial identity. On the basis of in-depth interviews with 45 young people brought up in a rural area of Britain, Jamieson (2000) describes four patterns of attachment to the rural locality: attached migrants, detached migrants, attached stayers, and detached stayers.

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This chapter has built a theoretical foundation upon which the thesis is based. This research aims to contribute to the literature in youth transition and youth migration by developing a spatial understanding of youth transition and a biographical understanding of youth migration. The study will extend beyond spatial analyses of migration patterns to a more sophisticated understanding of the spatial and the socio-cultural complexities of migration, including the complex migration trajectories, migration decision-making processes, the aspirations and motives for migration, personal experiences of migration, and place attachment. Equally significantly, this study will look at structure and agency in youth transition and migration, exploring how social differences shape individuals' lives and choices, as well as the role of human agency within a structural framework. A place-based case study combining quantitative and qualitative analyses is expected to shed light on these inter-linked issues. This raises questions about methodology, which will be discussed in the forthcoming chapter.
3 Methods and Methodology

This chapter is divided into four main sections: the first section introduces the overall methodological approaches in this research; the second part moves on to describe the area in which the study was conducted; the third part details the data collection procedure; and the last section explains the measures and the analytical procedures.

3.1 Methodology

As mentioned in the introduction, a huge body of scholarship has been devoted to migration and migrants in China; the majority are based upon a positivistic behaviourist conceptualisation of migration – migration, often regarded solely as a discrete event, is a response to the stimulus of push-pull factors and migrants are rational choice makers. This predominant paradigm is linked to ontological (single reality and deterministic view), epistemological (the researcher and the investigated “object” are independent entities), and axiological (context-free generalisations, explanation, prediction and control) assumptions. Recognising migration as an ‘action in time’ instead of a discrete contemplative act, Halfacree and Boyle (1993, p.337) advocated a biographical approach to the study of migration: “a specific migration exists as a part of our past, our present and our future; as part of our biography”. Using a biographical approach as part of a reconceptualisation of migration goes beyond simply using life-history techniques as a methodological tool. Ní Laoire (2000) asserts that the biographical approach is also a theoretical contribution to migration studies. Such an approach is associated with different philosophical assumptions: ontologically, realities are apprehensible in the form of multiple (re)constructions; epistemologically, knowledge is created interaction among the researcher and the research subjects; axiologically, the inquiry aim is for more informed reconstruction, understanding and empowerment.

Appreciating the diversity in different approaches to migration studies, this research employs mixed methods to incorporate multiple perspectives into the
understanding of young adulthood migration. A life-history questionnaire survey is used to collect quantitative data and capture larger scale patterns and trends. To ensure the complexity of youth transitions and migration is captured, the life-history survey collects retrospective data on migration, education, employment, and residential histories. To facilitate respondents’ recall of autobiographical memory, the event histories are located in time and space. Such a design improves data quality on the one hand, and on the other opens the door to understanding the diverse migration trajectories and related transitions events. The survey includes a sampling aim (to find potential informants) and provides contextual data (the sample context as well as the individual life-history) for biographical interviews. The purpose of biographical interviews is threefold: first to capture participants’ life stories as they depict them; second to explore their own perspectives on their experiences in their own words; and third to elicit participants’ experiences and understandings on particular topics such as migration decision-making, migration aspiration, place attachment, etc. Thus the qualitative data can be compared with the quantitative findings, supplement the survey picture, and more importantly, bridge the structure-agency divide, and allow insights into the process of meaning making.

The ‘paradigm wars’ in migration studies also happens in place research. The attention from various disciplines and perspectives paid to place research has led to lively debates and discussions on paradigmatic, theoretical, and methodological issues (e.g. Guiliani and Feldman, 1993; Giuliani, 2003; Stedman, 2003; Patterson and Williams, 2005; Trentelman, 2009; Lewicka, 2011a; Hernández et al., 2014; Williams, 2014). It was realised twenty years ago that there was a lack of empirical productivity due to the heterogeneity of place-related terms, differences in theoretical foundations, and lack of adequate measuring instruments (Lalli, 1992). Along the same line, Guiliani and Feldman (1993) recognised the need for developing a common language to clearly identify the object of inquiry. Despite the efforts of past decades, some scholars today still criticise that there is little empirical and conceptual progress (Lewicka, 2011a; Hernández et al., 2014). To them, the advancement in the study of place is blocked by terminological and conceptual confusion (Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001; Hernández et al., 2014), lack of theory (Lewicka, 2011a), blurring of conceptual boundaries (Pretty et al.,
2003) or lack of clarity regarding the relations between concepts (Stedman, 2003; Hernández et al., 2007), proliferation of measurements (Hernández et al., 2014), etc.

Despite these criticisms few, however, would appreciate the inclusiveness and diversity in the various strands of place scholarship (see Trentelman, 2009). The perceived ‘fuzziness’ is understood to be an overstatement as a product of a commitment to a paradigm (psychometrics); other paradigms employed in place research include phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theory, etc. Recognising that place is a broad domain of research informed by multiple research traditions each reflecting differing philosophical assumptions, Patterson and Williams (2005) call for researchers to be attentive to the history of, as well as the paradigm and world view underlying, different research traditions, and to adopt a critical pluralist perspective and a reflective dialogue in the face of incompatible paradigms, rather than to argue for the superiority of one paradigm or to strive for integration across divergent assumptions. In this light this study employs mixed methods to investigate educated young adults’ place attachment and belonging. The quantitative data will be used to identify patterns and to examine statistical relationships. The qualitative case studies will provide deeper understandings of people’s attachment and belonging. Also, place attachment is not static; changes in the people, places or processes over time may transform place attachment. Recognising that the survey could not capture the temporal dimension in place attachment, the biographical approach will be useful for qualitative studies of place attachment and migration, for instance, the formation and maintenance of affective bonding, the shifting meanings of places, and the continuity and change of affective bonding with regard to past and present.

3.2 The study area
Figure 3.1 The study area
Chaohu was a prefecture-level city in Anhui, China, administering one district (Juchao) and four counties (Hexian, Hanshan, Wuwei, and Lujiang). In 2010, it covered an area of 9,394 km² and had a population of 4,605,093 with an average population density of 490 people per km² (Chaohu Statistical Yearbook, 2011). Chaohu is known for and named by its lake (*hu* means lake in Chinese), one of the five largest freshwater lakes in China.

As an agriculture-dominated area, Chaohu is characterised by a low urbanisation rate and a high out-migration rate. At the end of 2010, among the 4.61 million permanent household registration residents in Chaohu, the agricultural population accounted for 83.6 per cent. The population outside residential areas in Chaohu (out-migrants, excluding those have obtained local *hukou* in the destination places) reached 1,962,961; among them about 1 million migrated for more than half a year. Regarding the latter, intra-provincial migration only accounted for 13.1 per cent and the major destination cities were Hefei (44.8 per cent), Wuhu (14.8 per cent), Ma'anshan (13.0 per cent) and Tongling (7.4 per cent), while 86.9 per cent were inter-provincial migration and the major destination places were Shanghai, Beijing, Jiangsu and Zhejiang (Anhui Statistical Yearbook, 2011). Clearly, the economic disparities offer a great pull towards the more economically developed areas both within Anhui Province and nationally. Historical ties, geographical proximity and cultural affinities also matter in inter-provincial migration. While the vast majority migrate to the neighbouring areas, a relatively small proportion of migrating population choose Guangdong Province in the Pearl River Delta, another prosperous region in China. This is somewhat further limited by transportation availability in the sense that there is no direct train to Guangdong Province from Chaohu.

Since the relaxation of restricted population movement in post-reform China, more and more people in Chaohu have moved out to make a living. After Deng's south tour in 1992, the scale of population movement increased rapidly in China. Outmigration from Chaohu has increased rapidly since the mid-1990s. The local

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1 As one of the most populous provinces with a large volume of surplus rural labour, Anhui is well-known for a historically high out-migration rate in China. Chaohu is one of few cities with very high mobility in Anhui Province, the others being Fuyang, Anqing, Lu’an and Bozhou.
government also encourages and promotes labour export as a way to resolve the problem of a surplus agricultural labour force and to increase its finance with migrant workers' remittance (Anhuinews, 2005). Wuwei domestic helpers, known as “Anhui baomu” or “Anhui maid” (Sun, 2005), have been known in Shanghai as early as the 1980s; Hexian construction workers have been popular in Beijing since 1990s (Liu and Wang, 2003) and sewing workers renowned in Zhejiang since 2000s (Liu, 2004).

While the vast majority of emigrants are low-educated migrant workers from the rural areas of Chaohu, more and more highly educated young adults have joined this outflow in recent years. Students from Chaohu who scored above the cut-off line on the national college entrance examination (gaokao) increased from 6100 in 2004 to 9005 in 2009; the total number reached 44920 during 2004-2009. It should be noted that the figures are close to – but not precisely the same as – university enrolment. In particular cases, those above the cut-off line may not be recruited or willingly accept the offer. Also, data on enrolment in undergraduate classes in branch campuses (autonomous institutions affiliated with public universities) and colleges is unavailable. Based on the number of applicants in Chaohu and provincial enrolment rate at each year, it is estimated that university and college enrolment of students from Chaohu could be nearly 200,000 in total over the period 1999-2009.

Along with the expansion of higher education since 1999, more and more young people have a chance to leave Chaohu to receive higher education. In reality, the vast majority of graduates have to depart from Chaohu if they aim to pursue higher education. There are only two colleges in Chaohu: Chaohu College and Chaohu Vocational and Technical College. They only offer three-year associate degrees. Chaohu College became Chaohu University in 2002 and begun to offer undergraduate degree programs. The migration of educated young people has become another important population movement trend in Chaohu since the beginning of the 21st century. As the most educated sector of the Chaohu population, their migration and mobility are likely to be distinct from that of less-

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2 The information is solicited from Chaohu Education Bureau.
educated migrant workers. The picture on migration would be incomplete if the migration practices of educated young adults are ignored.

In August 2011, due to adjustment of the administrative division, Chaohu was partitioned and the three nearby cities of Hefei, Wuhu and Ma’anshan each absorbed a piece of its territory. The county-level Chaohu City (previously Juchao District) and Lujiang County are now under the administration of Hefei City, Hanshan County and Hexian County under the administration of Ma’anshan City, and Wuwei County under the administration of Wuhu City. Participants in this research were recruited in the former prefecture-level Chaohu City. The main reason is that the target group were born, brought up and also experienced their first migration during the period when Chaohu was a prefecture-level city. Another consideration is the attempt to incorporate both the urban and the rural areas.

3.3 Data collection

The fieldwork was carried out between January 2013 and March 2014 on university and college graduates who were born and raised in Chaohu and received higher education outside Chaohu in or after the year 1999. The target respondents have graduated from at least one higher education program\(^3\), either attending a four-year university for a Bachelor’s degree\(^4\) or a three-year specialised college for a diploma (the latter refers to non-degree granting education, which can be used as credits towards completion of a bachelor's degree).

The process of data collection comprises three phases. The first phase involves exploration of the research topic by reviewing official statistics and alumni records of a local senior high school as well as informal discussion with potential interviewees, in order to come up with specific research questions, sampling strategy, and a survey questionnaire.

\(^3\) This includes regular higher education only; adult higher education is not applicable.
\(^4\) Some degrees like medicine and architecture require five years.
The second phase involves a life-history questionnaire survey, informed by existing literature and findings from the pilot study in Phase One. The survey attempts to trace the biography of each respondent in an “objective” manner as well as to elicit their subjective responses to particular questions. The life-history data is collected retrospectively by asking respondents to record life events in spatio-temporal sequence, including information on their paths through education, migration, employment, housing, and family formation. The period under study is their graduation from senior high school to the time of interview. Information on individual characteristics and family background is also collected.

A non-probability sampling technique was used, considering the fact that there was no sampling frame available, and meanwhile, members of the target population were difficult to access. Respondents were recruited in a variety of ways. On-site surveys were conducted during the Spring Festival (Chinese New Year) when a large percentage of migrants returned Chaohu. Most interviews were held at the respondents’ home via the help of neighbourhood residents (in urban areas) and town cadres (in rural areas). A small number of respondents were found in public space like a railway station. To include respondents who stayed in their destinations during the fieldwork period, electronic questionnaires were distributed via a snowball approach – solicitation of initial participants’ for referrals to their peer group. The fact that the researcher was born and grew up in Chaohu enables her to relatively easily establish and re-establish connections. Follow-up interviews were conducted with respondents for necessary correction and/or clarification of questionnaire responses from April to June. The initial sample consists of 300 respondents. After verification of eligibility and completeness, 274 valid responses were obtained. The number of cases included in analyses in later chapters is roughly the same, with only small variations. Data archiving and management are performed using SPSS.

In the third phase, biographical interviews were carried out from October 2013 to March 2014 with twenty participants who had completed the questionnaire in the survey and given their consent to participate in follow-up in-depth interviews. This sequential design gives the research the chance to select informants based on knowledge of the wider sample. Based on the preliminary findings in an earlier phase of the research project, 20 participants (10 male and 10 female) were
selected, representing different migration trajectories in the mobility typology developed from the survey data. Most of the interviews were undertaken with the individual via the internet (apart from the five face-to-face interviews during the Spring Festival). The interviews were conducted in Chinese and lasted from one hour to three hours; most were around two hours (corresponding to about 20,000 Chinese characters in length). The biographical interview consists of two phases: self-structured biographical narration by the participants in the first phase, and a questioning phase during which the researcher asks questions regarding participants' narratives as well as the research topics. The style of the self-structured biographical narration in the first phase is completely open and free, with no frame by the researcher and no interruption by questions. In the second phase, other than narrative-generating questions, the researcher designs an interview schedule, addressing questions on participants’ experiences and perceptions of migration and transition within the biographical context.

3.4 Measures and analytical procedures

There is a multi-layered spatial/administrative system and regionally differentiated economic environment in China. Historically, there is a remarkable degree of continuity in the rigid and hierarchical system of territorial administration in China. The administrative integrity is consciously constructed and maintained through “communications circles”: “once a territorial unit of government has been created at any level, it generates interactions among and between parts of the political system and elements of the social, cultural and economic environment” (Fitzgerald, 2002, p.13). The territorial structure based on the administrative levels of different constituent spatial units continues to be rigid and hierarchical in reform era. China's space economy continues to be governed administratively: the administrative level of a territorial unit of administration strongly impacts local economic development (Ma, 2005). Despite contemporary cross-border interaction and integration, there are administratively contrived barriers to the free flow of goods, services, capital and people across boundaries. For instance, hukou is a huge barrier to permanent settlement, though educated
young people are assumed to migrate on a more permanent basis. The administrative level as an analytical prism is thus of critical significance to the understanding of young people’s spatial mobility.

Drawing on the life-history survey data, Chapter Four will use the administrative level as an analytical prism for identifying different migration types and mapping the spatial patterns of educated young adults’ mobility over time. Migration in this research is defined as the movement of people across geopolitical boundaries for at least three months, being either non-hukou migration (moving without household registration status changed) or hukou migration (moving with household registration status changed). To be specific, overseas migration refers to moving out of Mainland China. Migration to Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan is also categorised as overseas migration in this regard, considering that an official document (an exit visa as well as an entry visa) is needed for entering these areas from Mainland China. Inter-provincial migration refers to moving out of Anhui Province. As mentioned earlier, Chaohu in this research refers to the former prefecture-level Chaohu City, which included Juchao District, Lujiang County, Hanshan County, Hexian County, and Wuwei County. That is, moving back to either Juchao District or the four counties is considered as return migration. Moving out of this study area but within Anhui Province is categorised as intra-provincial migration.

Chapter Five will also use the survey data to capture and analyse forms of place attachment and belonging. The scale of place attachment in this study comprises six components: Affiliation, Belonging, Responsibility, Concern, Security, and Pride (Appendix B-1). The Affiliation component of place attachment refers to the extent to which an individual perceives himself or herself as being affiliated with or connected with the place. The component Belonging reflects the state in which an individual regards himself or herself as being a part of the place. The component Responsibility asks for the perceived obligation towards the place. Concern is an expression of individuals’ active interest and attention to the place. Security reflects the significance of the place for the sense of being protected against external or internal threat. The Pride component refers to the feeling of pleasure derived from relating to the place. Each of the items has been used in various measures of place attachment, as reviewed in Chapter Two. In this sense,
the scale in this research is built on previous measurement efforts, although it does not adopt the full measure of place attachment designed by others. Participants are asked to respond to six questions concerning their attachment to the native place and the destination place (if the place of residence is not Chaohu). The researcher uses “place” (difang) in the questions to allow for variations, instead of expression of places on specific scales, such as city, county or town. The items are rated on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Negatively worded items are reversed scored prior to the analysis.

