Innovating China: governance and mobility in China's new economy
Tan, Y.

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Chapter Five Why Do These Young Professionals Go to

Shenzhen? ——The Rise of Middling Migration

This chapter is about how the social production of anxiety and aspiration for self-recognition drives young professionals to mobilize to Shenzhen. The chapter begins by articulating the population data and relevant theoretical debates in order to problematize how this group of professional entrepreneurs-to-be converges and is tied to China's post-industrial context. By analyzing the personal data of Chinese and non-Chinese informants, the following section will outline the new mobile population emerging in the social production of a post-industrial innovation city in Shenzhen. Different to migrant workers in the 1990s, the new migrant workers/professionals in high-end IT industries have more sophisticated expectations regarding social mobility. The second section explores the reasons they migrate to Shenzhen to start their careers. The third section discusses how family, performing as a pre-work, disciplinary, social institution, forges the ambition and desire of these young migrant professionals through burdens or expectations. The concluding remarks in this chapter will problematize the emerging mobility pattern in Shenzhen and offer an explanation to why Chinese and non-Chinese middle-class people pour into Shenzhen to become tech-entrepreneurs.

5.1. The Fear of Suspension: Middle Classes in Post-industrial Urban China

Within academic circles, the phrases 'middle class 'and 'global mobility 'allude to the emerging topic of middle-class migration. "Middling migration" (Blunt 2007; Ho 2011; Rutten and Verstappen 2014) and "lifestyle migration" (Foutain and Hall 2002; Benson and O'reilly 2009; Benson 2016) are terms invented by scholars from migration studies to penetrate the problematically volatile dynamics of middle-class trans-regional migration at a global scale.

In the Anglo-Saxon academy, sociologists and anthropologists have contributed significantly to theoretical and empirical research around issues of class from industrialization to post-industrialization. Positioning their theoretical works in the frame of reflexive late-modernity, Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, and Zygmunt Bauman's class analysis is based on analyzing the social, capital, and cultural mobility in advanced capitalistic society after the Second World War. Focusing on the rising middle class and the reproduction of social class, Giddens develops a theory of class distinction to explain the class differentiation in society. He argues that to maintain their status in the hierarchical social structure, the plural middle classes try to cultivate kaleidoscopic lifestyle orientations in a globalized society full of uncertain chances at life. When he discusses the unification of the rising middle class, he persistently

emphasizes the tricky ways in which the middle class invents and popularizes waves of lifestyles to valorize their social identifications and, as per Bourdieu's conceptualization, to conquer their own social space. The tight relationship between the working class and the desire for fashionable middle-class lifestyle can represent the attitude of social classes meeting with complicated social conditions in what Beck might call a "risk society."

It seems the focus on the class issue in Anglo-Saxon academic circles shifted from Marxist-Weberian working-class studies to late-modern studies on middle class formations. The fear of falling from the existing social status (Ehrenreich 1989) indicates the already existent "structure of entitlement" articulated through the establishment of the futuristic discourse and the concern about elite identity in the digital age and post-industrial planning. As Amy Hanser argues, the "structure of entitlement" refers to "the often-unconscious cultural and social sensibilities that make certain groups of people feel entitled to greater social goods" (Hanser 2008, 3). Here, "social goods" should be replaced by "social status." Following the post-industrial New Class hypothesis, which emphasizes the rise of professionals in post-industrial society, Peter Berger introduces the "knowledge class," whose labor is projected into producing cultures or symbolic knowledge in the age of "knowledge economy (Berger, 1966). Milovan Djilas terms the technocrats in socialist regimes as a "New Class" whose social status mainly depends on political capital, even in post-socialist conditions. Like Djilas, concerned with technocrats and post-war middle-class emergence, American sociologists use the term "professional-managerial-class" to understand the professional workers like teachers, middle-rank managers, engineers, artists, and academics, who receive entrepreneurship training and professional education and work for bureaucratic enterprises, state sectors, etc. (Graeber 2014). Holding the hypothesis that the post-industrial economy offers more flexibility, sociologist Richard Florida applies the term "creative class" to those who have the professional skill and knowledge to drive development and regeneration in post-industrial cities in America. Such post-industrial sociology under a democratic regime conceptualizes the new classes as professional workers different to the traditional petite bourgeois in early industrialization and the labor workers in the manufacturing age. More importantly, in a democratic regime, these new classes consciously involve themselves in changing political agendas (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979).

However, as a socialist country, China is on a trajectory which is difficult to classify under a simple category. The state-led institutional divisions of urban-rural and central-local make the temporal-spatial inequalities and coexistence of industrialization and post-industrialization possible in China. The existing definition and analysis of middle classes in Anglo-Saxon indicate how versatile middle classes sustain middle class status by reproducing socio-culturally segregated hierarchy. However, they infrequently point out the problem of social mobility foreshadowed by social-political transition, especially in the context of globalization, that is (the fear of) social immobility.

Paul Willis problematized social rigidity in his wry work on working class formation in the transition period of industrial society to post-industrial society. "The difficult thing to explain about how middle-class kids get middle class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain about how working-class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves" (Willis 1977: 1). Willis's insightful cultural study on youth explored why and how working-class youth reproduce working class subjectivity. He also alludes to how compared with working-class youth, who actively produce cultural and identity politics to fight the social institutions which were not friendly to the working class, middle-class subject formation remained relatively bound to existing social structures. This much seemed true in Birmingham during 1960s, when the UK transitioned from an industrial society to post-industrial society. Willis's questions about social rigidity and class formation inspired me to ask the following questions: Why and how did Chinese middle-class youth and foreign young professionals let themselves become an entrepreneurial class like "the lads," the working-class youth in Birmingham in the 1960s? Why do they seem to share a similar logic of subject-making?

The phenomenon of both foreign young professionals and middle-class Chinese young people from small cities and towns pouring into China's large post-industrial cities indicates the ambiguous feelings towards social mobility amidst the rapid reconfiguration of the global supply chain. The following anecdotes will elucidate this further.

