



Journal of Current Chinese Affairs

China aktuell

Topical Issue: Going Out: The Lives of Chinese Students Abroad
Guest Editors: Anders S. Hansen and Stig Thøgersen

Hansen, Anders Sybrandt (2015),
The Temporal Experience of Chinese Students Abroad and the Present Human
Condition, in: *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 44, 3, 49–77.

URN: <http://nbn-resolving.org/urn/resolver.pl?urn:nbn:de:gbv:18-4-8800>

ISSN: 1868-4874 (online), ISSN: 1868-1026 (print)

The online version of this article and the other articles can be found at:
<www.CurrentChineseAffairs.org>

Published by
GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Institute of Asian Studies and
Hamburg University Press.

The *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* is an Open Access publication.
It may be read, copied and distributed free of charge according to the conditions of the
Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.

To subscribe to the print edition: <ias@giga-hamburg.de>
For an e-mail alert please register at: <www.CurrentChineseAffairs.org>

The *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* is part of the GIGA Journal Family, which also
includes *Africa Spectrum*, *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* and *Journal of
Politics in Latin America*. <www.giga-journal-family.org>.



The Temporal Experience of Chinese Students Abroad and the Present Human Condition

Anders Sybrandt HANSEN

Abstract: This article examines the experiences of Chinese elite university students abroad through the lens of temporality. In the struggle to get ahead, elite students are expected to carefully deploy their time. Studying abroad, it is argued, has become one more step in a culturally idealised temporal arrangement of how one is expected to go about advancing. The downside to this ethics of striving is shown to be a pervasive sense of restlessness (浮躁, *fúzào*). The article shows how relocating to a different life environment allowed a group of elite students to respond to their temporal predicament in existentially creative ways that registered socially as personal maturation. It is argued that these responses were set in motion by the students' inhabiting an expanse of not-yet-purposeful time. Treating the temporal experience of Chinese elite students as a pronounced inflection of an increasingly global temporal mode of striving, the article enquires into the temporality of the present human condition.

■ Manuscript received 4 November 2014; accepted 1 June 2015

Keywords: China, self-development, striving individual, study abroad, temporality

Dr. Anders Sybrandt Hansen is a postdoc in Anthropology at Aarhus University. His research focuses on contemporary Chinese society and culture. He has written on university students' engagement with the Chinese Communist Party, on migrants' integration with the global economy, and on contemporary PRC historiography. His current research regards the experiences of elite students studying abroad. His publications include "Purity and Corruption: Chinese Communist Party Applicants and the Problem of Evil" (2013), "Learning the Knacks of Actually Existing Capitalism: Young Beijing Migrants and the Problem of Value" (2012), and "Past and Present Pasts: Historical Labours in Modern China" (2011).
E-mail: <etnoash@cas.au.dk>

Introduction

This article¹ employs temporality as an analytical lens to examine Chinese students' experiences of self-development abroad. I show that, for my informants, living abroad involved experiences of time that were strikingly different from those they were accustomed to as students in the Chinese context. I argue that my exchange student-informants found themselves inhabiting a horizon of not-yet-purposeful time. By this I mean an expanse of time that they did not perceive as already saturated with a specific, culturally valued purpose, but which remained open to different potential uses. This temporal condition, partly planned and partly fortuitous, elicited a number of different responses from the students that were decisive in regards to their personal feelings of maturation, which is a projected goal and a retrospective claim of countless transnational Chinese students (e.g. Thøgersen 2012). Moreover, the accounts discussed in this article evince particular tensions in response to a culturally predominant model of how aspiring young Chinese are expected to go about their individual development.

In what follows, five anthropological approaches to temporal experience in the present human condition are placed into dialogue with my empirical findings (Bourdieu 2000; Connerton 2009; Friedman 1994; Liu 2002; Miyazaki 2006). I follow Connerton and Friedman in arguing that modern, striving individuals are particularly invested in the future and disposed to pursue personal development towards projected futures. The vivid ethnographies of Liu Xin (2002) and Miyazaki (2006) are used to compare different temporal ways of finding oneself "caught up in things." Finally, I engage with Bourdieu's concept of protention as a temporal mode (2000) throughout the article and show that the future-orientation of my informants lacked the self-assurance that protention implies.