Factor analysis is used to determine the validity of the attachment scale. The first step is to decide upon the final scale items. The entire items are factor analysed via maximum likelihood (ML) extraction method, instead of the more popular one, principal component analysis (PCA). ML does not inflate the variance estimates and thus produces more generalizable and reproducible results (Costello et al., 2005). Confirmatory factor analysis is then conducted to assess the construct validity. Following factor analysis, the two-step cluster method developed by SPSS is used. Different from the widely used clustering algorithms, e.g., k-means clustering and hierarchical clustering, the number of clusters is automatically found in two-step clustering procedure. This generates four types of migrants and three types of returnees from the sample. Subsequent analyses are performed to understand what kinds of individuals constitute each of the seven groups. The study first examines the socio-demographic variables to investigate whether the seven clusters could be characterised by socio-demographic characteristics, then looks at whether the identified clusters also differ on life satisfaction variables.

The case-oriented comparative approach will be adopted in Chapter Six to analyse participants’ biographical narratives. The biographical approach is bound up with a theorisation of the role of structure and agency in migration. Drawing on Giddens’ (1984) idea of agency operating at different levels of consciousness, Halfacree and Boyle (1993) considers influences on migration decisions not only at the discursive level, which is actively thought about, but also at the ‘taken-for-granted’ level or ‘practical consciousness’. By comparing and contrasting different cases, case analyses can reconstruct, on the one hand, “the structural processes in which orientations and action patterns develop and change”, and on the other hand, “the variety of typical ‘answers’ to a specific ‘problem’ in a
specific social and historical context” (Breckner, 2007, p.117). Breckner (2007) has also argued that in contrast to quantitative approaches, case-based patterns constructed from the complexity of empirical processes in qualitative research are relevant to its structuring impact in a specific social field, that is, its representational potential does not necessarily depend on the pattern’s frequency of occurrence.
4 Spatial Mobility

Drawing on original data from the life-history survey, this chapter aims to explore and understand the spatial mobility of educated young people in their early adulthood by analysing their migration pathways from home to university and onwards to the current places of residence. Based on the administrative level or geographical scope of different spatial units, I distinguish four types of migration – return migration, intra-provincial migration, inter-provincial migration, and overseas migration.

Table 4.1 Sample profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (mean)</td>
<td>25.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male)</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>56.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous hukou type (urban)</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The only child (yes)</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCP (yes)</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>associate*</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bachelor (non-211)</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bachelor (211)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>master or doctorate</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARITAL STATUS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>single</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a relationship</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>married</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * “associate” here refers to tertiary vocational education qualifications.

The average age of the sample of 274 respondents is about 26 years old. Approximately half of the sample originates from the urban area. 56.6 per cent are male. 36 per cent are the only child of the family. 30 per cent have tertiary vocational education qualifications; 35 per cent have bachelor degrees from non-
211 project universities and 8 per cent from 211 project universities\(^5\); and 27 per cent have master or doctoral degrees. In terms of marital status, half are single, 30 per cent in a relationship and 20 per cent married. Overall, the sample includes reasonable numbers in most categories for analysis.

### 4.1 The first move

Out-migration of young people is significantly negatively related to the number and the quality of colleges and universities in local areas (Tuckman, 1970). As mentioned in Chapter 3, there are only two colleges in Chaohu. The first move of departure from the home area corresponds with entering higher education; to many participants it is also their first move from the parental home.

About two thirds stay in Anhui to attend college or university while the rest leave Anhui for higher education (Table 4.2), which echoes the reality of college enrolment of graduates from Anhui Province. In terms of inter-provincial migration, the column-percentage for students who study at tertiary vocational education institutions or non-211 Project universities is 21.9 per cent and 29.5 per cent respectively, while it is 61.4 per cent for those who attend 211 Project universities. This suggests that students who pursue bachelor degrees at 211 Project universities are more likely to leave Anhui. However, the trend is reversed in intra-provincial migration: there are much higher column-percentages among students who study at tertiary vocational education institutions or non-211 Project universities than among those who attend 211 Project universities. In other words, students who pursue associate degrees or bachelor degrees at non-211 Project universities are more likely to move within Anhui. The result of cross-tabulation

\(^5\) 211 Project, initiated in 1995 by the Ministry of Education of PRC, is aimed at cultivating high-level elites. Of 1700 standard institutions of higher education in China, 211 Project universities constitute only 6 percent. However, they take on the responsibility of training 4/5 of doctoral students, 2/3 of graduate students, 1/2 of students abroad and 1/3 of undergraduates. Also, they offer 85 percent of the State's key subjects, hold 96 percent of the State's key laboratories, and utilise 70 percent of scientific research funding. [http://english.people.com.cn/90001/6381319.html](http://english.people.com.cn/90001/6381319.html)
shows a moderately strong association exists between university ranking level of first degree and migration type of first move.

**Table 4.2 Cross-tabulation: first degree * first move**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>first degree</th>
<th>associate (non-211)</th>
<th>bachelor (211)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>first move</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inter-provincial</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>migration</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intra-provincial</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>migration</td>
<td>78.1%</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Cramer’s V is used to measure the association, since this cross-tabulation involves a nominal variable and an ordinal variable with more than two categories. Cramer’s V = 0.288, Sig. = 0.000

Young adults attending colleges and universities of different ranking levels are largely influenced by their academic achievement. This, then, raises the question: why are academically gifted students prone to leave Anhui whereas those academically less-gifted are more inclined to stay? This pattern is determined by China’s university and college admission scheme and enrolment process as well as the distribution of universities and colleges. As a result of centralised assignment of admission quotas - each province is assigned a fixed number, young people from different provinces have unequal access to universities and colleges. Generally, universities and colleges extensively recruit students from the local province, and the situation is most prominent in tertiary vocational education institutions. Also, the one-way enrolment process denies graduates’ freedom of multiple choices and assigns each graduate to no more than one college. Besides, higher education institutions are more likely to concentrate in metropolitan cities or capital cities. Economically or culturally deprived areas have less universities, let alone quality universities. In contrast with cities like Beijing (26), Shanghai (10), Nanjing (8), Wuhan (7) and Xi’an (7), there are only three 211 Project universities in Anhui Province, two of which are dominated by science and
engineering fields. Under such circumstances, young people with higher academic achievement have limited options in the province and thus are prone to leave Anhui for quality higher education. In contrast, those academically less-gifted have fewer chances to enrol at colleges or universities outside Anhui and thus are more inclined to stay.

4.2 The current move

It is found in the survey that moving back and forth between different destinations is far more common than migration once and for all. Only 14 per cent of the sample migrate once, 38 per cent twice, 34 per cent three times, 10 per cent four times, and 4 per cent five times or more. It is thus feasible to examine the association between the initial move and the current move. According to the survey (Table 4.3), the current moves made by educated young adults are more likely to be outside Anhui or intra-province; only about one quarter of the current moves involves returnees. The column percentage for those who migrate inter-provincially at first move is 60.5 per cent while it is 27.9 per cent for those who migrate intra-provincially. This indicates that individuals who experience inter-provincial migration at their first move are more likely to move to places outside Anhui currently. However, the trend is reversed when we look at return migration and intra-provincial migration. In these two rows, there is a higher column percentage among those individuals who migrate within Anhui Province at first move, compared to those who leave Anhui at first move. This indicates that individuals who experience intra-provincial migration at their first move are more likely to become returnees or intra-provincial migrants at the current move. The value of Cramer’s V (0.322) shows a significant and strong association between the first move and the current move.
Table 4.3 Crosstabulation: first move * current move

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>first move</th>
<th>inter-provincial migration</th>
<th>intra-provincial migration</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>overseas or inter-provincial migration</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intra-provincial migration</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>current move</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intra-provincial migration</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>return migration</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Cramer's V is used to measure the association, since this cross-tabulation involves two nominal variables and one variable have more than two categories. Cramer's V = 0.322, Sig. = 0.000

It is not uncommon that young adults pursue a higher degree after graduation from the first program. In fact, in the sample this amounts to 36.4 per cent: some go for bachelor degrees when tertiary vocational education is complete (zhuan sheng ben); some continue their studies through alternate forms of higher education - self-taught and adult higher education; some seek master degrees and even doctorate degrees after undergraduate studies. It becomes reasonable to examine the association between final degree and current move. Comparing the column-percentages (Table 4.4), there are remarkable differences among overseas or inter-provincial migration and return migration. Individuals with bachelor degrees at 211 Project universities and individuals with master degrees or doctorate degrees (including those who are currently studying for the degrees) are more likely to leave Anhui. However, those individuals with tertiary vocational education qualifications or bachelor degrees from non-211 Project universities are much less likely to move outside Anhui. This echoes the pattern of inter-provincial migration at first move. The trend is reversed for returnees. Individuals with bachelor degrees at 211 Project universities and individuals with master degrees or doctorate degrees (including those who are currently studying for the degrees) are very unlikely to be returnees, compared with their peers. For intra-provincial migrants, there is not much of a difference. The result of cross-tabulation shows a moderately strong association exists between final degree and
current move: the more highly educated are more likely to move towards a larger geographical world; the less highly educated are more likely to be returnees.

### Table 4.4 Crosstabulation: final degree * current move

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>current move</th>
<th>final degree</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>associate (non-211)</td>
<td>bachelor (211)</td>
<td>bachelor (211)</td>
<td>master or doctorate</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overseas or inter-provincial migration</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intra-provincial migration</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>return migration</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Cramer's V is used to measure the association, since this crosstabulation involves a nominal variable and an ordinal variable and both have more than two categories. Cramer's V = 0.259, Sig. = 0.000

### 4.3 A typology of spatial mobility

The life-history survey captures rich data on respondents’ migration histories; the detailed migration trajectories in this sample can be found in Appendix A-1. Based on the nature of mobility between the first move and the current move, I aggregate and compress the thirty-two migration trajectories observed in the data into twelve migration trajectories, and further develop a topology of spatial mobility in the sample (Table 4.5). The number refers to migration type; the arrow indicates the sequence in which migrations occurred. For instance, someone who leaves Anhui then returns to Chaohu and finally settles elsewhere in Anhui is represented by the same sequence as someone who leaves Anhui and finally settles elsewhere in Anhui after a sojourn in another province or country; both are represented as 2→1. The plus symbol indicates migration more than once, which is used to make a distinction between those who migrate only once and those who move between places either intra-provincially or inter-provincially.
Table 4.5 From migration trajectories to a typology of spatial mobility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mobility Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stick-in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1+</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2+</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-entry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1→1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2→2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move-down</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1→0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2→0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2→1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move-up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1→2</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1→3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2→3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
0: return migration, 1: intra-provincial migration, 2: inter-provincial migration, 3: overseas migration;
→: the sequence in which migrations occur;
+: migration more than once.

A four-fold typology of spatial mobility provides a generalisation of spatial patterns for the migration trajectories observed in the entire sample: Stick-in, Re-entry, Move-down, and Move-up. Figure 4.1 illustrates this four-fold typology of spatial mobility. The assumption underlying Move-down and Move-up is that the higher the administrative level of spatial units that the individual moves across, the greater is the personal spatial mobility. Here I only concern the hierarchy between the country, the province, and the city, rather than the three-level hierarchy within city divisions as mentioned in Chapter 2. As argued in Chapter 3, the territorial structure based on the administrative levels of spatial units is rigid and hierarchical in China; the administrative integrity is consciously constructed and maintained. Among the administrative divisions in China, the provinces

6 Spatial mobility of young people presented here is not a closed but an open-ended process. Because these educated young people are highly mobile, coupled with the complexity of their transition to adulthood, some survey data became out-of-date when I re-interviewed them a few months later.
continue to play their historical role of institutionalising, rationalising, and differentiating the state within their territorial jurisdictions (Fitzgerald, 2002). Crossing provincial borders usually involves facing and addressing more obstacles (such as hukou) than crossing city borders within a province; in this sense, inter-provincial moves are considered “higher” than intra-provincial moves.

Figure 4.1 A four-fold typology of spatial mobility

Notes:
0: return migration, 1: intra-provincial migration, 2: inter-provincial

7 In acknowledging the role of provinces, it is also important to recognise that provinces are arbitrary administrative units with boundaries which may fail to match regional patterns of economic, social and cultural activities; meanwhile, the role the provinces is under challenge with the rise of cities in recent decades (Fitzgerald, 2002).
Stick-in (trajectories 1, 2, 1+, and 2+) represents a spatial mobility of movements without change in geographical scope of migration. Some individuals only migrate once for higher education and have not moved since then; others migrate at least twice but all the movements are within the geographical scope of first move. 32.0 per cent of respondents fall into the group. Individuals experience only either inter-provincial migration or intra-provincial migration within Anhui Province.

Re-entry (trajectories 1→1 and 2→2) represents spatial mobility of returning to the geographical scope of first movement, comprising migrants re-experiencing intra-provincial migration or inter-migration after first movement. In other words, young people in this cluster have experienced migration at least three times. The size of this type is smallest (13.4 per cent), and the size of re-entry to inter-provincial level is smaller than that to intra-provincial level.

Move-down (trajectories 2→1, 2→0, and 1→0) represents downward mobility of moving from a larger to a smaller geographical scope, comprising migrants moving from elsewhere in Anhui to Chaohu, and migrants moving from another province to Anhui or to Chaohu. This is the most prevalent spatial mobility (34.7 per cent) and the last trajectory (1→0) peaks among the ten migration trajectories (21.6 per cent). Generally young people with a master degree or above are least likely to follow this mobility.

Contrary to Move-down, Move-up (trajectories 1→2, 1→3, and 2→3) represents upward mobility of moving from a smaller to larger geographical scope. The size of move-up is much smaller than move-down, revealing the difficulty of moving and long-term migration to a larger geographical scope and the relative ease of moving to a smaller geographical scope. About 20 per cent can be classified as move-up migrants, comprising migrants moving from Anhui to other provinces and moving from Anhui or other provinces to a location overseas. Within this spatial mobility, the first trajectory is common among young people with all
education levels; the other two trajectories are most common among young people with urban *hukou* and a master degree or higher.

### 4.4 Migration and youth transitions

The survey provides detailed migration history information in terms of migration destinations, beginning and end of migration, and individuals’ activities for the duration. It allows us to relate migration to young people’s school-to-employment transition (see Table 4.6). It becomes evident that young adulthood migration is dominated by moves for higher education (318) and employment (174). Migration is also closely linked with job changes (95). The available data also reveals that educated young adults experience higher unemployment in the immediate post-graduation period (34).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.6 School-to-employment transition and migration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before move</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents in the sample have migrated 686 times in total, 19 for overseas migration, 316 for inter-provincial migration, 369 for intra-provincial migration, and 151 for return migration. Table 4.7 summaries respondents’ study/work status based on different types of migration. While pursuing higher education is mainly related to intra-provincial and inter-provincial migration, employment is linked with inter-provincial migration, intra-provincial migration, and return migration. The data shows that unemployed young adults often move back to the parental home in Chaohu, suggesting return migration is a common coping strategy during periods of instability (Sage, et al., 2013).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study/work status</th>
<th>Overseas migration</th>
<th>Inter-provincial migration</th>
<th>Intra-provincial migration</th>
<th>Return migration</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study (associate)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study (bachelor)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study (master/doctorate)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed (free at home)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed (looking for jobs)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work (internship)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work (work)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (1)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(23)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>855</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.5 Summary

The typology of spatial mobility presented here supports the notion that the migration process of educated young people is very dynamic and complex. Previous research (Faggian et al, 2006) draws attention to the first and the second migration of graduates and distinguishes five types of sequential migration behaviours. In this study I observe graduates’ migration behaviours for a longer period of time, locate migration and mobility in the territorial administrative framework, and aggregate diverse migration trajectories into four categories. The impact of geopolitical boundaries on migration and mobility becomes evident in the local, intra-provincial and inter-provincial relations in China. Some places, territories and scales are systematically privileged over others as sites for capital investment and development over the history of the People’s Republic. Urban areas have for a long time been privileged against rural areas. Reorganisation of administrative space begins during the reform era with the rise of cities, which has undermined historical patterns of the state’s territorial organisation based on provinces and counties (Fitzgerald, 2002). Though geographically close to the developed Yangtze River Delta, Anhui is not among the privileges of coastal provinces (Sun, 2002). Chaohu, the previous prefecture-level city, lags behind in
intra-provincial competitions and falls victim to the promotion of Hefei, Wuhu and Ma’anshan as the favoured cities.