On a humid afternoon in June 2016, my informant Wu asked me to accompany him on a visit to an incubator where he wanted to register his innovation start-up. After finishing his master's degree in England, he worked in a high-tech company in Shenzhen. He started his own business project with an undergraduate classmate in 2014. He shared a regretful situation haunting most of my informants: "After I came back to China in 2012. I was amazed when I witnessed that my undergraduate classmate had earned a lot. It seems that studying abroad suspended (耽误 danwu) me from earning the same as my classmates. I should have started my own business with him earlier before going to the UK because, you know, in this area if you start early you could get more and earn more, especially considering the fast upgrading of technology in our industry. Age is also a big issue for us. Look at this space. Can you find people older than 30? I am 32, I feel I am old. If I cannot catch up to the running pace of my peers, I fear I could be taotai (淘汰 knockout). That is why we should invent new ways to reach success." The fear of "suspension" and "knockout" led Wu to seek "success" different to what he had explored in traditional business.

"How to define 'success'?" I asked a question that a researcher should not immediately ask, especially when he or she has assumptions about how the power of money and the modern imagination of urban lifestyle can defeat the dreams young people have of an idyllic life that may then turn them into sophisticated social climbers. However, Wu answered: "Success… perhaps means realize my dream. Of course, success means money and status. To tell you the truth, I would feel anxious if I cannot

live and earn as my peers do. But it does not only mean money, it also means a… a recognition that someone cherishes your innovation in this shallow market." On one hand, Wu emphasized the importance of making money as young as possible, as quick as possible; on the other hand, rather than positioning himself as a money grabber, Wu intends to acquire "recognition." This is a target of the contemporary urban moral-economy, a challenge to the "laissez-faire market," and an important aspect of success in contemporary China. Drawing on more data from my respondents, the following section will analyze why young professionals are replacing migrant workers in the new wave of immigration in Shenzhen, and how their diversified family backgrounds play important roles in producing this migration case by case.

5.2 The Coming of New Migrant Professionals/Workers in the Innovation Economy

In May 2016, when I started the second round of my fieldwork in Shenzhen, I was stranded at Pudong Airport in Shanghai because of Shenzhen's heavy rain, which was intensified by the typhoon in the South China Sea. I shared a room arranged by China Southern Airlines with Zheng Jing, a girl working in Shenzhen at a recently registered startup that had received a new round of investment from a local state-owned real estate company. The startup designs and markets electronic beauty instruments based on the rising demand for beauty goods, such as cosmetics and body-care products. With the support of Tencent's Open Platform, a free open-source online application to link hardware and software in smart phones, this startup gained additional network resources (Bourdieu's social capital in this sense), starting its e-commerce business by collaborating with a Japanese cosmetic industry giant. In order to accelerate trans-regional collaboration, Zheng Jing had come to the branch office of the Japanese cosmetic industry giant in Shanghai and then, like me, was trapped in the airport.

After graduating from Central China Normal University, Zheng Jing obtained a one-year master's degree in the UK, before working at a public primary school in Wuhan for two years. Wuhan is the provincial capital in central China. When she found out that I was doing fieldwork research about startup runners in Shenzhen, she happily and immediately relayed her trajectory of "how to be a startup runner":

"I felt desperate working all day with low pay in a big state-owned company. I decided to quit the job and follow my heart. One day, I complained about my weary situation in an intimate WeChat group. A master's course classmate in England told me about a job offer in his startup in Shenzhen. He asked if I wanted to go. He promised to give 3% equity to me, which means that I partly own his startup. Of course I wanted the job, he is an angel in my life! My father was a worker in a state-owned iron and steel company in Wuhan He is now retired. My mother is a primary school teacher. Both of them want me,

an only-child, to marry a good guy and live a stable life… They felt a little shocked by my quick decision to go to Shenzhen. In their generation, 'going to Shenzhen 'means 'Xiahai'. In good words, it means you become a *laoban* (老板 boss); in bad words, it means you live an unstable and risky life… Anyway, I came to Shenzhen. Although the startup is doing high-tech stuffs, it is actually highly linked to the beauty industry which I'd like to work with! Shenzhen is a fast and energetic metropolitan city, much more developed than Wuhan (provincial capital city). And because it is an immigrant city, I do not have a feeling of exclusion in Shenzhen, as most of the people in Shenzhen are *waidiren* (外地人 immigrants). The salary is also higher here than what I received in Wuhan. The people I work with are smart and young, I can learn a lot from them. Nowadays, you will be easily eliminated by the fast development if you do not study."

Having recently re-read sociological and anthropological works based on fieldwork in Shenzhen as I prepared for the second round of fieldwork, I was amazed by Zheng Jing's discourse. Her narrative, surprisingly, was similar to the narratives of the female migrant workers in Ching Kwan Lee's book *Gender and the South China Miracle: Two Worlds of Factory Women*. In her vivid ethnography, Lee describes the social-psychological complexity of city life for female Chinese worker groups in the early 1990s. She argues that "young women decided to come to Shenzhen when they were enticed by romanticized descriptions of life in Shenzhen circulated by complacent locals returning from Shenzhen" (Lee 1998: 81).

Shenzhen plays an important role in ethnographic story-telling about mainland China's modernity and mobility in the marketization period. Economic reforms contributed to regional disparities in China (Fujita and Hu 2001), and a regional hierarchy exists in which southeastern coastal regions represent and are associated with modernity and development (Anagnost 1997). This is especially true of Shenzhen, as the first SEZ, open to the world economy since 1979. Following this opening, wholly foreign capital invested original equipment manufacturers (OEM) were booming. However, to gain more authority in the market-driven economy, in 1993 the Chinese state proposed corporate reorganization based on newly released company law. The OEM enterprises were gradually replaced by sino-foreign equity joint ventures and wholly foreign owned enterprises (WFOE) in China. Since "development has been portrayed as a great machine for manufacturing prosperity in poor countries" (Tsing 2011: 21), the organization and reorganization of industrial enterprises are seen as driving China's economic miracles in the South.

Some economists also strengthen the discourse that South China's economic miracles are created by China's demographic dividend. They claim that it was the migration of surplus rural labor that made Shenzhen SEZ an economic miracle (Fang 2007; Chan 2010). This situation, of late-socialist market economy, also contextualizes sociological and anthropological ethnography on migrant workers. Most ethnographic descriptions

of Shenzhen are bound to discuss rural migrant workers searching for opportunities in export-oriented industrialization. Indeed, the ethnography of export-oriented industrialization sheds lights on how capital-driven marketization and a restricted household registration system accelerated disparities between urban and rural, and how labor politics strengthened the agency of migrant workers.