The discussion below is based on interviews and conversations with elite university students in Beijing, Shanghai, and Aarhus (Denmark). My informant group includes 22 students from top PRC universities including Beijing, Fudan, and Shanghai Jiaotong University

1 The research for this article was made possible by research grants from the Carlsberg Foundation and the Aarhus University Research Foundation. I would like to thank Günter Schucher of the *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* and the three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions.

who attended Aarhus University in 2013 either to do temporary exchange studies (generally one or two semesters), or to complete master's degrees or PhD programmes there. The group consists of 14 female and 8 male students. The majority of master's and PhD students were male and working in the natural sciences; the nine exchange students were all female and concentrated in the social sciences. The group also includes one student of journalism and one student of history.

The majority of the students described their socio-economic background as middle class. They were all relying on the financial support of their parents to go abroad and expected living costs to be about CNY 50,000 per semester. The exchange students benefitted from free tuition due to exchange agreements, while the majority of "full-degree" students (those seeking to earn a degree directly from Aarhus University) were financially supported by stipends. Except for one young woman, who had spent a semester in Canada, this was the first extended stay abroad for each of the informants.

In April 2013 the international offices at Aarhus University helped me distribute an introductory letter about the project to 35 prospective students. The letter made it clear that participation was voluntary and that whether or not they took part in the study would not in any way influence their admissions process, in which I had no part. Thirty students wrote me back expressing their interest, while five never replied. I omitted another eight students from the study (either because they had already lived in Denmark for several years or because they were to attend classes and live far from Aarhus), leaving me 22 informants. I had the chance to meet 13 of them prior to their leaving China and made contact with the remaining group as soon as possible after their arrival. In this first round of interviews, in summer 2013, we mainly discussed their expectations concerning their stay abroad. I then undertook a second round of interviews, in November and December 2013, in which we discussed their current experiences of living and studying in Aarhus, how these compared to their original expectations, and how they thought these experiences would influence their future. Each interview (both rounds) was semi-structured and lasted about 50 minutes. For the second round of interviews, I prepared individual interview guides for each informant that took into account the content of our earlier discussions. The topic of temporality sprung organically from informant responses to

open-ended questions regarding their expectations, purposes, and experiences living abroad.

Time played a crucial role in their accounts. On the one hand, their accounts related to what I call below the modern imaginary of time-as-progress in its specific, contemporary PRC version. This was a common theme in their reflections prior to going abroad. On the other hand, and while abroad, they often spoke of time in experiential, phenomenological terms. They spoke of time as something that moves at different speeds, in different rhythms, as something you may grasp, or which may drag you along. They spoke of impatience, restlessness, and calming down, of personal change, development, and maturation. Such reflections occurred with informants across gender lines, academic levels, and disciplines (for example, a male PhD student told me he was impressed with the clear partitioning of work and free time he experienced in Aarhus, while a female master's student declared that restlessness was a central property of Chinese student life). However, it was with the exchange students that the contrast in temporal experience was strongest. This was the case, first, because their reasons for going abroad were the most open-ended and, second, because their reflections on life abroad were heightened by the fast-approaching prospect of returning to China. The accounts of the exchange students had most to offer for the present theoretical topic, contrasting temporal modes of life, and for this reason I focus in the final sections of this article primarily on their accounts.

Temporal experience is intimately connected to the life spaces that people find themselves inhabiting. This is mirrored in the language we use when speaking of time, filled as it is with metaphors of spatial movement (e.g. Connerton 2009; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Munn 1992). To understand what studying abroad means to Chinese students, I consequently argue that we need to pay attention to this dimension of change in their environment (cf. Cwerner 2001). I mean this in both the literal sense of the physical, material environment, and in the existential sense of the social, experiential environment. With a municipal population of approximately 320,000 inhabitants, Aarhus is Denmark's second city. The city centre is dominated by five-storey buildings dating from the early twentieth century. In comparison with, say, Beijing, Aarhus has a quaint, small-town air to it. Its life environment is qualitatively different from that of Beijing. There

is more open space, less movement, less crowding, and there are fewer people; there is less noise and more silence, and one can usually see across longer distances. The environment of Beijing, by comparison, is oversaturated: crowded with people, cluttered with traffic, and dense with sound. Air is a topic unto itself. It is the most visible reminder of manmade pollution and the cause of Premier Li Keqiang's recently announced "war on pollution."