The majority of educated young people who grew up in Chao move away; only about one quarter return and permanent return migration is even smaller. Temporary return journeys mainly happen when graduates look for jobs or prepare for examinations or become unemployed. The local employment opportunities and wage levels are powerful push factors in their departure choice. The situation is becoming even worse, because of the adjustment of administrative division, and further discourages educated young people to return permanently. About half move to first-tier cities, like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, or capital cities. Hefei as the provincial capital is privileged over other cities in Anhui with greater administrative power, fiscal resource and economic development. It is no surprise that Hefei is the most frequent destination of intra-provincial migration. But their migration trajectories are diversified: some remain in the city after first move or move from other cities within Anhui (stick-in); some leave and return (re-entry); and some move from other provinces (move-down). Central cities in coastal regions are the main destinations for inter-provincial migration. Their migration trajectories are varied as well: some stay in the city after first inter-provincial migration or move within the same province (stick-in); some leave and return to the province of first move (re-entry); and some move from other cities in Anhui (move-up). Under the rigid and hierarchical administration system and space economy, the spatial mobility of educated young people from peripheral areas of China is highly territorialised.
5 Place Attachment and Belonging

Since the work of human geographers in the 1970s (Tuan, 1974, 1977; Relph, 1976), social scientists have an established and growing interest in people’s bonds with places, which is evident in the studies on place attachment (Low and Altman, 1992; Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001) and place identity (Proshansky et al., 1983; Lalli, 1992; Cuba and Hummon, 1993). How important are places for people in the era of globalisation and increased mobility? When places seem to be homogeneous and people become increasingly mobile, one may question the significance of studies on place attachment. Early writers usually assume that a person’s attachment is rooted in a single permanent locality. Relph (1976), for instance, stresses the decline of place in modern society and claims that an authentic sense of place is being gradually overshadowed by placelessness. Tuan (1977) also considers nomads (e.g., hoboes, migrant workers, and merchant seamen) in modern society as rootless. Setting the discussion in the larger context of modernity, Williams and McIntyre (2001) argue that modernity has changed the way an individual experiences a place. More specifically, in the premodern era, local conditions and culture are predominant, with local identity prescribed; modernisation (including, among others, circulation of people, goods, and ideas) liberates the individual from constraints of local place (e.g., local ways of life, community mores, and parochial society), leading to freedom to contest the meanings people ascribe to both their immediate and more distant surroundings. The self-identity is actively and reflexively explored and constructed rather than passively given by the circumstances of birth and local culture.

During the past forty years, research on people-place relationships has been growing, with a sharp acceleration in the last decade (Lewicka, 2011a). A large volume of published studies have provided empirical evidences for the persistence of place attachment and identity as well as the compatibility of place attachment and identity with spatial and residential mobility. For example, Cuba and Hummon (1993) challenge the placelessness of modern American society and claim that migration does not preclude place identity. Giuliani et al. (2003) find that individuals with high residential mobility can develop attachment to different places of residence, and that attachment to previous places of residence can
coexist with attachment to the present place of residence. Drawing on results from surveys conducted in Italy during 1985-2000, Pollini (2005) concludes that modernisation and globalisation tend to transform place attachment and belonging instead of erase them. In a similar vein, Lewicka (2011b) asserts that intensive urbanisation, migration, and economic development change the form of place attachment: the active and self-conscious attachment replaces the traditional attachment. In a series of studies on place attachment and mobility, Gustafson (2001, 2006, and 2009) advances the understanding of the relationship between place attachment and mobility from a sociological perspective: the two relate to different sets of norms and ideas about socio-spatial existence as well as to different research traditions.

This chapter explores how geographic mobility is implicated in the process of bonding with place. By using the survey data, four types of migrants (Translocals, Departers, Aliens, and Settlers) and three types of returnees (the Trapped, the Bonded, and the Rooted) are classified. This research acknowledges the significance of traditional influence in people’s bonding with places, and meanwhile challenges the conservative view of seeing attachment/belonging to the homeland as universal and unconditioned. The findings also show that educated young migrants tend to have a greater desire to be integrated into the host city and they are more prone to be accepted by the new socio-spatial environment. Taken together, this study corroborates the idea that geographic mobility does not undermine place-based attachment/belonging, but tends to attenuate its intensity. Attachment/belonging is not necessarily limited to one single place; yet, attachment/belonging ascribed by birth still has advantage over that acquired by residence.

5.1 Place attachment: descriptive results

In the sample, 5 currently live outside Mainland China. Given the small size of overseas migrants, this research does not take into account this population. Thus a total of 269 participants are included in the analysis, encompassing 101 inter-provincial migrants, 97 intra-provincial migrants and 71 return migrants. Table
5.1 shows the responses for the six questions about attachment to the native place and to the destination place. 198 migrants and 70 returnees report their attachment to the native place while 198 migrants report their attachment to the destination place.

Table 5.1 Place attachments to native place and destination place (percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Belonging</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Security</th>
<th>Pride</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native place</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=268) strongly disagree</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongly agree</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination place (N=198) strongly disagree</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongly agree</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With respect to attachment to the native place, the positive response is 51 per cent for Affiliation, 69 per cent for Belonging, 24 per cent for Responsibility, 53 per cent for Concern, 62 per cent for Security, and 50 per cent for Pride. Overall, positive attachment to the place of birth is prevalent, as is apparent in Table 2. Of the six components the participants that shows the highest level is Belonging (3.85) and the last is Responsibility (3.12).

In regard to attachment to the destination place, the positive response is 39 per cent for Affiliation, 48 per cent for Belonging, 16 per cent for Responsibility, 40 per cent for Concern, 33 per cent for Security, and 32 per cent for Pride. Apparently, the positive responses are smaller in magnitude than those reported on attachment to the native place. The respondents largely express positive attachment or neutral attitude towards the place of residence. All scores fall above
the average except Responsibility. Of the six components the participants that show the highest level is Concern (3.33) and the last is Responsibility (2.86).

A gradation of intensity of place attachment is evident when the participants are sub-divided into different groups according to mobility (see Figure 5.1). Comparing the two groups of migrants, intra-provincial migrants report greater attachment to either the native place or the destination place than do inter-provincial migrants. Comparing migrants’ attachment to the two types of places, either inter-provincial migrants or intra-provincial migrants, bonds with the native place are stronger than those with the destination place in all cases. Regarding attachment to the current place of residence, the mean values are highest in the returnees group whereas inter-provincial migrants have the lowest mean values, with intra-provincial migrants in between. With reference to attachment to the native place, the difference is not very large. Surprisingly, the mean scores are highest among intra-provincial migrants in most cases (including Affiliation, Concern, Security, and Pride); returnees score lowest in Concern, Security, and Pride, but highest in Belonging and Responsibility.
Figure 5.1 Mean of place attachment among migrants and returnees

Note: For returnees, the native place and the destination place are identical; and hence, their values are equivalent.

5.2 Place attachment: its factorial structure

Cronbach’s alpha is used to check the internal consistency (Appendix B-2). A high level of internal consistency for the scale is found in attachment to the native place (alpha=0.841; standardised item alpha=0.847) as well as in attachment to the destination place (alpha=0.842; standardised item alpha=0.848). In both cases, the removal of any items, except Belonging, would result in a lower Cronbach’s
alpha. This may lead us to consider removing the item of Belonging for an increase in Cronbach's alpha. Also, with the exception of item Belonging, the item communalities are acceptable (ranging from 0.425 to 0.719, see Appendix B-3). Considering Cronbach's $\alpha$ and communalities, five items are kept from the initial scale and the item Belonging is dropped. For each of the two target places the scale yields one strong factor, explaining over half of the variance. Table 5.2 shows that the five indicators load positively on place attachment, with acceptably high factor loadings (ranging from 0.652 to 0.848). The item Concern has the strongest association with attachment to the native place while Security has the strongest association with attachment to the destination place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.2 The scale of place attachment: factor loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native Place (N=268)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To assess the construct validity, two models are examined in confirmatory factor analysis for each of the two target places. The hypothesised model assumes that the six indicators determine the underlying latent construct, while the revised model with five indicators excludes the item Belonging. The hypothesised and the revised models fit the sample data quite well; the revised model fits the data better than the hypothesised model (Appendix B-4). One can say that a sense of belonging is more often an indication of place identity. For instance, Proshansky et al. (1983) consider place belongingness as a narrower conception of place identity. In their analysis of place attachment and identity (Hernández et al., 2007; Vidal et al., 2010; Ruiz et al., 2011), feeling of belonging is one of the most representative aspects of place identity. Gustafson (2009) instead examines sense of territorial belonging itself rather than trying to relate it to place attachment or
identity. The analyses performed in this research yields a factorial structure in which absence of the item Belonging better explains observed responses. In this respect, future research on place attachment may consider discriminating between belonging and other affective bonds.

5.3 Attachment/Belonging: a typology

Following the factor analysis, factor scores are calculated separately for the two types of places by using maximum likelihood estimates. Bartlett scores more accurately reflect each case’s placement on the factor. In further analyses the factor scores will be used, reflecting the intensity of place attachment. On the other hand, the item Belonging is treated separately. Based on attachment and belonging, cluster analyses are then conducted for two sub-samples (inter- and intra-provincial migrants and returnees). Figure 5.2 shows the overall distributions and differences between clusters.

For the sub-sample of inter- and intra-provincial migrants, four variables – attachment to the native place, attachment to the destination place, belonging to the native place, and belonging to the destination place – are cluster-analysed. Four clusters are generated automatically as the best approximation of the distribution of the migrants group (Table 5.3): those high in attachment and belonging to both the native and destination place (Translocals); those low or negative in attachment and belonging to the native place (Departers); those low or negative in attachment and belonging to the destination place (Aliens); and those having median attachment and belonging to both the native and destination place (Settlers). The most frequent are Settlers and the least frequent are Aliens. The silhouette measure of cohesion and separation (between 0.2 and 0.5) indicates a fair cluster quality.
Figure 5.2 Cluster comparison

Note: For categorical variables (belonging), the dot indicates the most frequent category for each cluster; the size of the dot indicates the relative size of each cluster. For continuous variables (attachment), the square point marker and horizontal line indicate the median and interquartile range for each cluster.
Table 5.3 Classification of migrants and returnees by attachment and belonging (standardised mean value)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native place</th>
<th>Inter- and intra-provincial migrants</th>
<th>Returnees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translocals</td>
<td>Departors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>-0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>-1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the sub-sample of returnees, the native place and the destination place coincide; thus two variables – attachment to the native place, and belonging to the native place – are cluster-analysed. Three clusters are generated automatically as the best approximation of the distribution of the returnees group (Table 5.3): those negative in attachment and belonging to the native place (Trapped); those high in attachment and belonging to the native place (Rooted); and those having median attachment and belonging to the native place (Bonded). The most frequent are the Rooted and least frequent are the Bonded. The silhouette measure of cohesion and separation (larger than 0.5) indicates a good solution.

The four-fold pattern of migrants to some extent accords with that of Engbersen et al. (2013), who identify Bi-nationals, Circular Migrants, Settlement Migrants, and Footloose Migrants. Despite the differences in profiles, there are similarities in their attachment between Translocals/Settlers and Bi-national Migrants, between Aliens and Circular Migrants, and between Departors and Settlement Migrants. Yet we do not find in our sample the cluster of Footloose Migrants with weak attachment to both the native place and the destination place. This is not to deny the existence of placelessness, but to realise that placeless migrants may account for only a very small fraction. It seems that, in contemporary China, places continue to provide a significant locus of attachment for individuals. The typology of migrants and returnees can also be compared to those of Jamieson (2000), who describes degrees of attachment/detachment among young people in rural communities and identifies attached migrants, detached migrants, attached stayers, and detached stayers. The present finding confirms the association between...
migration and attachment, and further reveals a more complex pattern than that observed in the qualitative research.

**5.4 Attachment/Belonging and socio-demographic characteristics**

Table 5.4 provides the socio-demographic profile of each of the seven groups of participants in the sample. The migrants sub-sample does not show much difference among the four groups regarding gender, marriage status, only child, original *hukou*, and education. In terms of homeownership in the place of domicile, Settlers and Translocals have relatively higher homeownership rates than Departers and Aliens. Correlation analysis does yield a value of Cramer’s V = 0.196 (p = 0.056). 44 per cent of Settlers, 31 per cent of Translocals, 28 per cent of Departers, and 8 per cent of Aliens hold local *hukou*. Correlation analysis reveals a significant relationship: Cramer’s V = 0.270, p = 0.002. With respect to the mobility-related variables, there is no major difference in number of places migrated; however, inter-provincial migration is most frequent among Aliens and least frequent among Translocals. Correlation analysis confirms that migration type significantly differentiates the four groups: Cramer’s V = 0.184, p = 0.083. As for the returnees sub-sample, the proportion of only child as well as urban *hukou* is lower in the Bonded group. The Bonded also have the smallest rate of homeownership. Correlation analysis however does not yield significant results.

Closely related to the variable of mobility is that of residence length. Length of residence has been identified as an important predictor of place attachment: the longer people live in an area, the more likely they feel attached to it (Lalli, 1992; Hay, 1998; Gustafson, 2009). Yet it does not show statistical significance in this research. This is probably due to the relatively short length in the overall sample (shorter than ten years). Yet we do observe small variations among migrants, with longest length of residence among Translocals, shortest length among Aliens, and median length among Departers and Settlers.

Homeownership is found in earlier research to be a positive predictor (Mesch and Manor, 1998). However, this study demonstrates that homeownership could
counteract such an effect. Homeownership in the place of domicile is an import factor for the Translocals and the Settlers to form attachment/belonging to the destination place; in contrast, homeownership in the native place seems to constrain the Trapped and frustrate them to maintain local attachment/belonging.

Table 5.4 Socio-demographic characteristics and mobility variables by groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Inter- and intra-provincial migrants</th>
<th>Returnees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translocals</td>
<td>Departers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>married</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only child</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>original <em>hukou</em> (urban)</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education diploma</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bachelor</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>master or above</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>local homeownership</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(current place)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>local <em>hukou</em> (current place)</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monthly income</td>
<td>4653</td>
<td>4200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(RMB)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no. of places migrated</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>length of residence</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in current place (months)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>migration type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(inter-provincial)</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.5 Attachment/Belonging and life satisfaction

Figure 5.3 shows the patterns of satisfaction with life-domains among the two sub-samples. The scale of life satisfaction includes eight items, rated on a five-point scale from 1 for “very dissatisfied” to 5 for “very satisfied”. With regard to the migrants sub-sample, the Translocals express the highest satisfaction in all items except romance/marriage. The Departers in contrast display the lowest satisfaction in most items, with a negative response to satisfaction of economic
situation. The Aliens and Settlers hold median satisfaction scores, yet the former report the lowest satisfaction with leisure time and employment/study and the latter report the lowest satisfaction with living. To evaluate the differences among the four groups on life satisfaction, a Kruskal Wallis test is conducted. The results indicate that there are significant differences among the four groups in satisfaction with living ($\chi^2 (3, 198) = 8.205, p = .042$), leisure time ($\chi^2 (3, 198) = 6.659, p = .084$), relation with parents ($\chi^2 (3, 198) = 21.352, p = .000$), and friendship ($\chi^2 (3, 198) = 17.131, p = .001$).

Regarding the returnees sub-sample, the Rooted express the highest satisfaction in most items, with the exceptions of health. Contrastingly, the Trapped report the lowest satisfaction in all items. The Bonded in most cases are the in-betweeners, while they display the highest satisfaction with health. The Kruskal Wallis test reveals the existence of significant differences among the three groups in satisfaction with employment/study ($\chi^2 (2, 70) = 7.425, p = .024$), living ($\chi^2 (2, 70) = 11.675, p = .003$), leisure time ($\chi^2 (2, 70) = 9.562, p = .008$), and relation with parents ($\chi^2 (2, 70) = 4.988, p = .083$).

Consistent with previous research (Giuliani et al., 2003; Lewicka, 2011b), attachment and life satisfaction are mutually supporting. Migrants with strong attachment/belonging both to the native place and to the destination place (Translocals) express higher life satisfaction than those attached only to the native place (Aliens) or to the destination place (Departers). Returnees with strong attachment/belonging to the native place (the Rooted) express higher life satisfaction than those unattached or negatively attached (the Trapped). However, a question remains about the causal directions of the relationship: Does satisfaction contributes to attachment or vice versa?
Figure 5.3 Life satisfaction by groups (mean)
5.6 Summary

Is the traditional link between place and attachment/belonging being challenged by high mobility and mass migration? Existing empirical studies on place attachment of migrants in China have been conducted only on non-\textit{hukou} migrants in large cities. The emphasis on the destination place, however, has made it difficult to conceptualise the full relationship between individuals and places on the one hand, and on the other, conveyed the assumption that attachment to the native place is fixed and stable. Also, the heterogeneity of internal migrants in China has yet been adequately addressed. In response, I have tried to explore how geographic mobility is implicated in the process of bonding with place, with a specific focus on place attachment and belonging among educated young migrants and returnees. Based on attachment and belonging to the native place and the destination place, four types of migrants are found: Translocals, Departers, Aliens, and Settlers. Based on attachment and belonging to the native place, three groups of returnees are identified: the Trapped, the Bonded, and the Rooted. By combining the socio-demographic descriptions and life satisfaction measures, the following profiles of each of the four types of migrants and three categories of returnees can be built.