However, most of my informants were born into fairly well-off families from small cities in other provinces, rather than villages. They received higher education relative to their parents 'generation. The majority of new migrants in Shenzhen are professional-managerial workers in a high-tech driven economy. In contrast to earlier migrant groups who were "seeking factory employment as a personal decision in the rural household economy" (Lee 1998: 74), these newly emerging, and dominant, groups do not need to consider their household economies so much. The reason is not simply that, as they claim, the new migrant professional-managerial workers pouring into Shenzhen are not burdened by economic difficulties back home and are not being forced to send money back home, but rather because the classes (imagined as highly paid) do not actually have much to save at the end of each month. The later chapters will elaborate on how even with relatively highly paid jobs, these classes become urban poor influenced by larger institutionalized mechanisms in China's late-socialist political economy.

Over 90 percent of the startup runners, Chinese and non-Chinese, I interviewed were young men born between 1985 and 1995. As shown in the local statistics bureau report, the average age of residents[96] in Shenzhen is about 28-years-old, therefore young people are the dominant residents in this city. Furthermore, the report shows that Shenzhen is facing a new imbalance in terms of sex. The ratio between men and women was 97.74 in 2000 but had increased to 118.34 in 2010, which is much higher than the national average. Counter to the findings of some social anthropological narratives (see Ching Kwan Lee 1998, Aihwa Ong 1999 and Pun Ngai 2005) that the export-oriented economy brings rural, mostly female workers into labor-intensive low-end manufacturing enterprises,[97] the high-tech driven economy actually draws more men than women. This "new" change in Shenzhen's metropolitan population foreshadows the decline in female labor-intensive manufacturing, and highlights the reality of "low-end" rural-to-urban mobility being no longer prevalent in the "high-end" post-industrial upgrading process. In short, the majority of new immigrants in Shenzhen are no longer blue-collar workers.

Another newly booming population is *laowai* (老外 foreigners). In September 2015, I rented a room close to Nanshan District Technology and Science Park. The landlord Lao Cao, a Shantou man in his forties, told me that "there are so many high-

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[96]" The residents" in the statistics data are those people with Shenzhen Hukou (reticent permit), people without Shenzhen Hukou but who have been working in Shenzhen for over six months, and people with Shenzhen Hukou but studying or working in other cities or other countries. Please see:
http://www.sztj.gov.cn/xxgk/tjsj/pcgb/201105/t20110512_2061597.htm

[97] By using fieldwork data, Lee and Ngai show how the labor-intensive electronic manufacturers like to hire rural women, because bosses hold a gender-biased idea that the payment of female workers are cheaper and female hands are more dexterous than male hands when dealing with fine electronic knits.

end *haigui*[98] (海归 Chinese overseas returnees) and *laowai* in Shenzhen! *Haigui* like you are willing to come to Shenzhen now!" Alongside the de-manufacturing shift in Shenzhen, the city is now viewed as a favorite hub for foreigners to establish startups. Patrick, a 28-year-old Nepalese man who studied Chinese and Management at Jilin University, told me that Shenzhen is considerably more international than Jilin, and there are more chances in Shenzhen than in Nepal. "International," "high-speed," and "high-tech" were key words used by my informants to describe their global lives in Shenzhen. American anthropologist Dr Mary Ann O'Donnell has been living in Shenzhen for 20 years. In fluent Chinese, she explained that in the mid-1990s when she conducted her fieldwork, most migrants, especially the rural migrant workers, lived in non-metropolitan urban areas and urban villages (城中村 *chengzhongcun*) in metropolitan areas. "At that time, 'Shenzhen Dream 'meant migrating to Shenzhen and finding a job in a sino-foreign joint venture enterprise. The new 'Shenzhen Dream is becoming an entrepreneur and doing international business affairs. Look at how many young professionals and foreign people are coming here." She reminded me to look at our surroundings. Two foreign journalists were sitting two meters away from us and having a discussion while writing. A man in a brown cap was chatting with his female Chinese friend.

Jim Leung, a Dutch-Chinese man in his late 30s who was born in Hong Kong, told me his impression of the transformation in Shenzhen. "My home is in Rotterdam, but I come to Hong Kong and Shenzhen every year for business. I think Shenzhen became a Hong Kong in 1990s and Hong Kong became a normal Chinese mega city especially after the reunification in 1997." He told me that even without statistical data, he could immediately conclude that foreigners liked Shenzhen more than Hong Kong, "…because it is obviously an open global city. You can buy everything, enjoy world cuisine, and of course it is better to do a high-tech startup here than in Hong Kong." This one reason is why he transferred his business from Hong Kong to Shenzhen.

Focusing on how foreigners contend with institutions when moving to Shenzhen, and, more generally, on the area's flow of labor migration, raises a series of questions. How to understand "mobility" in post-industrial conditions? How does mobility play an important role in making Shenzhen a global city? Why and how are middle-class youth and young foreign professionals pouring into Shenzhen like "rural surplus laborers" did in the 1980s and 1990s?

Spatial mobility is always bound to social mobility and hence these questions should be contextualized by both the mechanisms of Chinese class stratification and the global environment. In these contexts, I do not emphasize the cognitive difference between "domestic migration" and "immigration," but rather by broadening ethnographic imagination of "domestic migration" and "immigration," conclude that both are actually enactments of mobility. Mobility here pertains to the migration and immigration of

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[98]Even though I explained that I was a student working on my fieldwork research, a rite of passage to become an anthropologist, in his mind, I was a haigui, doing high-end "shehui diaocha" (社会调查 social researches) in Shenzhen.

people, the inflow and outflow of capital. The small sample of personal data that I collected should be analyzed in relation to domestic migration, immigration, and (un-)employment issues on a domestic and global scale.