Reflecting on urban life in China, virtually every single one of my informants turned to the set phrase *ren tai duo* (人太多): there are too many people. In their accounts, *ren tai duo* was experienced as physical crowding, but it also implied environmental deterioration and the intensification of societal pressure and interpersonal competition. The saturation of space carried with it the acceleration of time in a race to not fall behind, but keep up, go forward, progress. By contrast, in Denmark they felt their lives were slowing down.

Below I argue that the ambitions of individual development among young people are channelled in particular ways in contemporary China. Striving to get ahead, and spurred by the fear of falling behind (Kipnis 2006; Yan 2013), they are drawn into a culturally idealised temporal arrangement of "how one is supposed to go about advancing." I call this arrangement "the temporal sequence of advancing" and argue that studying abroad can be understood as a step in this sequence.

In the following section, I show that the relocation to a new life environment prompted my informants to reflect critically upon the temporal predicament of their lives as students in the Chinese context. I argue that we can discern a specific temporal anxiety (and attendant feelings of restlessness and impatience) at the heart of their complaints. This is the anxiety that, although the temporal sequence of advancing promises that mental and physiological overexertion in the present is a passing sacrifice with the goal of eventually obtaining attractive employment, it will instead prove to be a constant mode of being: a future of ceaseless urgency. I will call this "the temporal mode of ceaseless striving." Treating the temporal experience of Chinese elite students as a pronounced inflection of an increasingly global temporal mode of striving, the article concludes by reflecting on the temporality of the present human condition. But let us first consider how the notion of progress is woven into PRC public discourse on studying abroad.

Studying Abroad in the Modern Imaginary of Time-As-Progress

Our understanding of time takes different forms. Clocks measure its passing as a succession of identical chunks, but we also confer shape and social meaning onto it. Nature furnishes us with biological birth, growth, decline, and death, day, night, and seasonal rhythms, to which we have added the institutional time-reckoning of calendars that mark common days of work, of rest, and of political or religious commemoration (cf. Adam 2006). The cyclical time of the 12-month calendar (and that of the 60-year Chinese lunar-calendar cycle), however, is encompassed within the larger narrative structure of national history and world history – within stories of struggles, of setbacks, of crises, and, above all, of progress.

In contemporary China, the future is only rarely, in all earnestness, projected as belonging to the specific stages predicted by historical materialism (Dirlik 1996: 251; Hansen 2011: 364). As is the case in most places integrated into the global capitalist economy throughout the world, the more generally modernist trope of time-as-progress, nonetheless, holds sway in public discourse. Even as the endpoint of progress now seems indeterminable, teleological euphemisms are still used to tell apart places and people that are logically contemporaneous (cf. Aronsson 2004). Time is plotted onto the geopolitical map when distinguishing modern countries from developing countries, and international rivalry is framed as a question of catching up with, and eventually surpassing, the developed countries. The western regions of Chinese national territory are said to have fallen behind, and Chinese citizens are not infrequently divided into the *xianjin* (先进) and the *houjin* (后进): those who advance first and those who advance afterwards – or, simply, the advanced and the backwards.

Higher education is widely regarded as the means to catching up and getting ahead at both the individual and the national level. As Andrew Kipnis has shown, this rush for higher education is a global trend that is particularly pronounced in the PRC (Kipnis 2011). Young Chinese today are encouraged on a national scale to develop the nation by developing individually. Students at elite universities are met with the further expectation that they, owing to their outstanding talents, shoulder a particular responsibility for future national pro-

gress (Hansen 2013). This temporal imaginary plays a significant role in both state and individual accounts of the purpose of education in general and of studies abroad in particular.

As Vanessa Fong has pointed out, the term “abroad” here needs to be qualified. In the context of higher education, abroad does not simply signify any place outside the national borders: it means precisely “the developed world” (Fong 2011). As Western countries are considered to be, on the whole, more developed than China, the state encourages students to build up their talents there. The plan is to foster brilliant, innovative minds that can help a developing nation become developed, whether by returning to China or by entering global networks that may facilitate this passage.