Translocals: Migrants with strong attachment and belonging to both the native and destination place. This cluster consists mainly of intra-provincial migrants. The proportions of local \textit{hukou} and local homeownership in the place of domicile are considerable among Translocals. They express highest satisfaction, especially with living, leisure time, relationship with parents, and friendship. Departers: Migrants with weak or negative attachment and belonging to the native place. The proportion of local \textit{hukou} in the place of domicile is not low among Departers, but that of local homeownership is very small. They display the lowest satisfaction, especially with living, relationship with parents, and friendship. Aliens: Migrants with weak or negative attachment and belonging to the destination place. This cluster consists mainly of inter-provincial migrants. The proportions of local \textit{hukou} and local homeownership in the place of domicile are significantly lower among Aliens than among other types of migrants. They have the lowest average monthly income among migrants. They report the lowest satisfaction with leisure
time and second lowest satisfaction with other items. Settlers: Migrants with median attachment and belonging to both the native and destination place. They have the greatest number of local *hukou* and local homeownership in the place of domicile. They could therefore be regarded as Settlers. They have the highest average monthly income. They report the second highest satisfaction in many cases but lowest satisfaction with living.

The Trapped: Returnees with weak or negative attachment and belonging to the native place. The proportion of local homeownership in the native place is highest among them. They may reasonably be labelled as the Trapped; and homeownership appears to confine them to the local place. The Trapped display the lowest satisfaction, especially with employment/study, living, leisure time, and relation with parents. The Bonded: Returnees with median attachment and belonging to the native place. This cluster consists mainly of non-only child who come from rural areas. The proportion of local homeownership in the native place is significantly lower among the Bonded than among other returnees. They also have the lowest average monthly income. Yet they report median life satisfaction to almost all items. The Rooted: Returnees with strong attachment and belonging to the native place. The proportion of only child who come from urban areas is highest among the Rooted. They have the highest average monthly income among returnees. They express the highest satisfaction, especially with employment/study, living, leisure time, and relation with parents.

Following Williams and McIntyre (2001), attachment and belonging to the destination place can be seen as a product of modernity, which has to be actively and reflexively explored and constructed. Attachment and belonging to the native place, in contrast, is a product of traditional influence, which is passively inherited at birth. Compared with that to the destination place, educated young adults exhibit relatively higher level of attachment and belonging to the native place. That is, attachment/belonging ascribed by birth, which may also be reflexively reconstructed along the route of mobility, still has advantage over attachment/belonging acquired by residence. Arguably, family ties play a special role in maintaining affective ties with the native place. It seems to us that today, at least in a peripheral area like Chaohu, the family still constitutes a great value for
the life of individuals, as demonstrated by the fact that among all life domains young adults are most satisfied with the relation with parents.

Yet, in acknowledging the significance of traditional influence in people’s bonding with places, we do not mean to accept the conservative view of seeing attachment and belonging to the homeland as universal and unconditioned. Though the majority feel they belong to the native place (69.0 per cent), the others have a neutral (19.8 per cent) or negative feeling (11.2 per cent). Degrees of attachment and detachment are found in either the migrants group or the returnees group, with the lowest level among Departers and the Trapped as well as the highest level among Translocals and the Rooted. Surprisingly, no obvious difference in socio-demographic characteristics is found between Departers and Translocals, or between the Trapped and the Rooted. However, this pattern of attachment/belonging is consistent with their life satisfaction: while Departers and the Trapped express the lowest satisfaction in many life domains, Translocals and the Rooted report highest the satisfaction. Being attached as migrants or returnees, there may be a qualitative difference between Translocals and the Rooted in their attachment and belonging to the native place. Similarly, being detached as migrants or returnees, a qualitative difference may also exist between Departers and the Trapped. Further qualitative work is necessary to more clearly understand this.

Regarding the destination place, varying degrees of attachment and detachment are also found among educated young migrants, with the lowest level among Aliens and the highest level among Translocals. While more intra-provincial migrants with local \textit{hukou} and local homeownership in the destination place make up the Translocals group, the Aliens group are marginal in the destination place in terms of local \textit{hukou} and local homeownership. Though some have the feeling of not belonging (21.2 per cent) and some are neutral (30.8 per cent), we do observe that quite a number of migrants feel they belong to the destination place (48.0 per cent). This finding can be compared to that of previous work (Qian et al., 2011; Qian and Zhu, 2014), further supporting the idea that educated young migrants tend to have a greater desire to be integrated into the host city, at the same time they are more prone to be accepted by the new socio-spatial environment than others.
At the theoretical level, the findings of the current research corroborate the ideas on the relationship between attachment/belonging and mobility in earlier studies (Giuliani et al., 2003; Pollini, 2005). First, geographic mobility does not undermine place-based attachment/belonging, but tends to attenuate its intensity. For instance, returnees are most attached to the current place of residence whereas inter-provincial migrants are least attached, with intra-provincial migrants in between. Also, intra-provincial migrants are more attached to either the native place or the destination place than are inter-provincial migrants. Second, attachment/belonging is not necessarily limited to one single place, which can be ascribed by birth or acquired by residence. The emotional significance of the destination place can be compatible with (e.g., Translocals, Settlers), or conflict with (e.g., Departers, Aliens) that of the native place. Third, in the contemporary era of increased mobility, attachment/belonging to a particular place varies among individuals. In fact, the educated young adults from the same place of birth display a diverse range of types of attachment/belonging to the native place and/or the destination place.
Biographical Narratives of Migration

This chapter adopts a biographical approach to examine educated young people’s migration and mobility, focusing on migration decision-making processes and migration aspirations. The underlying aim is to uncover (1) how young people experience mobility and exercise personal agency in their migration decision-making and (2) how mobility is shaped by, and shapes, their subjectivities (in terms of mobility aspiration and attitudes towards the home place). Specifically, I argue that, firstly, young people exercise agency in a differentiated and dynamic way and such agency in individual migration decision-making can only be understood when analysed within a biographical framework; secondly, how mobility is involved in ongoing processes of transforming the self must be contextualised within a biographical understanding.

This chapter draws mainly on the life-stories of four informants, supplemented by information gained from other informants. The four cases are selected to include a range of social background (in terms of gender, hukou, the Only Child, marriage status, education, family background) and to reflect the range of mobility patterns, i.e., move-down, re-entry, stick-in, and move-up (see Table 6.1). Based on the full transcription of the audiotapes, I will reconstruct the biographical cases, trying to understand how the chosen informants made migration decisions, what they experienced, and what meaning they gave to their experiences. All quotations included in this chapter are verbatim. Ellipsis dots are used to indicate the omissions that have been made to remove repetitions or to facilitate the readability of quotations. Words are sometimes added by the author in square brackets to clarify what the informant is referring to. The pseudonym X is sometimes adopted to avoid disclosing the real identity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Only Child</th>
<th>Original Hukou</th>
<th>Local Hukou</th>
<th>Marriage Status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Father's Education</th>
<th>First Move</th>
<th>Current Move</th>
<th>Mobility Pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yuan</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Senior high</td>
<td>Intra-provincial migration</td>
<td>Return migration</td>
<td>Move-down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>Junior high</td>
<td>Intra-provincial migration</td>
<td>Intra-provincial migration</td>
<td>Re-entry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhao</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Senior high</td>
<td>Inter-provincial migration</td>
<td>Inter-provincial migration</td>
<td>Stick-in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fang</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Inter-provincial migration</td>
<td>Overseas migration</td>
<td>Move-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.1 Migration trajectories: mapping migration in time and space

The target group of this research is a highly specific age group, characterised by emigration for higher education in their late teens and re-migration or return migration after graduation in their twenties. Migration in young adulthood is likely to be intertwined with key life-course events such as starting university/college, graduation/pursuing a higher degree, obtaining employment/becoming unemployed/change of job, relationship formation/breakdown, family formation, child-bearing, illness, and so forth. Young people’s migration decisions are thus usually interlocked with other decisions during the transition to adulthood.

Before proceeding to the further analysis, migration trajectories of the four informants and the critical life events (Thomson et al., 2002), as identified from informants’ narratives, are presented (Figure 6.1). The X-axis represents time and the Y-axis represents space. The place of origin, Chaohu, is placed at the bottom of the Y-axis. Destinations of overseas migration are placed at the top, as the ‘highest’. Accordingly, destinations of intra-provincial migration are placed at a lower level; destinations of inter-provincial migration are placed at a higher level. The shadow below the X-axis depicts the passage of years in different places. The marker plotted along the X-axis depicts the historical time of each critical life event. The current move of the four cases represents return migration, intra-provincial migration, inter-provincial migration, and overseas migration. Also, the four cases represent four different mobility patterns, i.e., move-down, re-entry, stick-in, and move-up respectively.
Figure 6.1 Migration trajectories and critical life events
Yuan left Chaohu to Hefei, the capital city of Anhui Province, for higher education. In the very first year she entered the university, her elder brother suffered a sudden stroke at 25, which left him half paralysed. Soon afterward she met her boyfriend on campus, who came from another city in Anhui Province. After graduation, Yuan stayed in Hefei and became a contracted teacher in a college. Her boyfriend also got a job in Hefei, but frequently travelled on business. Each trip was far away from Hefei and lasted for months. About one year later, Yuan succeeded in the civil servant examination and moved back to Chaohu. Two months after her return, Chaohu was split. Another two years later, Yuan and her boyfriend were married and lived separately in Chaohu and Hefei. Shortly she got pregnant.

Wang left Chaohu to study at a college in Hefei. After graduation, he worked in a private company in Hefei for one and a half years. Later Wang moved to Shenzhen and worked in another private company for nine months. When he returned to Chaohu in the Chinese New Year, his parents arranged a blind date for him. The girl was from the same town and worked in Beijing. Wang migrated to Beijing after the Spring Festival. After a two-month relationship, they broke up. Wang worked in a private company in Beijing for one year and a half. During this period, his only cousin died in an accident. He recently re-migrated to Hefei, trying to find employment as well as a marriage partner.

Zhao left Anhui to study as an undergraduate at a 211 Project university in Wuhan, Hubei. He changed his major in the first year. After graduation he worked as a teacher and obtained a local hukou in Zhejiang. He was single and lived with colleagues in a rented apartment, although he had bought a commodity housing unit in the local place.

Fang left Anhui to spend four years at a 211 Project university in Xi’an, Shaanxi. After a short-term internship in Beijing, she continued postgraduate studies at a 211 Project university in Nanjing, Jiangsu. During this period, the person she liked went abroad. Also, she caught an acute illness and was left tinnitus or ringing in the ear. After graduation from the graduate school, Fang worked in a state-owned enterprise in Nanjing. One year later, she resigned and recently began her new life in London as a master student.
6.2 Taking control of their lives? Agency in migration decision-making

In this section I take a biographical approach to understand young people’s migration decision-making. The four participants have made fifteen migration decisions (including the decision not to migrate) and gained eleven migration experiences. The case study evidence will be organised in chronological order, migration decision-making for higher education first, then migration decision-making after graduation, and later re-migration decision-making. In the comparison of different migration decision-making in the four different migration trajectories, I will consider how these moments may reflect socially structured patterns, how agency interplays with social structure, and how agency operates in a differentiated and dynamic way.

6.2.1 Migration decision-making for higher education

The narratives suggest that young people tend to unintentionally assume parental involvement in the decision-making process (see Extract 6.1). Yuan’s narrative on how she chose university in the circumstance of parental advice being unavailable is representative of those whose parents do not have university education. The older generation has limited chance to go to university because of the social and educational conditions of the 1970s. Those parents with relatively low education level could hardly provide academic supervision on the child’s study and give advice on university choices. Parental advice being unavailable, both Yuan and Wang chose universities at Hefei and thus migrated intra-provincially. Yet there are structural conditions underlying their choices. The two with varying levels of academic accomplishment have totally different options. As discussed in earlier chapter, because of China’s university and college admission scheme and enrolment process as well as the spatial distribution of universities and colleges, young people with higher academic achievement have some but limited university options in Anhui Province while those academically less-gifted have fewer chances to enrol at colleges outside Anhui. Having little idea about alternatives outside Anhui, Yuan purposely selected a university in Anhui for the sake of caution. Indeed, for high academic achievers, staying in Anhui usually represents a safe option since the universities extensively
recruit students from the local province. Yuan’s choice of staying in Anhui can be regarded as an ill-informed and conservative decision. Wang’s choice is more constrained by the structural conditions. With very restricted alternatives outside Anhui, Wang chose the city first and the college second. A main motivation behind his choice of Hefei is the attachment to parents and Chaohu. His choice of college seems rather arbitrary.

Contrary to Yuan, another two high academic achievers, Zhao and Fang, moved outside Anhui to pursue higher education. Different from Yuan and Wang, they made their migration decisions with direct or indirect parental assistance. Among the interviewees, some young adults, as in the case of Fang, conceded that the decisions were directly made by their well-educated parents; some, like Zhao, reported that the propositions of parents or others greatly limited the scope for university choices; others spoke of their own university choices being changed by the parents. Many interviewees admitted that they knew little about the university and the destination place. This is particularly the case for students choosing to study outside the immediate region (East China). For those who had dispositions on migration destinations, it was imaginative geographies generated through books, TV, radio, etc. Zhao and Fang reflected on the decision-making process and talked about the neglect of their interests and life projects. This view is commonly expressed among other interviewees. Indeed, the primary and secondary education in China prioritises students’ academic performance over any other interest and ability. Also, both schools and parents fail to prepare young people to become independent and take on decision-making roles. The reality turns to be that young people know little about university education as well as their interests and life projects and have no clear idea about entering a particular university.

**Extract 6.1 Narratives on first migration decision-making**

Yuan: (migration to Hefei, Anhui) My parents are not intellectuals. They did not educate me [in academic aspects] when I grew up. When I chose universities, unlike other parents, they could not give me any advice. So I searched information by myself and decided what kinds of universities were attainable… I had no idea about the exact university. X University was a safe choice; I was sure I could make it… Besides, Hefei is not far away from home. Universities
outside Anhui Province are difficult. X University has a large enrolment [in Anhui Province].

Wang: (migration to Hefei, Anhui) I felt in my heart, how to say it, I could not be separated from my parents. The most ideal place, or the most suitable place, was Hefei. Wuhu and Ma’an’anshan were also considered. The most important reason was that Hefei is nearest [to my home]. Besides, I had relatives in Hefei, though I had never been to their home. From my parents’ point of view, I could look to the relatives in case of emergency. So the most suitable place was Hefei. I did not think too much, choosing a college arbitrarily.

Zhao: (migration to Wuhan, Hubei) I did not know how to choose a university. The only way was that my uncle, who worked in the Education Bureau, looked to an acquaintance for advice. He recommended two universities after screening… I felt, during the process, I did not completely follow my interests. No training was available on this aspect. Neither the teachers nor the parents consciously developed your interests, which would be turned into career ideas. So choosing universities was relatively blind; I just selectively took some advice.

Fang: (migration to Xi’an, Shaanxi) X University is a key university. Its admission score is not very high. You will be admitted if you choose it. So it was for safe, for the admission. I knew nothing, that is, I did not have an intense intention, or a plan about my life… It was mainly my parents who made the decision. I felt I just accepted it… The parents hope you enter a key university, so the first priority is the university quality. Distance is not that important.

Significantly, the above narratives on the first migration decision-making suggest overwhelmingly that young people (aged 18 to 19) do not actively form dispositions towards certain educational and migration choices. Even if some have dispositions, they concede that such dispositions are suppositional. The final decisions are to a great extent influenced by the parents, if the parents have relatively higher education level. Appropriate guidance from the parents being unavailable, young people are forced into premature independence and to make a serious decision by themselves, which in many cases is ill-informed, blind, thoughtless, arbitrary, or conservative. Decision-making in this context does not imply agency; at most it constitute a form of pseudo-agency. Following Jones (2002), this research advocates empowering young people through information and research: first, providing young people with access to accurate and up-to-date information so that they can make informed choices; second, involving young people in the research process so as to increase their knowledge of decision-making structures.
6.2.2 Migration decision-making after graduation

After graduation from the first degree, young people may experience a range of transition strands: education, employment, relationships, housing, etc. Those interviewees who fell in love on campus agreed that the uncertainty of life after graduation was a big challenge in relationships, rendering any migration decision-making more stressful. Of the four cases, Yuan was the only one in a romantic relationship (see Extract 6.2). In order to maintain the relationship, Yuan decided to stay in Hefei. In fact, it was not an individual decision but made by the two. However, they did not have a detailed and long-term plan: “we didn’t think too much about the future; we just wanted to be together.” As graduates from a recognised university in the local area, they had high competence beliefs (Flammer, 1997) and were optimistic about employment prospects, although they had very limited knowledge about the job market and had no concrete career plan. Yuan’s career choice was influenced by a relative who advised her to become a tenured teacher; Yuan herself did not have a high intrinsic career motivation. Wang had a clear idea that he would not try to upgrade himself from a college student to a university student. Although he chose to work after graduation, he did not have a career plan or prepare himself for future employment. The narrative suggests that it needs to be interpreted as a reaction to perceived vulnerability; he perceived the employment prospect of his major to be unfavourable for the newly graduated. Wang’s choice of Hefei could be seen as inertia to stay even though he did not like the city and the local labour market situation was unfavourable.