On the surface, young middle-class trans-urban migration is driven by chances at high-paying jobs. As explained by my informant Zou, a former engineer working at a state-owned enterprise in Hunan, because of the doubled salary he could earn, he quit his job in SOE and came to Shenzhen. However, the dilemma of social mobility arises when the middle classes in inner mainland China (内地 *neidi*), a less-developed area compared to Shenzhen, choose to leave home. With the decline of the socialist work unit system, which protected residents with a strong state-sponsored welfare system in urban China, middle-class young people of *neidi* cannot easily find iron-rice-bowl jobs anymore. This caused panic for middle-class youth. An informant shared his anxiety with me: "I am afraid of what will happen if I marry a girl and cannot afford to raise my family. What if I can't afford an apartment, like my parents did?" Most of their parents, working in state-owned-sectors in the cities of inner mainland China, had housing and other welfare benefits before the decline of *danwei* (单位 state owned work unit) system. However, without the protection of strong state-sponsored welfare, the new generation cannot even sustain their middle-class status, which is represented by owning an apartment and having the same full-protection of state insurance as their parents 'generation. In this sense, as claimed by my informant Yang Yang, they have to leave home and find more or better chances at the lives they aspire to.

Moreover, the imbalance between the long-term, high-pay investment of education in middle-class families and the low-pay salary in the inner mainland area accelerates the trans-urban middle-class migration. Over 50 percent of Chinese(-born) startup runners have had educational experiences in other countries, especially in the US and the UK. After graduating from Zhejiang University, Cao Feng studied computer science in the UK. He found it hard to find a job in London, so left the UK and came back to China. The low-paying IT jobs in inner mainland China made him choose to stay in Shenzhen and not in his hometown Changsha.

This small sample aligns with what large sets of data showed in the UN Chronicle: the beginning of the 21st century witnessed increasing numbers of overseas Chinese, especially young professionals, migrating back to China. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education, in 2012 over 272,900 overseas students returned, this being an increase of 46.57 percent compared with 2011. [99] Running parallel to the normalization of obtaining an overseas degree which is highly commodified when coming from developed countries such as the UK and the US, is that Chinese return migration has become popularized among Chinese overseas students. An informant, working in a social association for promoting local tiny-scale entrepreneurship, offered an explanation and joked about this phenomenon: "Getting an overseas degree in

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[99] In 2013, migration-studies scholar Wang Huiyao published a report "China's Return Migration and its Impact on Home Development" to share this data, see: https://unchronicle.un.org/article/chinas-return-migration-and-its-impact-home-development

developed countries is like the well-known commercial strategy to '*chukou zhuan neixiao* '(出口转内销 domestic sales of commodities originally produced for exports). It is reasonable for a middle-class family in inner mainland China to spend from 200,000RMB (28,000Euros) to 500,000RMB (70,000Euros) for their one-child to get an overseas degree within one or two years because this 200,000RMB degree is imagined as good credential that may help them to find 100,000RMB/year job in big cities."

Behind the socialized notion that good degrees can help people find good jobs, there is an unspoken social fear of technical-professional unemployment in urban China. There are no reliable figures on the real unemployment rate in urban China, especially during and after the state-led industrial upgrading.[100] An informant working as a service manager in a state-sponsored entrepreneurial incubation center stated: "Why did we receive the money from local government? It is because we are increasing the employment rate of this society! See how many entrepreneurs are working in this center!"

The underdeveloped high-end industries in inner third-line and fourth-line areas cannot keep up with the increasing number of professional workers graduating with higher degrees in specific professions. Take Yang Yang's case as an example. Yang Yang is a 32-year-old 3D printer startup founder and manager in an "incubation center" founded by Star River Corporation, a local real estate developer in Shenzhen. He studied Industrial Engineering at De Montfort University from 2001 to 2005, and obtained his master's degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Warwick in 2006. He was born in Shijiazhuang, the capital city of Hebei Province. His parents are now retired government officials who remain in Shijiazhuang and ask him to come back. "There is no job to fit my interest and career. I focus on affordable 3D printing technology in the technology service industry. However, the state-owned heavy industries, which have no position in technology service, are dominant in Shijiazhuang. I cannot realize my career dream in Shijiazhuang. Shenzhen is a good place!" he responded to my question about why he chose Shenzhen over of his hometown as his entrepreneurship hub.

At the same time, the global recession and shifting market bring more and more young foreign professionals to China. Some are young graduates with desires to explore the world rather than, as explained by Luke, "be trapped in industries with high rates of unemployment." Luke reported that during his time studying for his electronic engineering degree at the University of Adelaide, he learnt that it was difficult to find a job after graduation. He took a two-year gap from university and came to China. Although he had never been to China, to him the country was familiar, "…because I have a lot of Chinese neighbors in Sydney and Chinese-born classmates in Adelaide."

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[100]An economist from Shanghai University of Finance and Economics shared her perspective on national data collection regarding the unemployment rate in China. She said that the methodology of collecting unemployment data in China is underdeveloped and figures per se are also unreliable, especially the figures from local governments.

Some foreign entrepreneurs-to-be have been living in China for several years or more. Even though there is huge diversity in employment, profession, family, nationality, and ethnicity amongst the foreign professionals I met in Shenzhen, it also seems that they all agree that Shenzhen is their best choice if they are to stay in China. In general, these foreign professionals were at least middle-class or the offspring of middle-class parents in their own countries. On the surface, most of the foreign tech-entrepreneurs I met in Shenzhen gave me similar explanations as to why he or she came to China: China is a massive consumer market. Amirsan is a 29-year-old Russian tech-startup runner who has a bachelor degree in Communication and Psychology. He said he had watched the fast growth in China and decided not to leave. A convenient mode of urban life has been cultivated by the latest round of urban "globalization" in Shenzhen. Like other global cities, world cuisine created by "culinary soft power" (Farrer 2010) from the global North to the global South is everywhere in Shenzhen. Local authorities have tried to form an authentic global community in the Shekou area with the introduction of separate supermarkets only selling expensive imported food, even though the regular customers of expensive supermarkets in these local communities are newly rich Chinese.