There exists, in sum, both a dominant institutional orientation towards geopolitics and education, and particular discursive formations that cluster around the central motif of time-as-progress. The topic of time in this discursive sense is central to understanding Chinese students’ decisions to go abroad. It provides them with a vocabulary of temporal distinctions with which to express degrees of socio-economic fitness in relation to the contemporary global economy, it proposes ways of bridging poor and rich in terms of temporal processes, and it suggests culturally acceptable narrative structures for framing their individual purposes within studying abroad.

Making the Most of Time: Striving, Urgency, and Restlessness

My informants had obtained entry into top PRC universities after years of diligent studies culminating in *gaokao* (高考), the National University Entrance Exam. In terms of total hours spent either at school, at home doing homework, or taking extracurricular classes, high school had been their most intense period of study. On average, they reported having spent approximately 70 hours a week studying during high school. This was a formidable investment of time with the distinct purpose of enhancing *gaokao* performance.

Workloads were considerably lower in the initial years at university, but the students were now confronted with new options for advancement, such as going abroad to study, which entailed figuring out whether to go, where to go, how to apply, and how to win out over competitors applying for the same stipends. Tang Xiaoli (An-

onymous 1 2013, pseudonyms are used for all informants), a 23-year-old student from Fudan University, explained that going abroad had become quite the thing to do:

When I was in high school from 2006 to 2008 there were people who went abroad to study, but it was still relatively rare. It now seems as if every second student goes abroad. They are just following the trend: it looks as if everyone else is going abroad to pick up a diploma, it looks as if this will make finding a job easier. (Anonymous 1 2013)

However, she continued, this was not unproblematic since

a diploma from abroad does not hold the kind of appeal it used to. They may be faced with defeat because it really is not clear to them why they are going. (Anonymous 1 2013)

You should be clear about your purpose, she argued, for only in this way could you really profit from what she believed to be the superior academic standards abroad.

Two of Xiaoli's observations spoke of the purposeful deployment of time, of making the most of time. First, she spoke of attaining an attractive job as the purpose of studying abroad. My informants were in universal agreement that overseas qualifications were of great importance to prospective employers. However, Xiaoli was not alone, either, in pointing out that the times have changed: a diploma from abroad – in itself – is no longer a guarantee of attractive employment. The logic of diploma inflation described by Vanessa Fong plays out here on the transnational scene (Fong 2004). With their eyes set on an upper-middle-class life that is accessible only to a minority, it appeared to my informants that some kind of overseas credential was simply an expected minimum in the eyes of prospective employers. Against the societal backdrop of *ren tai duo*, attractive employment was seen as a scarce resource, which implied that one had to make the most of one's time to get ahead of the competition.

Paul Connerton argues that the human condition within capitalist modernity is temporally peculiar in the prominence it extends to the future. The past, he claims, is losing power to determine the present. Instead, the present is increasingly experienced in anticipation of some future that appears as the "cause" of the present (Connerton 2009: 3; cf. Beck 1992; Stafford 2013). I take this relationship to hold whenever choices in the present take place in conformity with some

strategically projected future. For the case at hand, the projected future structuring present choices logically appears to be that of already having become a successful, white-collar member of the upper-middle class. Such goals of personal achievement, according to Yan Yunxiang, have become more or less universal among aspiring young Chinese (Yan 2013).

The actual process of reaching for this future can be broken down into a number of steps. Xu Pengfei, a master's student from China University of Political Science and Law who felt she had undergone profound personal change while living abroad, put it this way:

I now feel that life has a lot of different potentials. Formerly, I would probably just have followed the prescribed sequence in a step-by-step fashion (一步一步按部就班, *yibu yibu an bu jiu ban*): study from an early age, do an internship, and after that I would write my thesis, find work, and then take the Civil Service Examination. In China, this is a very common phenomenon. (Anonymous 2 2013)

Pengfei explained that this was what her parents expected of her, and that it was typical for students today. The expectation that the individual child should go through this sequence may be said to emerge from the interplay of familial investments in the child and the public praise for expert university candidates (Kipnis 2011). As Terry Woronov has argued, university education is regarded as the principal avenue to socio-economic mobility (Woronov 2011; cf. Ling 2015), and parental expectations (as is the case in most places) continue to exert great influence on the life choices of young Chinese (e.g. Liu 2008).