The interviews with high academic achievers revealed that their parents had rather high aspirations for the adult children in academic careers and wanted to see the children obtaining a postgraduate degree. This also applies to the cases of Zhao and Fang (see Extract 2). Because of their academic performance at university, both Zhao and Fang got the opportunity to be recommended to graduate school with exemption from examinations. They both voluntarily gave up the opportunity of going to the graduate school of their universities. Recognising a master degree in his major would not widen the career opportunities, Zhao defied his father’s will and chose to work instead of pursuing a higher degree. Fang had an aspiration for an advanced degree.
and did not consider employment upon graduation. There was a disagreement between Zhao and her family on the choice of graduate school. While the family were more conservative and preferred the adult child staying in the original university to taking risks, Zhao was more ambitious and determined to “jump out of the university and go to a better one”. Zhao and Fang chose to move on after graduation. The location choices of their second migration were pragmatic: for Zhao, the economic development was a major concern; the major ranking of the university was most important to Fang. At the same time, the consideration of distance led them both to select a place close to the hometown.

**Extract 6.2 Narratives on migration decision-making after graduation**

Yuan: (stay in Hefei, Anhui) We [my boyfriend and I] talked about [the plan after graduation] and decided to stay in Hefei. A relative in the Education Bureau in Hefei advised me to take examinations for tenured teachers and to stay in Hefei. I thought…That’s what I planned. I was confident. He [my boyfriend] thought it was not difficult for him to find a job in Hefei. So that’s our plan. But it was very preliminary: we didn’t think too much about the future; we just wanted to be together [after graduation].

Wang: (stay in Hefei, Anhui) I graduated in 2009. From 2009 to 2011, it was my first job, [which was] in Hefei. It was because of several reasons. I did not like Hefei; the wage was too low and the consumption level was relatively high. I just graduated. [Graduates] of my major were not easy to make a career. It was difficult for the newly graduated.

Zhao: (migration to Jiaxing, Zhejiang) If I seized the opportunity of recommendation [exemption from examinations] to go to graduate school, I would still become a teacher after graduation. I would rather save the time and work. I could have salary and lighten the parents’ [financial] burden, and accumulate work experience. I thought it was a good decision. … My father wished me to become a master, then a PhD. His persuasion was not strong enough. I chose to work finally. … My first choice was Shenzhen. Because wage in Shenzhen is the highest, as high as [RMB] 100,000 [a year]. Also, it is modern. It is definitely one of the best choices. Why did I choose Zhejiang? It’s because Zhejiang is close to Anhui. Also Zhejiang is an economically developed area.

Fang: (migration to Nanjing, Jiangsu) I gave up the opportunity of recommendation to graduate school. All my family members, including the relatives, were against it. They were afraid I would fail. I studied in an engineering university; liberal arts were not its strength. The majors of liberal arts were very limited. I wanted to go to a better university. In my eyes, if I accepted the recommendation opportunity and stayed another three years in the
same university to be a postgraduate, it was meaningless. So I had a strong
aspiration: I must jump out of the university and go to a better one. Despite the
risks, I decided to give it a try... I also applied overseas universities. It was
suggested by my family. If I failed, I could consider overseas universities. It
was leaving room for manoeuvre. In January, I was dead beat and complained
tearfully to my mother. She encouraged me, “Just try your best. If you failed
and wanted to try in the next year, then try.” So it was not too bad. I could try
again if I failed. [I would] never give up. I did not consider getting a job at that
time. [Interviewer: Why the university in Nanjing?] It was because of the major
ranking. The top three were too difficult for me. I selected the fourth or fifth or
so. It may be a little higher above my ability, but I could reach it if I make some
efforts. That’s it. Needless to say, Nanjing is close to home [place].

Each of the four young people can be seen as standing at a transition point in relation
to independence. Dependence and independence are seen by young people mainly in
relation to their parents (Jones, 2002). Different from the first migration decisions,
they begun to attribute to themselves – rather than their parents – a much more central
role in the second migration decision making. Leaving home is associated with
greater autonomy, yet the parental influence in young people’s lives does not vanish
with their departure from the parental home. For Zhao and Fang, their parents had a
saying in their second migration decision making. Also, family support, financial and
moral, was a central resource for Fang: the family was able to provide financial
support during her master studies in China or overseas; her mother provided strong
moral support during her preparation for the examinations.

The four participants exercise agency in differentiated ways. Compared with Wang
and Yuan, Zhao and Fang took a more proactive role, They consciously analysed the
situation and choices ahead, assessed the consequences of each choice, made their
own decisions despite external interference from the parents, and prepared to take
responsibility for their own actions. Yet such different individual responses need to be
understood in relation to structural conditions and their life chances. Their ability to
respond to the environment is shaped by the social and cultural resources that they
could mobilise. Zhao and Fang had more control over their future by virtue of their
qualifications and family support. Zhao was well settled into a career path because of
his qualification; Fang had more choices with family support. In contrast, Yuan’s and
Wang’s circumstances were relatively beyond their control. Yuan’s qualification did
not provide a career path; Wang had very limited autonomy because of lack of
choices. In fact, among the four, Wang as a college graduate was particularly vulnerable in the labour market. The training did not only make him less competitive than university undergraduates but also lowered his aspirations.

Despite the lack of career goals and strategies to achieve them, Yuan and Wang got jobs related to their major. Some other interviewees in this study were less fortunate; they had difficulties in finding major-related employment, or took temporary jobs, or became unemployed shortly after graduation. Many graduates were really not sure what career to pursue upon graduation; in fact they were less likely to have predictable career paths to follow. The educational outcome became increasingly uncertain after 2003 because of the expansion of higher educational enrolment since 1999 and the establishment of a market-oriented employment system. This was particularly the case for graduates of some majors and universities, who were unlikely to have a conduit into specific labour market. For example, one interviewee with a bachelor degree from the administration management major reported that his classmates were faced with severe employment problems and the vast majority worked in jobs unrelated to the major. Indeed, the educational expansion has not equalised life chances. Recent research (Bao and Li, 2012) has confirmed that graduates’ life chances are highly influenced by structural difference, e.g., gender, hukou and family of origin. More specifically, female graduates, those from rural origin or poor family background are more likely to be unemployed after graduation.

6.2.3 Re-migration decision-making

As shown in the previous chapter, migration of educated young people in most cases is not a once-and-for-all act; about half have migrated more than twice. Even after having entered the labour market, young adults are still likely to re-migrate, either move back or move on. One explanation stresses the logic of labour market and sees migration as a selective process, that is, the successful migrants are less likely to re-migrate while the individuals who have multiple migration experiences are composed of unsuccessful migrants (Bailey, 1993). From the perspective of migrants, this phenomenon can be explained in that migration is a learned strategy, that is, migrants
with migration histories learn to respond efficiently to labour market signals (Bailey, 1993).

The narratives on re-migration decision-making do illustrate that young adults react to the unfavourable employment conditions by making a corrective move (see Extract 6.3). For example, Wang’s decision to move to large cities was the outcome of the desire to leave the employment environment which in his eyes was “a place for the elderly, not the young”. Wang’s migration to Beijing also arose from his resignation in Shenzhen. As for Yuan, despite the fact that her return migration was mainly influenced by her parents, her migration decision was also linked to employment, which was induced by a favourable employment chance in Chaohu and also affected by her unfavourable employment experience in Hefei. In Fang’s case, although overseas migration was mainly motivated by her aspiration, it was partly because “the job was not very satisfactory”. Regarding Zhao’s decision to stay in Zhejiang, it was also connected with occupation choice. He preferred his current occupation as a teacher to a civil servant and hence his stay decision took account of the success of the original migration decision.

Yet, the narratives of participants in this study suggest that young people’s re-migration decisions are not just the outcome of economic calculation, but also include a wide range of motivations. Their migration motivations include but are not limited to the following: migration as going places, migration as settling down, migration as a road to freedom, migration as an expression of filial obligation, etc. As Fielding (1992) argues, only the insiders’ understanding (e.g., ethnographic research) can reveal the subtler details of migration experience and migration decision. Indeed, the biographical approach employed in this study allows migrants to reveal the multiple factors influencing their re-migration decision-making.

Notably, the family has a critical influence upon re-migration decision-making. One important way the family affects the adult child’s mobility is to propose norms and values and make explicit its expectation for the young person’s future – where to settle down, what career path to follow, when to start a family. This is epitomised in the following interview excerpts:

The life my father planned for me is like this: finding a secure job, living close to the parents, and marring another civil servant in Chaohu. (Yuan)
They said to me: “Come back. Don’t float outside. See some girls. Work in Hefei. Don’t go outside anymore.” (Wang)

The following narratives reveal three different parental expectations on young adults’ mobility, ranging from those who expect the child to return to Chaohu (Yuan’s father), or those who prefer the child to migrate intra-provincially (Zhao’s father; Wang’s parents), to those who wish the child to move out of Anhui Province (Fang’s parents). With regard to adult children’s occupation, parents have three different attitudes. While for some the parents have a clear career plan for the adult child (Zhao’s father; Yuan’s father), for others it is only a general career aspiration (Fang’s family), while for still others the parents have no views about the adult child’s occupation (Wang’s parents). It is worth noting that parental expectations on children’s occupation are not gender-neutral. They prefer the daughters to take up secure and easy jobs (Yuan’s parents) or less challenging jobs (Fang’s parents).

In recent years, educated young people have shown an increasing interest in becoming civil servants as the employment market gets more competitive. The cases of Yuan and Zhao suggest that to get into “the establishment” (tizhinei) is not an individual decision but a family decision. The parental generation, as Zhao said, has a faith in “the establishment”, which used to be a good outlet for their generation. From the perspective of the parents, “iron rice bowl”, which means a stable and easier job, is still a good choice for their younger generation. Another consideration is that the family can maintain a short physical distance if the child becomes a local civil servant. Both Yuan and Zhao had parental pressure to become a civil servant at the home place, which placed constraints on their mobility and occupation choice. The two young adults both responded to parental pressure by adopting a perfunctory attitude. Yuan just tried once for the examination without adequate preparation and did not expect a successful outcome. In this way Yuan offered her contingency beliefs (Flammer, 1997) and attributed her success to fate. Her return migration was thus more of a response to contingency than part of any plan.

The impact of parental influence changes over time as the adult children adjust to the changing socio-spatial conditions and personal circumstances. Young people may resist, or surrender to, or agree with their parents’ will during the process. For instance, Wang resisted parental pressure to move to Shenzhen, later agreed with the parents half-heartedly to move to Beijing, and finally surrendered to the parents’ will
to move back to Hefei. Without adequate information about the labour market in Shenzhen and substantive help from others, Wang did not have a clear and detailed plan about his career and life in Shenzhen. Although it was a less thoughtful decision, Wang sought to change the environment by moving up to an unfamiliar world. Wang had to negotiate with the parents about his inter-provincial migration because he “had never left them to go far away”. As young people move through their lives, they often strive for individual autonomy from parental authority. Wang particularly emphasised his gender identity: “But I am a guy. A guy would not heed what the parents say when he grows up.” In these ways Wang can be understood as exercising considerable agency in his first inter-provincial migration decision making. Wang’s migration to Beijing was not an outcome of any plan, but rather a result of an unexpected contingency. The parents forced Wang to Beijing with special consideration for romantic relationships; Wang finally agreed with the parent’s will for a different purpose. It was a hasty and less thoughtful decision. By framing his statement that “Heading for Beijing was not entirely because of my parents; I had my own considerations”, he became less passive. The motivation behind Wang’s move was to go some places, as he put it: “go north after a south journey”.

Wang’s re-entry to Hefei reflects the impact of age norms, that is, social norms about the appropriate timing of certain life events in important life transitions (Billari and Liefbroer, 2007). Wang perceived the age 30 as a critical point in marriage timing and wished to get married before 30. Wang’s re-entry to Hefei illustrated how social norms are transmitted from one generation to the next through the parental guidance and regulation on the adult children’s life transitions. As he explained, the most influential external pressure came from the family, who persistently pushed Wang for marriage. Peers reinforce such pressure, as Wang said: “Previously I kept myself out of the affair. But now, honestly, I begin to be worrying. I do worry. Why? Because people around me, including my friends and schoolmates…” Wang himself internalised the age norms, as he identified himself as “a traditional person”. He decided to be “on time” as he got close to 30. At the same time, he made an assertion of “I have no choice. I am forced”. Such statements demonstrated Wang’s struggle and negotiation with the notion that he should establish a family as soon as possible. Wang’s case illustrates the interplay of structural forces and personal attempts to control his life as well as the process of internalisation of external influences.
Fang surrendered to parental will to stay in Nanjing after graduation from the graduate school, and quickly decided to go abroad, which was against her parents. For Fang, entry into employment was indicative of stepping into a mundane and predictable life, as she put it: “My life is set.” She had not prepared herself for a career and family life and refused the transition to employment. The parents weighed the benefits and costs for her and convinced her to go to work. Later, they yielded themselves to their daughter, although they disagreed with her decision. Like Wang, Fang also complies with age norms in her overseas migration decision-making. For Fang, overseas migration is a transitional period of “time out” before other life events, such as marriage and parenthood. Her overseas migration decision can be seen as a protest against the commonplace of life and a desire for possibility and free. Her current movement to the UK is a snapshot of contemporary international student migration from China. Fang had an aspiration for overseas migration for years, which was generated imaginatively through TV, books, and films. Such an aspiration became an intention when she compared herself with her peers, of whom many had overseas experiences because of work or study: “I suddenly realised that people around me all have chances to be abroad.” Her cohort as the first generation who grew up after the economic reform had much more opportunities to go abroad in their young adulthood. The peer influence in Wang’s and Fang’s migration decision-making suggests that young people are differently positioned within the social landscape: while Wang compares himself to his peers who have stepped into marriage, Fang compares herself to her peers who have overseas migration experiences.

**Extract 6.3 Narratives on re-migration decision-making**

Yuan: (moving back to Chaohu, Anhui) He [the father] desperately wanted me to return. My brother was ill, so he [longed for my return to live beside them]. He had no idea that I had a boyfriend in Hefei. Our relationship was not mature at that time. I was floating alone outside in Hefei. My father hoped [me get back.] Every time he learned about [civil servant] examinations, he helped me with registration. I only attended one of the exams and unexpectedly got admitted. I had not even prepared for the exam. Sometimes, some things, I feel, are decided by fate. Some desperately want something but can never get it; some accidentally… The life my father planned for me is like this: finding a secure job, living close to the parents, and marring another civil servant in Chaohu. How wonderful it is! This is the ideal of life he could imagine for me. He talked to me about it again and again. I was tempted.
Wang: (move on to Shenzhen, Guangdong) There were external and internal factors. The company was not good. I felt that it was a place for the elderly, not the young. The salary was only 1,500 yuan, and the workload was light, very light. We only worked in the morning; in the afternoon, people watched movies, listened to music, or chatted online… There were about thirty persons in the company. Few were young adults, who worked hardest but were paid least… I did not quit the job easily as I newly graduated and it was my first job. So I stayed. During the Spring Festival of 2011, I said to myself: I could no longer muddle along like this. It was not good for me. So I resigned determinedly… [Wang talked about a classmate of his major who was working in Shenzhen with the assistance of his uncle.] Different from him, I had nobody to seek for help and had to look for jobs by myself… I felt I couldn’t endure Hefei any more. My thought of the time was that I could go outside to spend some years in large cities; things would probably turn better when I come back. So I moved to Shenzhen. My parents did not much approve, because I had never left them to go far away. But I am a guy. A guy would not heed what the parents say when he grows up. I was determined. I said no; I must go outside. It was fine with my father. But my mother was worried. She was worried about pyramid scheme. I said to her, “I am not a crafty person, but I am not idiotic, either. You just let me go and don’t worry.” Then I went to Shenzhen.