Similar to the Chinese middle-class migrant professionals in Shenzhen, middle-class foreign professionals are bound to re-create an entrepreneurial subject to overcome their specific and diverse anxieties stemming from the re-configuration of global supply chains. Henk, a Dutch professional, was working as a merchandise manager for a Dutch company. After the Dutch company shut down its branch in China, he lost his job and started his own business in transnational commerce between China and Europe around the year 2000. He became rich. He and his wife rented a big villa in a decent Shekou community. He had even purchased a small factory when he had enough money to invest in his own business. In his narration of his entrepreneurial career, the year 2008 was marked by the global recession in traditional transnational commerce, especially the traditional direct commerce between China as supplier and Europe as buyer. This situation, according to Henk, lead to his failure as a middling buyer of cheap goods. After discovering that the Chinese maker movement had opened a niche market in China, he collaborated with Hans and other foreign friends to invest in establishing a tech-entrepreneurship in Shenzhen. When asked why he decided not to return to the Netherlands, he said due to his age (40s) there was little chance of finding a similar high-paying job as a manager in the Netherlands. The growing Chinese market gave him reason to believe that he would become happy and rich again in Shenzhen. In *Transnational Lives in China: Expatriates in a Globalizing City* (2014) Angela Lehmann shows how foreign middle-class migration to China is "privileged migration." Lehmann argues that the individualism valued by "Western" (neo-)liberal global capitalism sets the stage for its citizens to travel and migrate. She problematizes this structured phenomenon as "privileged migration."

The updated Exit-Entry Administration Law of the People's Republic of China (2012), the never-upgraded Administration of Foreigners Working in China Provisions

(1996), and local practice of these laws plays an important institutional role in (re)shaping the experiences and practical mobility of middle-class professionals in Shenzhen. Half of my informants, like the Chinese middle-class youth, had already experienced domestic migration within the boundaries of mainland China. The relatively new updated Exit-Entry Administration Law and the reclaimed, outdated Provisions increase the tension between enterprises that hire informal foreign workers and the local government. For some foreigners it is more difficult to find a temporary job in some cities, especially cities in the northern part of China where the formal state-owned economy is dominant. However, in Shenzhen, where private enterprises were booming during the marketization period, the local practice of employing foreigners did not follow item 34 of the outdated Provisions which states that individual economic organizations and individual Chinese citizens are not allowed to employ foreigners. Even with extensive experience in dealing with its informal economy, this was such an overwhelming issue for the local state in Shenzhen that they simply turned a blind eye to it. As a result, and as was discussed earlier, this attracted increasing numbers of foreigners from other parts of China.

Local practice of the Exit-Entry Administration Law is less regulated in Shenzhen compared to other places. During my fieldwork in Shenzhen, I experienced two official purges of *sanfei laowai* (" 三非 " 老外 illegal immigrants, foreign residents and employees). The first was in December 2015, half a month before Christmas, when there were still many foreigners. The second was in June 2016. As explained by a policeman who is also my father's colleague, big cities always conduct routine biannual purges. Shenzhen is no exception. Some local police stations make formal terrifying announcements about the punishment for non-registration, yet it seems that foreigners, especially those who have lived in Shenzhen for a while, have gotten used to the announcements and ignore them. In fact, foreigners living in Shenzhen for over a year even comfort newcomers on their online discussion platforms:

(notes from an online chat)

Me: Did you hear and read the announcement online?

Informant: They do that all the time… Does not affect me. But thanks for the warning.

Me: Okay! "All the time"? What do you mean?

Informant: In Shekou they go to all the bars to check passports once every six months... Just do not hang out in Shekou or Coco Park shopping zones. The police have quotas to fill every six months.

Me: Is it convenient to legally register in Shenzhen?

Informant: Yes, just go to the police station and fill in a form… If you live in a hotel, the hotel will do it for you.

Me: But why do some of them not want to register? Because they are travel visa holders?

Informant: Because some of them are on a ten-year tourist visa (from USA), and leave China every three months, teach English, and do some small business like

us on their tourist visa. But, even if you have a tourist visa and you work, it is fine. Just don't tell them your work. In my opinion China is very open and welcoming to foreigners. And no, I am not "5mao."[101]

Me: Okay! I understand your point! So, Do you think that they aren't registering at the police station because they are hesitant to do this (for fear of the Chinese police) – or are they just ignoring the requirement?

Informant: Because they do not know what will happen if they do. The reality is nothing will happen. But they do not know this, so they are scared. And they do not know that actually China is less careful in handling this issue today. Even if they wanted to, who cares about foreigners teaching English and doing small entrepreneurship on a tourist visa? They have bigger fish to fry.

The 2008 crisis caused some foreign companies to shut branches in China. However, the global crisis also seemed to bring a large number of foreigners to China. The majority of these foreigners were neither expats nor associated with companies from their own countries. Moreover, due to the less-regulated milieu and bureaucratic system of foreign affairs in Shenzhen, even documented foreigners who live in Shenzhen are increasing,[102] not to mention those who are undocumented. During the early stages of their engagement in China's political-economy, foreigners needed Chinese business partners to transfer from being dispersed subjects with low-pay flexible jobs to being entrepreneurial subjects managing the flexibility of their businesses in China. Strong demand and expectation for foreigner skills, qualification and foreign networks drove the Chinese government to launch new regulations on migration and foreigner employment. Local government is at the forefront of the management of middling migration for their own development targets. With its focus on the development of technological innovation, Shenzhen government intends to attract high-end professionals from developed Western countries.[103]

5.3 Producing Migrant Professionals through Family

The anxieties and expectations of entrepreneurial subject-making are also reconfigured in relation to family. Personal information about family was always a key topic during interviews with my informants in Shenzhen. Most of my informants felt a little embarrassed about the questions on "family." This was not because my questions were odd—I used some "standardized" questions from a larger CFPS (China Family Panel

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[101] A term invented by some netizens to define those online commentators who receive RMB from governments and speak for them.

[102] Please See this report in month-piece mass media in China: http://www.china.org.cn/english/23230.htm. Also, see the online platform established by foreign startup runners in China:
http://www.startinchina.com/shenzhen/life/expats_in_shenzhen.html (Accessed July 3, 2018).

[103] How Immigration is Shaping Chinese Society (Pieke, Wang, Xiang, Barabanteseva, Speelman, Ahl and Pelican 2019). Mercator Institute for China Studies: China Monitor. 27 November 2019. Please see: https://www.merics.org/en/china-monitor/china-immigration (Accessed January 26, 2020).

Studies) questionnaire—but rather because, in my informants 'words, they do not often speak at length about their family and parents. More or less, there is an escapism from "family" in the circle of Chinese and non-Chinese entrepreneurs. Although only a limited number felt comfortable discussing the role of family in their life tracks towards tech-entrepreneurship, family does play an important role in young professionals becoming tech-entrepreneurs. However, diverging slightly from the main arguments made by sociological researchers who care more about the role of family in inter-generational social mobility—i.e. that family offers educational capital and social capital for network building (Bourdieu 2011)—I explore the idea that rather than acting as a source of social and educational capital helping children to pass through challenges in the process of social mobility, the original family *per se* is one of the challenging social institutions that these young people must pass through.