Pengfei's account suggested that there is a conventionally accepted script in place regarding the deployment of time for aspiring young Chinese. I will call this the temporal sequence of advancing. By this I mean a culturally idealised arrangement of "how one is expected to go about advancing" that comes to act as a reference point in individual reflection. And with the contemporary pervasiveness of studying abroad in mind, I argue that we may add "study abroad" as one more step to the ideal sequence suggested by Xu Pengfei: attend preschool, primary school, middle school, and high school, all while doing extracurricular activities; sit for the *gaokao*; go to university; study abroad; find an internship; become a member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and do the Civil Service Examination (op-

tional); obtain attractive employment. In each phase of this sequence, the individual is subject to assessment and enters into competition with his or her peers. This is how the advanced are filtered out from among the remaining candidates.

Does this temporal arrangement make for a distinct experience of time? Jonathan Friedman has labelled modernism the dominant position in the identity space of capitalist modernity. What he means by this is “an identity without fixed content other than the capacity to develop itself, movement and growth as a principle of selfhood” (Friedman 1994: 91; cf. Rose 1998). If this seems exceptionally overstated (we could say, for example, that the very fact of being the child of someone acts as a fixed content because of the reciprocal obligations entailed by this relationship), it is because Friedman is creating a sociological ideal type, rather than describing any single, existing individual. And the temporal dimension of this ideal type is very much to the point for my present purposes. Prior to going abroad, Xu Pengfei’s future seemed stretched out in front of her, each period already filled by an established purpose, the success of which depended on her diligence. The successful passage through this sequence would require, in Friedman’s terms, a continuous process of accumulation of self (Friedman 1994: 91–92).

In Pengfei’s account in the above, the end goal of advancing was to attain an attractive job, and my informants had been progressing successfully along this route so far. They were, after all, students at top universities on their way to study in a “developed country.” Most of them were, however, also forthright about the downside to this “ethics of striving” (Yan 2013). Ma Mingzhou, a 27-year-old master’s student from Fudan University, expressed her grievances in comparison with what she took to be a central facet of a Western-value outlook, the pursuit of happiness. The Chinese outlook probably still overemphasised success in career pursuits, she told me: “That is to say, success in your job: Can you get a better position? Can you get a job where you make more money?” (Anonymous 3 2013) The reason for this mindset, she argued, stemmed from both parental and individual expectations, and from the unequal resource distribution in society.

In her account, life was heavy with burdens:

For example, you will be under the stress of having to obtain a residence, and after marrying and having a child, you will be under

the stress of having to pay for the child's education. In your future, you will have the burden of retirement. (Anonymous 3 2013)

I asked her if she meant the need to set money aside for a pension, and she confirmed this, before concluding,

There is layer upon layer of stress that has people constantly working (层层压力就让他们要一直不停地去工作, *cengcengde yali jiu rang tamen yao yizhi butingde qu gongzuo*), constantly pursuing a higher position and more money to give them a sense of security. (Anonymous 3 2013)

Li Zhenyuan, who studied at China University of Political Science and Law, expressed a similar sentiment:

There is no way of slowing down – you try to think of how to slow down and not have to run after things in that way (你是试着去停下来不那么追赶, *ni shi shizhe qu tingxialai bu name zhuigan*), but your objective conditions do not permit this. (Anonymous 4a 2013)

It is important to note here with Pierre Bourdieu that we should not confuse the temporality of living towards a projected future that shapes present decisions with the more subtly anticipatory temporal mode of protention. Following Husserl, Bourdieu writes of protention that it is “a pre-reflexive aiming at a forthcoming which offers itself as a quasi-present in the visible, like the hidden faces of a cube” (Bourdieu 2000: 207). The temporal mode of protention requires sufficient familiarity with the social game in question to allow the actor to pre-reflexively foresee and adjust to the unfolding of events. As temporal modes, protention and the project both entail a preoccupation with the future. Protention is a question of immersion in the self-evidence of the imminent, of feeling at home in things as they gradually develop. A projected future, on the other hand, is a contingent end goal that one is striving to realise. It is a “not yet” struggling to become an “is” without recourse to the self-assurances concerning what is to come that characterises the temporal mode of protention. We may use the phrase “a sense of security” from Mingzhou's account in the above to pinpoint the contrast: protention implies a sense of security in one's orientation to the future, a sense of security that her account lacked.