(move on to Beijing) My family wanted to introduce girls to me. They said to me: “Come back. Don’t float outside. See some girls. Work in Hefei. Don’t go outside anymore.” At that time, I was put in a difficult situation by the boss [in Shenzhen], I resigned… I returned and saw the girl [introduced by my family]. I was not satisfied; my parents were very satisfied. The girl was working in Beijing. My aunt was in Beijing too. I was going to Shenzhen and bought the railway ticket to Shenzhen. Just before my departure, I was intercepted by my parents and the ticket was changed to Beijing… Heading for Beijing was not entirely because of my parents; I had my own considerations. I had already been in Shenzhen for one year. I might just as well have a try in Beijing. So it’s fifty-fifty, partly because of my parents and partly too because I thought it might be a good opportunity. [I wanted to] go north after a south journey.

(re-enter Hefei, Anhui) I am back; the major reason is that I am going to be 30 [years old]. My current situation is that I have no successful career, unable to settle down [in large cities] outside, and still single. My parents and relatives either introduced girls to me each year, or tried to convince me to find a girl. Previously I kept myself out of the affair. But now, honestly, I begin to be worrying. I do worry. Why? Because people around me, including my friends and schoolmates….the children of them can play on the street; some are almost able to go to school….Every year I returned [to Chaohu] during the Spring Festival, the neighbours dropped around with their grandchildren. You can imagine the impact on my parents. It is partly because of my parents and partly because of me. I have no choice. I am forced. So I am back now, finding employment as well as a marriage partner… Now, my first priority is to establish a family, the next is employment. It’s partly pushed by my family. If possible, I’d like to get married after 30. My previous thought is that before 30, career is my first priority unless I meet the right one. But now I’m pushed [by
the family]; it’s different. On the one hand, I’m traditional; on the other, the influence from others is inescapable.

Zhao: (stay in Jiaxing, Zhejiang) After I started work [in Zhejiang], my father hoped me to be a civil servant [in Anhui], because of mianzi [face] and grey income. My mother thought it was fine to be a teacher in Zhejiang. She is a Buddhist and content [with my situation]: Zhejiang is good in economy and environment. I myself don’t want to be a civil servant. Because of the influence of books, TV plays, and information on the internet, that is, bureaucratic politics and intrigues, I don’t like it and don’t think I can acclimate. However, a civil servant is what he wishes for, because it’s the value of their generation. [He talked about his father regretting that he didn’t stay in the army.] My father tried to change me, but I didn’t positively respond. [He talked about one experience that he made a perfunctory effort in a civil servant examination and failed.] After the failure, my father gradually brings himself to accept that I work as a teacher.

Fang: (stay in Nanjing and then move on to London, UK) I’ve been dreaming of going abroad for many years. [She talked about how the dream came from in her childhood and then developed at university.] When I graduated [from the graduate school], my classmates at university had worked for three years. They are not academically excellent; their employment is ordinary. Because of their jobs, many have chances to go abroad. Besides, many of my classmates in senior middle school, as well as university classmates, study abroad. I suddenly realised that people around me all have chances to be abroad. It would be more difficult when you settle down and get married. You cannot leave your husband and children to move out. There would be no chance if I stay any longer. [After I graduated from the graduate school in Nanjing], I did not want to look for jobs at all; I just wanted to go abroad. My parents were against it: “You have a master degree already. It’s meaningless if you go abroad and obtain another master degree. Why not just keep on the rails and work? Everybody graduates and works; this is good. If you go abroad, you become older. It would not be easy to find a job when you return.” I was convinced. Everyone around me was looking for jobs, so I went with them. The job was not very satisfactory. When induction time came, I was grieved: “My life is set. But it’s not what I want; I don’t want to work. Why do I have to work?” I quarrelled with my parents: “I’m not going to work. I will devote myself to application.” My parents were so anxious: “How could you? You have to work. You can go abroad in the future, but you start work first.” I accepted, applied while I worked.

My family, including my parents, aunts and uncles, think that I should not follow a challenging professional career: “You’ll be very tired. It’s a heavy work.” They don’t think it is suitable for girls.

I have not decided which city I’ll go to after my return to China. I prefer Shanghai, then Nanjing and Hefei. I’m not certain… [Interviewer: Do your parents oppose your migration?] No, they don’t. I’ve been far away from home at university; Nanjing is not as far as Xi’an. They have been used to [my migration]. Of course, they [the parents] wish that I could live in cities like Nanjing. They can come to see me if they want to; I can also return home if I want to. I feel that the parents become attached to the child when they become
older, so they hope that I could be close to them. However, wherever I go, they will support me. Sometimes I say I could move to Hefei, they reply: “If you have the capacity to live in larger cities, you should stay there.”

6.2.4 Summary

Conceptualising migration as part of an individual’s biography involves recognising that migration decisions are made in the context of personal past, present and projected future. Through the lens of agency as a socially situated process (Evans, 2002), this chapter firstly investigates how young people make migration decisions when they are constrained and enabled by socially structured opportunities and limitations. The findings are emblematic of bounded agency in young people’s migration decision-making; they make distinctive migration choices at critical junctures within socially structured environments. The findings show that, firstly, young people’s agency in migration decision-making is differentiated and dynamic. In the decision-making for first migration and higher education, they generally demonstrate limited capacity to make fully-informed choice. Beyond their narratives, young people’s educational and migration choices are circumscribed by China’s university and college admission scheme and enrolment process as well as the spatial distribution of universities and colleges. Since leaving home for university, they begin to acquire the capacity to navigate their transitions and tend to make more independent, proactive and thoughtful migration decisions, although some decisions are convenient and less calculated in nature.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Move to Hefei</th>
<th>Stay in Hefei</th>
<th>Move to Chaohu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yuan</td>
<td>self (parental advice unavailable)</td>
<td>self + boyfriend (indirect parental assistance)</td>
<td>father + self (surrender to the father’s will)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an ill-informed and conservative decision</td>
<td>a less thoughtful decision</td>
<td>a convenient decision (a favourable chance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang</td>
<td>Move to Hefei self (parental advice unavailable)</td>
<td>Stay in Hefei self</td>
<td>Move to Shenzhen self (resist the mother’s will)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an arbitrary decision (limited choices)</td>
<td>a convenient decision</td>
<td>an initiative yet less thoughtful decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhao</td>
<td>Move to Wuhan other (indirect parental assistance) + self</td>
<td>Move to Jiaxing self (resist the father’s will)</td>
<td>Stay in Jiaxing self (resist the father’s will)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a less thoughtful decision</td>
<td>a thoughtful decision</td>
<td>a thoughtful decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fang</td>
<td>Move to Xi’an parents (accept the parents’ will without question)</td>
<td>Move to Nanjing self (conflict with parents)</td>
<td>Stay in Nanjing parents (surrender to the parents’ will)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a thoughtful decision</td>
<td></td>
<td>Move to London self (resist the parents’ will)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>an initiative yet less thoughtful decision</td>
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Secondly, one key identifying feature of the narratives of migration decision-making is parental influence in young people’s agency. Generally, the parental influence gradually withers away with their economic independence and emancipation from parental authority, young adults can claim more personal agency for their actions. As migration decisions are usually intertwined with decisions concerning other transition events, they are therefore affected by the relations and interactions between young people and their parents in particular settings. In some ways young adults have more independence and autonomy, which may create potential more conflicts in the intergenerational relations. In some other contexts parents have become even more important. The most obvious example is home purchase decision; indeed, for most young adults, housing becomes a barrier to living a fully independent social and economic life. Many parents in mainland China provide generous financial assistance to their adult children in the purchase of properties, especially when the children are male. If the parents cannot afford the full payment, they usually save money or borrow money for the down payment.

The narratives also show that young people from disadvantaged family background (e.g., rural hukou, low education level) usually make educational and occupational decisions by themselves; in contrast, parents of high socio-economic status are more likely to have a say in the adult children’s decision making. However, it would be unfair to contend that young people from disadvantaged family background are more independent of their parents and can make free choice. Since their parents cannot easily advise or inform them, young people are forced to navigate their way through life by themselves, e.g., choose universities and gain employment. These better-off parents have the ability to provide resources for securing employment, including information on employment opportunities, advice on occupation and career, social capital to help them obtain employment (often locally), etc. Following Hopkins and Pain’s (2007) relational geographies of age, I argue that intergenerationality is important in understanding young people’s agency.

Different from the poorly educated rural migrants, these highly educated young people do not appear to rely heavily on the network of laoxiang. The majority tend to use more formal job search channels (e.g., job fairs, personnel advertisements, civil service examinations, etc.), though some rely on the support of their families and relatives to find work. Nevertheless, what emerge from my fieldwork is that these
young people from the same place of origin are connected mainly through personal networks rather than alumni association. More importantly, the development of the internet and social media in China has driven the young generation to be more connected by virtual means, e.g., QQ, Renren, Weibo, Wechat, etc. By creating their online space, returnees and emigrants across destinations maintain networks and contacts across physical space. The peer networks in virtual space provide young adults with a great way to learn about social environment from their peers’ experiences, gauge their own positions in society, understand social norms and conduct, explore their identity, etc. In this context, peer influence plays an important role in young adults’ re-migration decision making.

6.3 Migration aspirations and senses of place: the significance of mobility and life course

The analysis of migration decision-making has demonstrated that young people actively shape their biographies by adapting their migration decisions despite the persistence of structural influences on their lives. What remains unknown is how and to what extent mobility and migration-related life experiences are shaped by, and shape young people’s migration aspiration and attachment to the home place. This section will explore young people’s reflections on their mobility and place experiences, drawing on four different migration trajectories.

6.3.1 “It’s like the frog of the well”

Let us read Yuan’s narratives (Extract 6.4). She does not show signs of aspiration to mobility when she leaves home for higher education. After graduation, she expresses a desired aspiration to stay in Hefei to maintain the romantic relationship, but it is more of a short-term motive than a long-term prospect. Such an aspiration is frustrated by her unsuccessful efforts to become a tenured teacher and his boyfriend’s frequent and prolonged travel on business. Yuan’s return to Chaohu is unplanned and unexpected, which is mainly an outcome of “chance” instead of “choice”.

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Her return migration is accompanied by the adjustment of administrative division, which is identified by Yuan as having a profound impact on her and her family’s life. Yuan narrates the depression of Chaohu and its impact on her parents and relatives. More importantly, the drain of young talents from Chaohu is a significant aspect relating to her decision to maintain the relationship with the boyfriend in Hefei, because it becomes more difficult to find a potential marriage partner in Chaohu. After marriage, the young couple experience living apart together (LAT) – the relationship from where intimate partners live at different places. The husband tries to find employment in Chaohu but fails because there are very limited enterprises in Chaohu and programming-related jobs (his profession) are unavailable. Yuan strongly opposes when her husband suggests to work as a civil servant in Chaohu. The changing local social environment in Chaohu has stimulated her aspiration to move out of Chaohu, which is “not a place for young adults”.

Yuan’s move-down in the city hierarchy interfaces with her entry into “the establishment”; such a movement from the private sector to the state sector represents upward mobility in the social ladder within the province. A secure and well-paying job together with a high social status in the local place has become a breeding ground for inertia. As Yuan describes, the easy life in a little place, like “the frog of the well”, has limited her horizon, lowered her aspiration level, and shaken her courage. Yuan clearly identifies the differences between herself and her female colleagues who have never left Chaohu. Those girls, in Yuan’s eyes, “have no confidence and prepare to limit themselves the whole life within the little place and the narrow view”. Yuan also concedes that she is becoming such a person.

Although Yuan currently lives in Chaohu, her friendship networks are outside of Chaohu. In her circle of high-school friends she is the only one coming back to Chaohu. The exchange of ideas and information through online connections with her peer group outside Chaohu has an effect in shaping Yuan’s subjectivities. To a certain extent, the peers bring the outside world closer to Yuan, which expands her horizon and gives her dreams. The imagination of ‘outstanding people’ – the successful highly-skilled emigrants – stimulates Yuan’s aspiration for a “different” life. A different life to Yuan is to reunite with her husband in Hefei in the future.
The mobile body becomes a site for negotiation of tensions between decisions to maintain or to change, to stay or to leave. On the one hand, Yuan has become used to such a life and is daunted by new challenges; on the other, she wants change and regains her courage when she is in positive mood. This also supports the effect of mood states in control belief: positive moods raise control beliefs while negative moods lower them (Flammer, 1997). As Yuan has moved down from the provincial capital city to a county-level city, she finds difficulty of moving up to places of higher level. This supports the quantitative finding in the previous chapter that moving and long-term migration to a larger geographical scope is more difficult and moving to a smaller geographical scope is relatively easier.

Yuan reports in the survey median attachment and belonging to Chaohu and can thus been categorised into “The Bonded” returnees. This is closely related to her master-plan of life: Yuan desires to emigrate for family reunion and does not want to reconcile herself to the life in Chaohu. Her narrative suggests that her belonging is a traditional form, ascribed by birth and residence (Pollini, 2005). This is explicable in her migration trajectories: Yuan has spent most of her life in Chaohu and has only one intra-provincial migration experience. To Yuan, Chaohu and Hefei are still two places because “the physical distance still exists”. Indeed, the distance is real and unchanged in Yuan’s lived experiences with LAT.

### Exact 6.4 Moving-down: Yuan’s Narrative

Who knew the city was downgraded less than two months after my return! If I knew the adjustment of administrative division, I would not return to Chaohu. The previous prefecture-level city was relatively more promising.

I’ve been used to the easy life and don’t want to change. It’s true. If you stay for a long time in a little place, your horizon and courage will become smaller. [Interviewer: You don’t seem to return for a long time.] Two years. But I find it difficult to try something else. Frist, I’ve forgotten English [her major at university]. If you ask me to teach English, I feel it is very difficult. Also, I become easy to be satisfied. I feel that staying in Chaohu is like an old saying: the frog at the bottom of the well. The frog has a narrow view of the world and thus believes that life inside the well is best. Sometimes I talk with my friends who live outside Chaohu; they tell me the new trends. I can have a little expectation that life could be different. [She talked about her female colleagues who received college education in Chaohu and had never moved outside Chaohu.] They have no confidence and prepare to limit themselves the whole
Gradually, I’m drifting in this direction. However, I want challenges when I’m in good health. Because I know many outstanding people, my classmates at university as well as high school, I feel I should still dream for something. Dreams can come true. I feel I’m still young. But I don’t think about it when I’m not well. After the baby is born, it is unreasonable to make him/her feel the parents are apart. It is no good to his/her education either. In the long run, [I will] go to Hefei. All things considered, Hefei is [better]. We have a house in Hefei as well. So if not impossible, [I will] choose moving to Hefei. But, what kind of job can I get? [I am qualified] by education. And I still have some courage to face the challenges. But when pessimistic, I don’t think so. When I don’t feel very well, I just want to stay besides my parents, who take good care of me. When jaunty, I think I should try and fight. Sometimes, my husband suggests that he could try taking the exam [and becoming a civil servant in Chaohu]. I don’t agree. It is because Chaohu in my eyes is depressed and not suitable for the development of young adults. If he came, I could see our future, like this, dragging through our lives. It is purposeless. [So I said to him:] “You stay there, make money, and wait for me.” There is plenty of food and fun in Hefei. In Chaohu you can only stay at home, nothing to do. A friend who works in Chaohu says: “Chaohu is a place lack of vitality.” Because he is not a local and has no affect towards the place, different from us born and grew up here, he can say such words. He feels the place is dead. It’s true. He’s determined to move to Hefei. He is discontent to stay in the place the rest of his life. So am I. Discontent.

[She talked about her friends in Hefei.] In their eyes, Chaohu is [part of] Hefei. It seems to them the change in administration makes a difference. But, in reality, the physical distance still exists. I feel far away from Hefei. I’m in Chaohu, not Hefei… Sometimes I feel I have to try very hard to go to work in Hefei. They seem to have planned and just stayed in Hefei after graduation. It’s so easy for them to stay and work in Hefei. It’s incredible, isn’t it? Who knows his/her life! I’ve always been muddle-headed. When you want to move back, it’s really hard to make a change.