In order to bypass the classic sociological hypothesis that family functionally enables a child's network building, several Foucauldian sociological and anthropological scholars have drawn attention to the disciplinary role that family plays in a child's formation into an adult (Hannah 1997; Therborn 2004; Holt 2008). I do not employ this trend of research in my thesis to deny the results of other family-bound network studies in Asian entrepreneurship building in modern economy (Weidenbaum 1996; Douw, Huang and Ip 2001; Colli 2003; Yeung 2004). Instead, I aim to offer an alternative approach, to re-consider the role of family in personal subject-making and the alternative ways of network building prevalent in current startup entrepreneurship in the innovation economy. This seems essential given that most contemporary startup runners are not from "traditional" merchant families, but from families backed by *danwei* (单位 state-owned sector). However, unlike culture-centered arguments about how the disciplinary power in East Asian families stems from so-called "Confucianism" (Hwang 1999), I argue that the tension created by family disciplinary power should be understood in the specific and transitional context of the state-led institutional construction of family. Otherwise, we may become confused by the informant's ambiguous attitudes towards their conjugal families where, on one hand, they try hard to escape from these families, yet on the other hand, they are bound to them. There are also emerging studies dealing with the intergenerational divisions in Western societies especially after the 2008 financial crisis. Intergenerational relationships are increasingly important in young adulthood because without them individuals face a disadvantage. Individuals today confront greater difficulties in finding good jobs and often cannot attain a stable financial position on their own (Swartz 2009). These lengthened ties with parents are vital and are changing the relation between the individual and their family. Tensions also rise when families cannot sufficiently support adult children to achieve higher education, which would influence the social mobility of the next generation (North and Fiske 2015). Family studies sociologist, Kurt Lüscher's theory on "intergenerational ambivalence" (2002) offers some insights to understand the family as an important force for Western young adults. As argued by Lüscher, ambivalence accounts for the coexistence and opposition of harmony and

conflict in intergenerational relations. This is not necessarily negative but rather implies an individual task of re-structuring relationships. That is, there are always strong drives for young generations of family members to leave and to come back home, with both love and dislike.

The overwhelming impulse to escape from the conjugal family should be considered as part of a generational gap created, in part, by institutional changes and large-scale social restructuring in post-reform China and the post-crisis West. Both young generations are searching for the recognition of family while redefining their own pattern of mobility through working innovatively and building entrepreneurship in Shenzhen. In their narration, "family" and "anxiety of influence" for entrepreneurial subject-making, drives them to "go out" in youthfulness and "come back" in adulthood. The stories below will depict how newcomers to Shenzhen deal with the activities of "going-out" and "coming-back" and will analyze which kinds of institutional factors influence their conflicted mentalities around "going-out" and "coming-back."

5.3.1 "Going out" from One's Comfort Zone: Forging Individualistic "Entrepreneurial Spirit" through Family

I noticed that young professionals, like Wu and his colleagues working in high-end techno-enterprises, tend to come from middle-class Chinese families. Some of their parents work or retired as *ganbushenfen* (干部身份 a status of employees in state-owned enterprise or in the governmental organizations). I asked, "do your family members support you starting up your business in Shenzhen?" I assumed their parents who worked in state-owned enterprise and governmental organizations would not allow them to work for their own interest and make profits through entrepreneurship without the protection of the formal welfare system offered by the state because, in my perspective and experience, these parents expect their children to have stable jobs. A "stable job" means the salary of the job is stable, and the position of the job is tenure-oriented. Subsequently, only some state-owned enterprises, huge private businesses, and governmental sectors can offer relatively "stable jobs." Startup entrepreneurship building is not automatically supported by parents who expect their children to have stable jobs. Wu explained that his parents don't know or understand what he is doing in Shenzhen. "They only know that their son is an engineer working in a big company and working for the rising new industry."

The strong will to differentiate themselves from their peers living an expected "stable life" also drives many young startup-builders to work and stay in Shenzhen. Unfortunately, after Wu started his business with his classmates and colleagues, his financial budget became very tight. "Even though I earn relatively more than my high school classmates working in my hometown city, investment in networking and preparation for designing my product costs me a lot of money and time... I think I am

poorer than them, but different to them. They have bought relatively cheap apartments in our hometown, earn several thousand *yuan* a month. They are living the stable life that our parents expect. However, I want to do something different." The strong will to "do something different" is actually grounded in the anxiety of "self-realization." In Wu's discourse, the conjugal family-bound "stable life" is anything but "self-realization" manifested and conceptualized by "doing something different." He added that he doesn't want to go home frequently because he cannot deal with the judgement of families and neighbors. "Even though I do not care what they are talking about, I sometimes feel uneasy… I would rather choose to stay in Shenzhen."

Wang, an informant running his startup with former colleagues, told me: "To tell you the truth, if I stay and live with my parents in Shenyang (a provincial capital city in the rust-belt northeastern of China), of course I can live well, even better than how I live in Shenzhen. It is my comfort zone. But I still choose to stay in Shenzhen and focus on my business. The youth should learn how to bear life risks while they are young. It is not only because the salary is low in my hometown, but because my parents still nag me with traditional cliches, such as 'you should hurry up and find a good girl to marry, ' 'you should find a stable job. 'Actually, the working pattern in our generation is totally different from our parents. They cannot offer any useful suggestion on our career building, and they cannot even judge what I am doing in Shenzhen."

Other Chinese entrepreneurs agreed with the sentiments expressed by Wang. They discussed leaving their comfort zones for opportunities in the city as a chance to test how much risk they could bear in their search for their first buckets of gold, and also how it was necessary to move away from the outdated life structure that was shaped by nagging parents and family scrutiny.

The parents of my Chinese informants were born between 1955 and 1965. Their children, the Chinese generation born between 1985 and 1995, is highly problematized in sociological research and the mass media as post 80-generation (八零后 *baling hou*), a generation born under the strict practice of "the One Child Policy," a social engineering policy on family/population planning adopted in 1979. They are seen as a generation diverged from their parents 'generation, post 50-generation (五零后 *wuling hou*), who experienced political-economic unrest such as the Cultural Revolution and the Urban Youth Down-to-the-Countryside Movement in the Mao era (1949-1976), Reform and Opening in the Deng era (1978-1994), and Mass Lay-offs in Jiang's period. In this sense, the post-80 generation is seen as a generation with insufficient experience to take on responsibilities. Additionally, with the development of marketization after de-collectivization in China's post-socialist reforms, when the state retreated from private life, those born in and after the period of Reform and Opening have become more individualistic, even if their approaches to individualism deviates from Western Europe (Yan 2010).

As argued by Mette Halskov Hansen and Cuiming Pang (2010), individualism among young rural migrants "remains entangled with their perceptions of the family as a collective of indisputable economic, social and emotional importance (Hansen and

Pang 2010, 61)." While in creating the motivation of "escape from the family," family acts as a regulatory social institution in relation to the risk of entrepreneurial life in Shenzhen. However, from my conversations with them, the Chinese and non-Chinese tech-entrepreneurs-to-be did not all perform entrepreneurial individualism through "leaving family." The escape from family is driven by individualistic ambitions to search for career success, though Chinese individualization in youth-to-adulthood is distinct from the Western process. Compared to Western Europe, where individualization started in an affluent society, individualization in China started during marketization based in an economy of shortage without political liberalization and a well-structured welfare regime. This situation in China, as is argued by the anthropologist Yan Yunxiang, engendered state-managed individualization (Yan 2010). Returning to the current situation, the generational gap created through social transitions contributes to the rise of individualistic consciousness, a drive to challenge the existing "less-developed" expectations of family and realize economic goals in risky and "developed" ways. In this sense, family presents regulatory social orders, seen as outdated cliches and "traditions," which should be escaped when individuals want to "develop" themselves in the market economy.

For "Western" tech-entrepreneurs, departing the developed "West" equates to leaving a continually decreasing post-economic crisis comfort zone in search of better lives overseas, specifically in China. Chinese and non-Chinese entrepreneurs have different notions about the regulatory role of family. Such differences depend on the existing inter-generational relations and the different tracks of individualization, within each social context. For Chinese interviewees, family acts as burdensome order and collectivized power that compels them to leave. The Chinese performances of individualism shed light on the burden that family adds. For those foreign interviewees, especially those from western countries, family plays an important role in reshaping their communal performance of individualism in China. Hans, a self-employed Dutch engineer who started up his tech business in early-learning education in Shenzhen, discussed the influence of his family on his choice to "go out":

"My mom and dad were hippies in the 1960s. They always supported what I wanted to do when I was a child. After graduating from HBO (higher vocational education) in Utrecht, I started to work for Phillips... I came to China in 2006. I met my wife (Emily, a Hunanese woman) in Shanghai. We moved to Shenzhen in 2010, then I started up my business. My parents always supported what I want to do… economically and mentally. However, I found out that Chinese parents are not so supportive in a child's individualistic choice. In the early-learning education programs, I met a lot of Chinese parents. They are anxious parents. They expect their children to study well and later become an elite. Of course, my parents wish me to have a better life, but they seldom judge the job I work in and the woman who I am married to."

Hans 'discourse shows the binary social notions of "Western liberal parents" and "Asian anxious parents" that some of the other foreign interviewees also mentioned when they discussed the roles of their families. However, the reason I cite his discourse is that his explanation about "the difference" sheds light on "liberal Westerners" privileges and their indifference about the competitive social context that globally makes "anxious parents" (Stearns 2004; Nelson 2010). It also highlights the re-conceptualization of their "liberal home in the West" to support them going out. Chapter six further articulates how this difference was used in cultivating "entrepreneurial Maker Culture," as common sense to form economic communities in the current globalized innovation economy. My fieldwork data suggests what is argued by Angela Lehmann (2014): that the middling foreign expats in China strengthen their image as "Westerners" through the articulation of "traditional" "Western" family activities and nostalgic performances of nationality and home (Lehmann, 2014). The practice of (anti-)social orders of home is a strategic way for many foreign professional entrepreneurs to perform as "Western." The construction of imagined "Western adventurers" strengthens their performance of individualism in China. "The value of individualism plays a central role in this decision to leave home and essentially 'become global'. The tension between value discourses of this heightened individualism and the contrasting expectations of the community results in the form of vulnerability—expressed here as the feeling structure of anxiety" (Lehmann, 2014).

5.3.2 "Be successful, otherwise I will not come back": Making "the successful subject" through Familial Recognition

The second challenge that family seems to create for my interviewees is that the activity of "coming home" implies a family's recognition of their offspring's success. In this sense, the recognition of family is an important factor in feelings of personal achievement. Interviewees always claim to struggle between "coming back" and "not coming back." Wang explained this struggle to me:

> "Most of my entrepreneur peers in Shenzhen understand that they will go back to their hometown. As the only-child, if we do not go back to see parents at least once a year, we would be criticized as cruel people who are bare of credits. In my mind, I want to go back when I feel I am successful, economically successfully because, in their minds, making a startup business is not economically safe work. At least, I should prove to them that I live much better than in the past. However, the ambiguity of coming home is that if I went back and lived with my parents for a longer time, other people would speculate about whether or not I had failed in Shenzhen, yet if I live longer with my parents, I would be nagged as *kenlao zu* (啃老族 young adults who live with old parents).

Chinese people are afraid of losing face (丢面子 *diu mianzi*) upon others and whether I am successful or not in the future, I do not want to be judged by those provincial people. So I always struggle between 'come back 'and 'not come back. 'It seems that I *diaozhe* (吊着 an informal phrase of "suspension" in Chinese) between considering 'come back 'and 'not come back'!"