6.3.2 “I cannot adjust, but I have to”

The next set of narratives is those of Wang, who, similar to Yuan, Wang does not show signs of aspiration to mobility at first move (Extract 6.5). During his first job in Hefei, he expresses a strong desire for a temporary inter-provincial migration and moves to Shenzhen. His migration to Beijing is unplanned and unexpected. Wang expresses a strong interest in remaining in Beijing but is faced with impediments to its realisation. Wang’s return to Anhui can be considered as disheartened aspiration and aborted mobility (Ferro, 2006).
Ni Laoire’s (2008) work on Ireland’s return migration highlights the normative association of the major cities within the global system and young adulthood, and of Ireland with settling back. It is suggested here that this type of association also occurs in internal migration, where migration destinations (large cities within China) are associated with early youth while the home places (Anhui in this study) are associated with settling down. This is evident from the interview with Wang, who linked the young adulthood in his narrative with going places, individualism, and a life of adventure, and return migration with settling down, family, and a life of ease and comfort. As mentioned earlier, Wang’s re-entry into Hefei is linked with the life transition. Because of the internalised age norms as well as parental and peer pressure, Wang is urged to transit into a particular life stage. The mobile body becomes a site for negotiation of tensions between decisions to go places or to settle down, to be outside or to return. Wang finally surrenders to age norms and re-enter Hefei, a place he sees his future lying in.

Wang’s account – “While others go abroad, losers like me can migrate internally to large cities” – suggests that, on the one hand, migration aspiration is rooted in social structure, and, on the other hand, individuals also purposefully make an effort to produce constructive change so as to enhance their chance of making a better career. The context of Wang’s inter-provincial migration is that the college educated young migrants tend to fill gaps in labour markets in major cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen. Being non-hukou migrants in these cities – even if they are highly skilled and long-term migrants – could certainly imply a vulnerable status with limited access to employment opportunities, housing market, and other resources. As a result, these young adults usually adopt a transient lifestyle, work in the informal economy, and live in informal housing settlements such as villages-in-the-city. For the college graduates at the bottom of the higher education pyramid in China, they have little chance of obtaining local hukou and settling down in the host city. Before his departure, Wang has already been aware of the transience of the inter-provincial mobility. For Wang, the transient sojourn in major cities is not only an investment (“to get gilded” in his words), but also an exploration of different places (“see something of the world”). Despite his desire of living his life in Beijing, he admits that such a dream cannot be realised and simply ascribes it to individual ability. This
can be interpreted as a product of unconscious individual internalisation of social structural constraints.

The return migration of educated young people to their home province from major cities has emerged as a phenomenon in recent years. Many people may experience significant discomfort related to return migration; some may choose re-emigration while the others experience “re-entry shock” in the readjustment process to the original environment. Wang does exhibit the negative affect associated with re-entry transition. Being ill prepared for his return, Wang regrets for the lost migrant lifestyle; the work experience compared with those of large cities is quite dispiriting, in the sense that the wage level is low and company management is informal. Wang finds himself returning to Hefei in an environment that has not really changed since his departure. This raises the issue of the critical role of social changes in origin societies and professional advancement in the reintegration process of returnees; in return, the returnees’ capacity to invest their migration experiences in their home places is determined by the local power relations, traditions and values in home places (Cassarino, 2004).

In consideration of the realities in the province and their need for career development, many young people, especially those who cannot rely on parental support for employment in the hometown, are more willingly to settle down in the provincial capital city. Wang is one of the examples. He distinguishes Hefei and Chaohu and identifies himself as a Chaohunese. Although he is not attached to Hefei, he chooses to settle down in Hefei in the future. Wang is aware of the influences and benefits of family background and compares his situation with the life experiences of some of his peers. Those young adults are placed into good jobs in Chaohu which their parents have secured for them. For people like Wang who “have to build a life on their own”, the provincial capital city is a better choice because it provides more job opportunities and relatively higher wages. The adjustment of administrative division further discourages Wang from returning to Chaohu.

Similar to Yuan, Wang’s belonging is also ascribed by birth: “you cannot free yourself from it. You’re Chaohunese. You’re Anhuinese”. At the same time, Wang speaks of his detestation of the home place: “I hate it in my heart and criticise it”. Ambivalence is characterised in the extreme and dramatic terms of simultaneous love
and hate for the home place: “Whatever the imperfection, it’s your home.” The two contradictory emotions are not rare among other interviewees; some expressed that nobody but themselves could say derogatory words towards their home place. The feeling of love, as mentioned above, reflects a traditional form of belonging; the feeling of hate could be understood in relation to the geography of power. Individual places are each positioned in the wider geographies of power, which structure the inequities of uneven development (Massey, 1995). In the context of economic growth in China, the inequality of uneven development between places is evident. Compared to the large cities in China, Chaohu represents the less powerful, the geographically peripheral, the economically undeveloped, and the socially marginalised. Wang’s case shows how the meaning of a sense of place is bound into social power relations, suggesting that senses of place are constructed by underlying structures of power (Rose, 1995).

**Exact 6.5 Re-entry: Wang’s Narrative**

After one year’s work in Hefei, I determined to go outside to get gilded. From childhood to adulthood, I’ve never left Anhui. While others go abroad, losers like me can migrate internally to large cities. Although the outcome is inevitably return migration, I don’t regret the two years outside [Anhui]. In others’ eyes, I’m not making out better. However, at least, I’ve changed rather than preserved the status quo. Change may not make a difference, but the situation will remain the same if you don’t change. I’m still young and should not seek after a life of comfort.

Since my graduation, the only thing I have felt regret is my return from Beijing. I wished I could stay longer in Beijing... I did not intend to return back so early. But the reality is I am back. I do not want to return, because I have been outside for only two years - a little longer than two years. I feel it is short. [Interviewer: “Why is it short?”] Two years... At least five years. You cannot the capture the essence in less than five years. Two years is too short... If I had the opportunity, I would like to go to Xi’an, Shanghai... move across the country. But it is only a dream; I cannot make it.

Among the four cities where I’ve lived in, I definitely want to settle down in Beijing. To be honest, I don’t want to settle down in Hefei or Chaohu. But I’ve no choice. The reality is that I have to stay in Hefei or Chaohu, because I cannot settle down anywhere else. I don’t have the ability to settle down.

[He used an analogy of Chinese National Football Team to describe the role of the hometown in his heart.] I hate it in my heart and criticise it. Whatever your critics, you have to accept the reality that you cannot free yourself from it.
You’re Chaohunese. You’re Anhuinese. Whatever the imperfection, it’s your home.

In my heart, I have always considered myself as a Chaohunese; I have never thought I am a Hefeinese… I treat Chaohu and Hefei as two different places. To me, Hefei is an alien city. It’s not my hometown, my true hometown. I probably would buy a house and live in Hefei; the possibility in Chaohu is small. After all, Chaohu was underdeveloped before and became worse after it was downgraded. Chaohu has no prospect already… [He talked about some of his classmates who currently work in Chaohu. Their education levels are similar to Wang, but they come from urban and advantaged families.] If I could have a relatively stable and decent job in Chaohu, I would be willing to stay there. But either in Hefei or Chaohu, my situation is the same, that is, I have to build a life on my own. The wage level in Hefei is higher than Chaohu. I definitely want to stay in Hefei.

There are many high-rise buildings in Hefei. On its face, Hefei seems to have made progress. However, there is no change in nature. The wage level is an example; it hasn’t changed a bit. This is my current situation: I am here physically, but my heart has not come back to Hefei. It is probably a psychological blow. I do feel disappointed. I’m now unemployed. Last week, I worked in a company for three days. I felt I really could not persist. So I said to the boss: “I quit. I don’t want to stay in the company.” The true reason is that it was a terrible let-down. Firstly, it is the wages. The wages of the company is low; and it is single day off. This is about the welfare of the employees. As for company management, it is very informal. [It] cannot be compared with other cities and other companies. [It is] lifeless. So I don’t want to stay. This is a tough situation: I cannot adjust myself to the life in Hefei, but I have to adjust. [It is] because I cannot but adjust. In the next several years, at least before my marriage, I probably would not go outside.

6.3.3 “I do not want to stick at home place”

Zhao’s narrative describes the circumstances of an aspiring, educated young man brought up in Chaohu, who aspires a prosperous and modern life in a developed area, and escapes from the backwardness (economically, socially and culturally) of his home place (Extract 6.6). Zhao’s committed aspiration to mobility is related to a master-plan of life improvement (Ferro, 2006). Zhao refers such commitment to mobility to a sort of tradition in China – young people “building a life in a new land and returning to the home place in glory”. Without doubt, the phenomenon of youth migration is nothing new across the historical range of migration in China. However, the mobility patterns of young migrants certainly represent an essential part of the
regional inequality and labour market segmentation emerging in today’s China. Zhao himself also realises the phenomenon of brain drain in central provinces of China. His narrative reflects popular representations, in the national imagination as well as in its self-perception, of Anhui as a place that is poor in economic terms and conservative in a cultural and political sense (Sun, 2006).

Zhao attributes his desire for prosperous cities to his aspiration, and relates such an aspiration with academic achievements, places of origin, and gender. Zhao’s narrative suggests that migration as moving upwards applies frequently to periphery-core migration of male academic achievers from less developed areas. Such a view highlights the imagination of out-migration from the periphery as both class- and gender-specific. On the one hand, Zhao actively embraces knowledge-class notions of mobility through higher education; on the other hand, he orients to a dominant patriarchal narrative of male subjecthood. Following the traditional male-breadwinner/female-carer ideology, Zhao emphasises men’s pioneering spirits, aspiration for career and accomplishments, and at the same time, women’s aspiration for marriage, family life and a settled way of life. Such an ideology implies a male-mobile/female-immobile model in which the male breadwinner is expected to be mobile and dynamic and the female carer is confined at home.

In light of his previous account on the migration decision-making for higher education, Zhao’s narration here – “Why do I move out? When I was going to university, all I ever thought about is to leave Anhui” – could perhaps be read as a post hoc rationalisation through reframing the decision-making process (Halfacree and Rivera, 2012). As Halfacree and Rivera (2012) suggests, migration becomes realised more fully after having experiences at the place; it is thus necessary to consider the migrant’s subsequent everyday life at the destination place. Indeed, Zhao’s socio-spatial imagination is re-constructed and enhanced through the mobility in his everyday experiences in the destination place. In contrast to the “nice” urban environment and “harmonious society” in Zhejiang, Chaohu is “chaotic” in terms of the physical and social environments and “always lags behind”.

Based on his response in the survey, Zhao can be categorised as “The Departer” (migrants with weak attachment and belonging to the native place), which is quite consistent with his narrative. However, Zhao is still attached to the home place in
some aspects; his place attachment is mainly related to family and kinship ties in the home place. Zhao in his narrative still identifies the parental home as his “true home”; this probably can be attributed to his marital status and living arrangement – he is single and currently shares a rented apartment with others. It is noticeable from the interviews that married interviewees are more likely to identify with their new home. Like many other interviewees, proximity to the home place is an important consideration in Zhao’s migration decision-making after graduation. He chooses Zhejiang instead of Guangdong where most of his classmates go to. But he soon realises distance is practical in real life sense, as he put it: “500 kilometres and 5000 kilometres are the same”.

**Exact 6.6 Stick-in: Zhao’s Narrative**

The place [Zhejiang] is nice, including the human environment. Generally, it is a harmonious society, easy to live with the common people as well as the government departments. [In contrast,] Chaohu is chaotic. [Interviewer: “Chaotic? In what aspects?”] The transport, environmental sanitation...Things can be done through someone [guanxi]... Chaohu looks like a small county. It always lags behind in fashion. There’s no point in moving back to Chaohu. If I was born in the provincial capital, or if I was someone with no aspirations, I would have returned. Why do I move out? When I was going to university, all I ever thought about is to leave Anhui. When I was looking for jobs, all I ever thought about is to leave Chaohu. This is partly determined by my characteristics: I want to aspire after new things; I want to change; I do not want to stick in the mud; I do not want to stick in the home place... I believe this is the thought of many academic achievers in central provinces, which causes brain drain in these areas. [The life] in Chaohu is being in a rut. You can have a strong family bond if you stay in Chaohu. But, for us academic achievers, we prefer developed areas. That is, moving out. It has always been like this in China: building a life in a new land and returning to the home place in glory. Although the belief of returning to the home place is rooted in our culture, you first need to move out and then you can return. So all I ever thought about is to move out. Besides, I am a boy, not a girl. [Interviewer: “Why are boys and girls different?”] Of course they are different! [He talked about a female colleague who resigned and returned to her hometown.] Girls want a settled way of life; girls wish to marry someone nice and live out their lives; girls are sentimental and purse a cosy and sweet family life. But boys want a career; boys wish to accomplish something; boys have more pioneering spirits.

To be near the home place, I considered working in Zhejiang. But it is near relative to Shenzhen. It’s not really near, but shorter hours to return home. You cannot return to your true home [family home] after work. Unless you can return home once a week or you live in Hefei, otherwise it is meaningless. 500
kilometres and 5000 kilometres are the same... You’re not surrounded by your parents and relatives; family and kinship ties are absent; romance cannot take the place of them. This is a great loss. I don’t like it.

6.3.4 “I felt expanded and upgraded”

The last set of narratives is those of Fang, who intentionally reflects on her migration biographies and interprets the meanings of such mobility as “a process of self-discovery and change” (Extract 6.8). The inter-provincial migration for higher education is identified by the interviewee as “the first step” of her change. As Fang describes, her involvement and achievement in the university expand her horizon, enrich her experience, and boost her confidence. The positive transitional experiences foster high control beliefs; Fang believes she is in control of her life and has the ability to attain what she desires. During this period, Fang “despises” the home place and decides not to return. Having jumped out of the confines of her life in Chaohu, the experiences in the new world inspire her to “be different” from people in the home place, who are “the frogs of the well” in her eyes.

From Xi’an to Beijing, Fang “ascended to a new level at university and a higher level at internship”. The transient internship experiences in Beijing, secured by family members, further her aspiration for large cities (“another eyeopener”, “stimulated my appetite” in her words). Major cities within China become associated in Fang’s narrative as well as in public representations with economic vibrancy, metropolitan lifestyles, and wealthy opportunities and possibilities, which seem appropriate for upwardly mobile young adults. The graduate school in Nanjing gathers top students from different universities; Fang feels “expanded and upgraded” and believes that she finally steps into the circle she belongs. So far Fang has been in pursuit of climbing academic and social ladders, accompanied by her geographical mobility.

Yet, Fang’s account is not a linear narrative of transformation to a more aspiring and progressive spirit. The high spirit is dampened by the overseas migration of her boyfriend, and she becomes less optimistic as to her control. From education to work, Fang is placed in a new environment, “totally different from the campus life” that she was used to. The transition from a student to a worker role represents a movement
across social space, which shakes her aspiration for large cities and also changes her negative attitude towards return migration. Fang does not perceive any longer life in Chaohu as “futile and negative”. Here, the change in Fang’s attitude towards the home place is also partly influenced by some of her peers, who in her eyes work and live well in Chaohu. The profound impact of the adjustment of administration division is absent in her account. The superficial and inadequate knowledge troubles her socio-spatial imagination of Chaohu, which may be different from the reality of many non-migrants’ and returnees’ lives, as revealed in Yuan’s narrative. Although Fang changes her past attitude towards the home place and idealises it to some extent, she is clear that she “cannot return”. For Fang and many other migrants, Chaohu represents a space of desolation and lack of opportunities, where they are unable to work and cannot return.

While Fang becomes disenchanted with metropolitan life, she has not completely given up the aspiration. She also considers the provincial capital city as a destination choice. Her position is ambiguous between large cities and medium cities. Notably, without first-hand experience, her imagination of the provincial capital city mainly comes from second-hand experiences of friends in the area. Such a socio-spatial imagination could also be influenced by nostalgia and there is a risk of “return shock” as experienced by Wang (see also Ni Laoire, 2007).

I’ve migrated to several places and I like travel. In my opinion, migration is essential in personal growth. I despise those who stay in the province to attend university and have never gone outside. You can jump out of the confines of your life only when you have experienced other places. The migration process is a process of self-discovery and change. But it has cost. The farther you go, the less likely you can get back to the place of origin as well as the original self.

I had never thought that the first time I left home was heading for such a remote place. It takes nearly twenty hours by train, from the evening to the next afternoon. It is miraculous, but it is this inter-provincial migration that becomes the first step of my change…This period made me jump out the circle of friends and life in Chaohu; my horizon expanded and my experience were enriched. I was introverted during the high school years and became outgoing and breezy at university. Because of the achievement I made, I was recognised and became more confident, believing I had the ability to attain what I desired. It was also the period that I despised the home place. I felt people in the home place were
the frogs of the well; I had to be different from them; I had to jump out. I decided not to return to the home place... In a word, I changed. The self developed during the university years prepared the ground for my present self.

My first internship was in my dreamed Xinhua News Agency. I was recommended by relatives through guanxi; it was not attained by my own. [It was] another eye-opener. It was the first time I experienced metropolitan life, very stimulating. I learned little from the internship, but the experience of metropolitan life stimulated my appetite again. It looks like I ascended to a new level at university and a higher level at internship. Without life pressure, I just felt that large cities were gorgeous, so full of possibilities. I intended to stay in large cities... The students in graduate school, coming from the top of different universities, were more excellent than my undergraduate peers. The feeling was good. I finally stepped into the circle where I belonged. I felt expanded and upgraded.

[During the graduate school years,] the person I liked went abroad. In my eyes, my life and his life were divided, no matter how many channels for contact. I don’t know if it is significant enough to influence the meaning of my life. I did experience a dejected and sorrow state for two or three years. I became pessimistic about life and relationship. [It is] different from the high spirit of the undergraduate years when [I believed] I had control over the world. Such pessimism still casts blight upon me.

The work life was totally different from the campus life. I have been adjusting myself in the last year. It was the first time I tasted the reality. I became less dreamy and more practical. The work experience made me at the first time want to give up the aspiration for large cities and choose medium cities. But by now I have not decided yet and sway between the two. During this period, I witnessed many classmates worked and lived well in the home place [Chaohu] and did not conceive staying in the home place as futile and negative. I began to envy them. However, since I have been away from the home place for years, I know I cannot return. As more and more friends work in Hefei and get married, I start to consider Hefei a proper choice.

6.3.5 Summary

A biographical approach to migration also involves an appreciation of the intentions/aspirations implicated in the migration decisions and actions. Focusing on particular examples of migration trajectories, this section presents different types of mobility and migration aspirations: Yuan’s desired aspiration for intra-provincial mobility, unexpected return migration, and unsatisfied immobility and desired aspiration for second intra-provincial migration; Wang’s desire for temporary inter-
provincial mobility, unplanned and unexpected inter-provincial migration, and disheartened aspiration and aborted mobility; Zhao’s committed aspiration to inter-provincial mobility; Fang’s committed aspiration to inter-provincial mobility, desire for temporary overseas mobility, and capricious mobility aspiration. In analysing young people’s narratives, I have explored how and to what extent mobility and migration-related life experiences are shaped by, and shape young people’s migration aspiration and attachment to the home place.

Although most young people do not have clear and strong aspiration for mobility at their first migration for higher education, the first locational choice plays a big role in their migration trajectories. This is also supported by the quantitative analysis in the previous chapter. Yet, it is not just previous locational choice that matters but all aspects of the migration experiences and their impact on the self. Focusing on biographical narratives of encounter, Valentine and Sadgrove (2014) have argued for the significance of contact with difference through processes of mobility and emplacement in shaping attitudes. Here I address the potential for meaningful experiences of geographical mobility to change migrants’ subjectivities. Migration transfer an individual from one socio-spatial environment into another one, the constraints and opportunities afforded by the new environment have the potential to shape subjectivities that the individual formed in the previous environment.

Yet the implication of mobility for subjectivity change varies depending on the migration experiences and the individual. Some migration experiences have transformative impact while others have little significance. While for some their mobility and migration experiences have notable biographical significance, for others their subjectivities have relatively less affected by migration. The possibility to encounter difference or diversity varies in spatial contexts; boundaries matter. Crossing a national border brings a more significant change in socio-spatial environment than crossing a provincial border, or a city border, or a town border, or a village border. A high-level mobility is more likely to draw an individual into contact with new language, customs, attitudes, and values, which potentially leads to a new becoming and brings the individual into reflection. In contrast, a low-level mobility is more likely to expose an individual to a similar social environment and opportunities largely within the small area, which may in turn limit his/her horizon and migration
aspiration. The impacts become much more evident when crossing different levels of borders.

The four informants’ narratives provide excellent example of the interplay between mobility and migration aspiration in the transition to adulthood, suggesting migration is part of long-term biography formation (Ni Laoire, 2000). Yuan’s colleagues, who have never left Chaohu, are confined to the life in Chaohu and too timid to migrate. Yuan and Wang do not consciously recognise the impact of the first intra-provincial mobility on their subjectivities. The return migration experience in Chaohu, as identified by Yuan, lowers her aspiration level. Wang experiences “return shock” when re-entering Hefei after inter-provincial migration, as a consequence of encounters with and across differences at different spatial levels. Contrastingly, Zhao and Fang see entering a quality university as a critical life event and are consciously aware that first inter-provincial mobility impacts their subjectivities. After graduation, they actively seek to change the environment through mobility to make it fit in with their aspirations. As biographies change with time and with place, these young adults’ migration aspirations change too. It is therefore important to contextualise youth migration within one’s biography.
7 Conclusions

In his well-known work “the hypothesis of the mobility transition”, Zelinsky (1971, pp. 221-22) suggests that the expansion of personal mobility is tied to the progress of a society towards modernisation: “There are definite, patterned regularities in the growth of personal mobility through space-time during recent history, and these regularities comprise an essential component of the modernisation process.” Following this linear modernisation of mobility, Zelinsky (1971) anticipates acceleration in some forms of circulation, deceleration in some forms of circulation and inception of new forms in a future super-advanced society. The last few decades have indeed witnessed “ubiquitous” mobilities – rapid and enormous movements of people, objects, capital and information on a global scale. However, mobility has undergone a qualitative change in course of ongoing modernisation of classical modernity, whereas the transition from pre-modernity to classical modernity can be conceived as quantitative mobilisation (Rammler, 2008).

As argued by Kesselring (2008), mobility is a general principle of modernity – an inconsistent, contradictory and ambivalent principle – which needs to be conceived along the transition from first to second modernity. First modernity is an era of order, stability and certainty whereas second modernity is connected with the idea of contingency, instability and uncertainty. Against this background, mobility as a social concept transforms itself from directionality (road mobility) to non-directionality (network mobility) in a spatial as well as in a social way (Kesselring, 2008). Mobility embodies the idea of freedom and self-fulfilment but at the same time brings with it the ambivalence and fragility (Kesselring, 2008). Urry (2008) identifies five interdependent forms of mobilities: the corporeal travel of people, the physical movement of objects, imaginative travel (e.g. images on multiple media), virtual travel (e.g. cyberspace) and communicative travel (e.g. person-to-person message). The last three forms, or virtual mobilities, are the very modern experience under the conditions of second modernity and are forming and reforming social life. Also, the movement of people and objects in real space follow more complex and more distinct patterns, or particularisation and individualisation of space-time trajectories, as conceptualised by Rammler (2008). Within the mobile risk society people have to be
self-responsible for their becoming, or the trajectories they choose during their life course (Kesselring, 2008).

The current “mobility turn” or a new “mobilities paradigm” in human geography specifically (Cresswell, 2006; Adey, 2010), and in social sciences generally (Urry, 2007), calls for a renewed focus on mobility. Crucially, mobility and place should not be viewed as isolated: they exist together in dialectic. The action of mobility is a response to differences between places; places are linked together through actions of mobility. The patterning of mobility in territory-specific forms thus manifests the spatial organisation of societies and the (unequal) interdependence of places. To assess the real nature of actually existing mobility – real people with real mobility experience in real places, instead of viewing mobility as a speculative metaphor or rhetoric on globalisation (Favell, 2001), we cannot do so unless taking into account in migration studies the immobile and bounded, i.e. territories, locality and boundaries.

In the case of China, the state has considerable influence over mobility in processes of modernisation. In command economy, the flows of population were largely controlled by government authorities. Work units or danwei in urban areas and the people’s communes in rural areas – both had economic, political and governmental functions – confined individuals in a variety of ways. The establishment of household registration (hukou) system in 1958 imposed severe restrictions upon the movement of rural population to cities. Forced migration represented a major form of mobility, such as “up to the mountains and down to the countryside movement” and movement of enterprises and workers to the inland regions in the southwest known as the "third front line". Along with a substantial rise in material welfare, rapid urbanisation, dramatic improvements in transport and communications, and relaxation of hukou control, personal spatial mobility potential has expanded greatly in transitional economy. A prominent feature of the ongoing processes of mobility transition in China has been the increased volume of internal migration. Still, such mobility, to a large extent, is induced and influenced by the state’s policies on economic growth, urban development and migration. The economic policies favour the modernisation and development of the eastern coastal regions, especially the Pearl River Delta and the Yangtze River Delta. The urban-biased policies dominate the state policies, which can be seen from, among other projects, large-scale urban renewal and urban sprawl, development of mega-urban regions, urban infrastructure developments, investments
to urban state-owned enterprises, and so forth. The reform era has seen an onset and growth of outmigration of population from peripheral and semi-peripheral areas towards coastal cities, but most can be classified as “non-hukou” migration. The rate of hukou migration has been kept below two per cent since late 1960s (Yang, 2003); in this sense, the state control over mobility has not diminished.

Compared with the older generations, who grew up in an era when opportunities to receive higher education and rights to migrate are limited, this generation receives much better education and have higher mobility. For those born in peripheral areas, growing up in many cases implies moving out, and higher education offers a stepping stone towards spatial and social mobility. However, the educational outcome becomes increasingly uncertain after higher education becomes more market-oriented. This research has explored the patterns and meanings of migration among educated young people in their early adulthood. It contributes to the field of youth migration by providing a mapping of the spatial patterns for migration of educated young people and addressing the complexities and dynamics of spatial mobility with a case study. Also, the present work highlights the importance of a biographical approach that allow us to appreciate the significance of the migrant subject and to investigate the ongoing nature of migration processes, instead of looking at a migration experience as single and unitary.

Firstly, the native-place perspective, together with a life-history survey, enables us to grasp the divergent migration trajectories starting from a particular locality and further develop a typology of spatial mobility. Mobility is more than just movement between locations; it is bound up with shifting meanings of places. By adopting a biographical approach, this research has further explored the potential for meaningful experiences of geographical mobility to change migrants’ subjectivities and considered the emotional dynamics involved in the intersection of identity with senses of place. As both a driving force and a product of mobility, aspiration is related to the changing social situations and individual circumstances. Exposure to different socio-spatial environments by crossing geographical boundaries and different levels of mobility provides the opportunity to see the world in different ways and facilitates self-reflection about their identities in relationships to places.
Secondly, this research has addressed the issue of differentiated mobility – who moves and who does not; who move spontaneously and freely, who move involuntarily, and who are constrained. Contrary to the ‘classic’ understanding of mobility as hindrance of attachment/belonging, mobility has become a crucial determinant of individual well-being and life chance in today’s globalised society: “elites are cosmopolitan, people are local” (Gustafson, 2006). This local-cosmopolitan dualism may be problematic; however, the typology of migrants and returnees developed in this research to some extent could be viewed as an expression of social stratification. Even within these highly educated, the returnees are more likely to be those with relatively lower education qualifications, whereas the migrants are more likely to be those with higher education qualifications. Also, there is a systematic difference in income between returnees and migrants. For reasons of their small size, overseas migrants, who clearly have the greatest mobility and the highest education qualifications, are not included in the analysis. Among internal migrants, the Trapped group has relatively lower qualifications (largest proportion of diplomas and smallest proportion of master’s degrees or above); they feel detached to the home place but are locally constrained, partially because they lack the means to take advantage of spatial mobility. By contrast, those with greater mobility (in the forms of inter-provincial migration) and relatively slightly higher qualifications (smallest proportion of diplomas and largest proportion of master’s degrees or above) are found in the Aliens group. Their attachment/belonging to the destination place, however, is precluded by local hukou in the place of domicile. The existence of hukou in China makes it different from other contexts. This is a vital issue for future research on place attachment among internal migrants in China.

Thirdly, by examining the spatial and temporal contexts in which migration decisions are made, this research shows the inescapable intertwining of individuals’ lives and structural contexts in the fluidity of lived experience. In comparing these migration decisions across the sample and identifying the presence of agency and structure, we gain insight into the ways in which individual biographies interplay with wider forces. Young people’s agency in migration decision-making is differentiated and dynamic. They generally demonstrate limited capacity to make fully-informed choices at their first migration decision-making for higher education; since leaving home, they begin to acquire the capacity to navigate their transitions and make relatively more proactive
migration decisions. Since migration decisions are usually intertwined with decisions concerning other transition events, they are therefore affected by the relations and interactions between young people and their parents in particular settings. The research demonstrates that incorporating lifecourse and intergenerationality into the study of young people's migration will increase our ability to understand dynamics in mobility and variations in agency.

Furlong and Cartmel (2007) recognise the disjuncture between objective structure of opportunity and subjective interpretations of social position in youth transitions, and put forward so-called ‘epistemological fallacy of late modernity’ – diversification of individual experience may lead to an impression of greater equality without substantial evidence and may obscure underlying the structural bases of actions. Participants' narratives in this study do suggest a tendency for individuals to construe their biographies and see solutions on an individual rather than a collective basis. For instance, Wang understands his impossibility of settling down in large cities as a function of individual incapacity; Zhao translates his mobility aspiration as a result of individual capacity and personality. It is thus insufficient to simply give participants voice since some of the underlying forces may be hidden from them. Instead, the researchers need to have their own readings of these narratives and discover the structural forces of which the participants are unaware.

The evidence from this study suggests a diverse pattern of place attachment and belonging among educated young adults. Interestingly, only a small proportion of educated young adults feel a sense of responsibility: 16.2 per cent feel responsible for the destination place; 24.3 per cent for the native place, including 28.6 per cent of returnees and 22.7 per cent of migrants. Such a low degree of sense of responsibility implies a one-way relationship between educated young adults and their socio-spatial environments where the need to receive is more than the need to give. The reason for this is not clear but it may be related to the powerful role of the state in state-society relations in contemporary China. An implication of this is the possibility of empowering the young people and enhancing social dialogue. Taking into consideration views and concerns of educated young adults, both the sending and receiving places in such a way can benefit from the migration of the highly educated. For the sending area, it is important for the local government to promote initiatives which attract the highly educated to return home and help the returnees reintegrate
and utilise their skills and competencies. For the receiving area, it is necessary to assist the integration of educated young migrants by securing them access to employment, housing, and public services, so as to reap long-term benefits. As Du and Li (2012) suggest, there is a tendency for the less attached migrants to leave and the more attached migrants to stay in the host city.

Finally, the findings in this study are limited by the small sample size and non-representative sampling frame. The case of Chaohu may not adequately represent what is happening to educated young people from peripheral areas of China, however, I expect the findings will shed light on the complex spatial practices of young people from other origin places that are in similar situations. More work is needed to explore whether these patterns and meanings hold in other contexts of origin places. Also, this research is designed to specifically explore spatial mobility of educated young people. In fact, young people leaving peripheral areas of China are not a homogenous group, who have very different access to and experiences of mobility. Educated young people are relatively privileged to be able to move. There are also less mobile or ‘forced’ mobile or immobile young people. For instance, second generation migrant workers adopt migration as a livelihood strategy; migrant children endure forced migration because of the family; so-called ‘left-behind’ children and youth are ‘forced’ to be separated from their migrant parents; less-educated young people are ‘forced’ to stay in the native place because of limited opportunity or capacity to desert the locality. The multiple spatialities in young people’s lives, which offer a wonderful opportunity to understand the huge transformations of China and to contribute to the knowledge of human geography, are waiting to be systematically and thoroughly studied.
## Appendices

### Appendix A-1 Detailed migration trajectories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
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<tr>
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<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1+</td>
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<tr>
<td>2+</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>21201</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>269</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes:
0: return migration, 1: intra-provincial migration, 2: inter-provincial migration, 3: overseas migration; +: migration more than once.

### Appendix B-1 Measure of place attachment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Item description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>I feel closely connected with this place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>I do not feel I belong to this place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>I feel a sense of responsibility for this place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>I care about this place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>This place gives me a sense of security.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>I take pride in this place.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix B-2 Reliability test for the scale of place attachment (Cronbach's $\alpha$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Native Place (N=268)</th>
<th>Destination Place (N=198)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corrected item-total correlation</td>
<td>$\alpha$ if item deleted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation</td>
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<td>.805</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
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<td>.860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>.623</td>
<td>.815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
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<td>.790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>.654</td>
<td>.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>.648</td>
<td>.809</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's $\alpha$) 0.841 0.842
Cronbach's $\alpha$ based on standardised items 0.847 0.848
### Appendix B-3 The scale of place attachment: item communalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Native Place (N=268)</th>
<th>Destination Place (N=198)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>Extraction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affiliation</td>
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<td>.515</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
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<td>.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
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<td>.521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>.602</td>
<td>.719</td>
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<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>.456</td>
<td>.496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>.488</td>
<td>.535</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix B-4 Confirmatory factor analysis: goodness-of-fit indices

<table>
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<th>Native Place</th>
<th>Destination Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hypothesised model</td>
<td>Revised model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cmin/df</td>
<td>P-value</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hypothesised</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revised model</td>
<td>22.38 (5)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Academic qualifications of the thesis author, Miss. DU Huimin:

- Received the degree of Bachelor of Science from Southwest University, June 2009.
- Received the degree of Master of Philosophy from Hong Kong Baptist University, November 2011.

March 2015