Metaphorically speaking, Wang's discourse sheds light on two "credentials" bound to family that define entrepreneurial success in contemporary China. First, the activity of "coming home" is a re-confirmation of personal achievements after "going out." The activity of "coming-home" always combines with missions such as exhibiting an entrepreneur's economic "success" to parents and relatives. Second, the activity of "coming-home" is a double-edged sword. If they come back and stay longer than the expectations of the people around them, they will be judged "not successful." However, although some informants mentioned the filial merits of the activity of "coming back," these two dissimilar family-bound entrepreneurial credentials are actually produced in specific social-economic contexts rather than "traditional filial culture." Taking care of parents is indeed a moral merit for an only-child to fulfill, but moral merit is also earned in entrepreneurship. For fear of being seen as "people who are bare of credits," they need to show their filial merit. In addition, it is the decline of the state-led pension system that increases the financial burden of conjugal families in China. It turns the migrant professional teleology of "coming back"—recognition of family—into "short time stay." Entrepreneurs who are able to "follow their heart" and "do what they want to do" are generally taking on most of the burden of justifying their good lives to their retired parents who, as retired former state-owned workers, are unable to afford peaceful retirement because the state has cut their pensions. Their children, then, have to move between the "city of opportunities" and "comfort zones." This anxious condition of back-and-forth is defined as *diaozhe*, an informal phrase of "suspension" in Chinese. It echoes the fear of social rigidity that I articulated at the beginning of this chapter.

As for foreign young professional risk-seekers in China, they also face up to the recognition of family on their return. It seems that Chinese and non-Chinese young men have slightly different feelings around the recognition of family. Nano, an Italian startup owner in Shenzhen, explained: "My family always support me in doing whatever I want to do. They supported me trying a different life in China eight years ago. When I told them that I had decided to stay and live in China (my wife is Chinese), they apparently said okay but I understand they are worried about me. Sometimes I feel anxious if the business is not going well... All I want to do with my parents is to prove that I am happy and live well in China." Joseph, an American currently hired as vice-headmaster at an elite local public school, told me that coming from a middle-class family, his parents are worried more about how he is getting used to the Chinese society than about how much he can earn. This dissimilarity shows that the "middle-class

family anxiety" is in relation to the social welfare system in specific nation states rather than in relation to the Europe-centered issue of "individualization."

I assert the above for several reasons. Firstly, compared to middle-class families in a welfare state, Chinese middle-class families place more pressure on their children's life choices. The families of Chinese and non-Chinese interviewees tend to see themselves as "middle-class" in the post-reform late-socialist state and Europe's post-war welfare states, respectively. However, the anxiety of "career building" is greater in Chinese middle-class families than in "Western" families. This cannot simply be explained by suggesting that the latter cherish children's independence more than the former, but because a child's failure produces a bigger burden in Chinese urban middle-class families, especially at a time when the state-led pension system is deteriorating. This supports another hidden teleology of becoming a successful entrepreneur, identified by Wang: being able to make his parents feel economically safe in the future.

This specific goal contributed to a phenomenon apparent in the young male Chinese professionals I met in Shenzhen. Increasingly, this group of entrepreneurs are buying apartments in their hometowns to prove to their families and neighbors that "they earned a lot or they are economically capable of living a good life in Shenzhen,"[104] even though they are not living in the apartments. Besides, investing in the real estate market in small Chinese cities was seen as a wise investment strategy because the price of real estate in small cities was mushrooming, at the time I was conducting my fieldwork. Thus, housing was becoming valuable materially, and was also an indicator of one's ability to live a successful life in China after the marketization of the real estate industry in the late 1990s (Zhang 2012). Recent ethnography in the field of China studies depicts how housing has also become a force that mobilizes growing numbers of young Chinese people to try entrepreneurial work in other places. An example is the key incentive that drove Chinese contracted migrant workers to Africa was the burden of housing mortgages in their hometowns (Driessen 2015). Along the same lines, trying to show their good-life-in-another-place, many Fujian overseas Chinese built European style villas in their home villages and countries (Chu 2010).

Secondly, middle-class families in each context, Chinese and Western, display different attitudes towards "entrepreneurship building" because they understand risk differently. Entrepreneurship building was only fully revived about 40 years after the marketization economic reform in China, hence "becoming self-employed startup owners in the market" is not a widely accepted idea for middle-class Chinese parents working in state sectors. Chinese interviewees always emphasized their struggles to persuade their parents to let them pursue their dreams in Shenzhen. However, their parents 'hesitant attitude towards entrepreneurship building likely originated from uncertainty about the market economy, which is seen as a riskier system than their *danwei* institution.

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[104] Interview Wu, July 02, 2016.

In sum, family does play an important role in the struggling formation of the entrepreneur-subject in the current market situation. On one hand, family provides order that is counter to entrepreneurship building. On the other hand, family can create the stimulus to arouse entrepreneurial spirit in children. This tension contributes to the dynamic construction of the contemporary entrepreneur-subject through young risk seeker activities of "going-out" and "coming-back." Moreover, young Chinese and non-Chinese "Western" professionals exhibit different mentalities and activities of "going-out" and "coming-back." This dissimilarity originates from the level of risk that their families can bear, and the potential loss or failure that they imagine their welfare systems can compensate for. No matter how many differences were created and stereotyped in their discursive activities, these people all strengthen their identity as "entrepreneurs" through struggling for, and hopefully gaining, the recognition of family.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter analyzes the pattern of mobility in the transition to an innovation economy: the massive middling migration in China. Like the rural-to-urban migrant workers in the 1990s, today's trans-regional migrant professionals are also driven by new economic chances in Shenzhen and the Pearl River Delta. However, holding different amounts of so-called social and cultural capital and pushed to the frontier of global competition in the IT-driven innovation economy, young migrant professionals have attained greater expectations and imagination of "making a difference" which are strongly supported by the state's discourse on "mass entrepreneurship and innovation."

Moreover, these young Chinese migrant professionals digress from a major industrial sociological assumption regarding catch-up social mobility driven by ambition for higher rungs on the ladder. The current expectations for mobility form with the rise of individuality, which is manifested by the massive trend of tech-entrepreneurship building as "self-realization." In this sense, rather than the mere fear of falling, the fear of suspension mobilizes and strengthens their strong will to differentiate themselves from other immigrants, such as peasant migrant workers and elites.

The fear of suspension is created by the conflict between expectation of self-realization and anxiety of recognition in relation to family. However, the burden of family and neighborhood recognition indicates that the standard to define the good-life is highly materialized in the institution of the Chinese family, and migrants or "runaways" have not really developed a new idea of a good life to challenge the older generation. This social factor contributes to their long-term dilemma of suspension between hometown and metropolitan city. How did my interviewees revise their

suspended life chances and survive the suspended living conditions in Shenzhen? Chapter six will offer some answers and analysis.