The frantic activity suggested by Mingzhou's and Zhenyuan's accounts has a parallel in Liu Xin's discussion of the temporality of

doing business in South China. According to Liu, his entrepreneur-informants inhabited a “mobile-ponic space” of constantly being reachable, of immediacy and urgency (Liu 2002: 160–161). But whereas the majority of Liu’s informants appear entirely adapted to a mode of temporal being, in which each moment is rife with the potential for strategic action, unencumbered by any past, and has no end in sight, my student-informants, on the contrary, were unsteadied by the prospect of a future of constant urgency. In this they were closer to Hirokazu Miyazaki’s ethnography of a Tokyo businessman, whose commitment to work in the present was consistently tied to his shifting imaginary future exits from work (Miyazaki 2006). The issue raised in both cases is that of finding it impossible to “get out.” In Mingzhou’s and Zhenyuan’s accounts, the problem raised is exactly that in the constant struggle to advance, no endpoint appears in sight, only further layers of stress. Below I will refer to this as the temporal mode of ceaseless striving. And to spell out the existential problem, what is at stake is that the end goal to advancing threatens to disappear and leave in its stead constant, relentless striving – in pursuit of a self ahead of oneself, unto death.

Liu Yingqi, a master’s student from China University of Geosciences, had a precise word for this feeling:

I do not know if you know this word or not, *fuzao* (浮躁). *Fuzao* is what it is like in China. How do you say this in English? It means you are anxious every day, worried and restless. The meaning is something like “not being able to come to a rest while absorbed in doing something” (不能沉心下来很专注地去做一件事情, *buneng chenxin xialai hen zhuanzhude qu zuo yijian shiqing*). (Anonymous 5 2013)

While Yingqi spoke about being preoccupied with the things of the world, the emotive tone of this preoccupation was clearly at odds with that of protention in the sense of Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu, we should consider protention the predominant human temporal mode – attuned to, invested in, and at home in the gradual unfolding of everyday life (Bourdieu 2000: 208–209). But there was no such ease, playfulness, or assurance regarding the future in Yingqi’s account: it spoke instead of restlessness and urgency. As a rule, people find it impossible to feel at ease if constantly reaching towards a receding horizon. Consequently, I argue that the restlessness (*fuzao*) Yingqi spoke of is set in motion by a frustrated desire to immediately

reach the elusive endpoint of advancing, or alternatively, by a desire to deviate altogether from this course.

Digression

In the above, I argued that a social imaginary of time-as-progress dominates public discourse in contemporary China, and suggested an ideal-type model for how aspiring students are expected to go about their individual development. I then raised the issue of the unhappiness that several of my informants experienced in response to this temporal arrangement. This unhappiness is important for the present discussion because it helps us understand why a number of the students dissociated from what they considered to be the general picture when they explained their individual motives for going abroad.

There are a number of reasons why young Chinese go abroad to study. According to the students I spoke with, it was primarily a means for people to add to their personal résumés and help them find attractive employment. For a minority – the truly talented, they suggested – it was fuelled by a more “genuine” desire to develop intellectually in an environment more conducive to this end. Some had their eyes set on emigrating, or went out to test whether relocating would be viable for them in the future. There were those who went out to escape the pressure, and those who went out to see the world, to open up new avenues of thought and become more independent, those who would broaden their horizons.

My informants were all sympathetic to the appeal on the part of the Chinese state that transnational students should use the talents they develop abroad for the greater good of the nation. After all, the state had invested in their upbringing and education. Whether or not you eventually returned to the PRC, they nonetheless held, was best left as an individual decision. This is to say that, while understanding of the entreaty, they did not feel personally obliged to take the national good into account when planning their futures. The students’ accounts were in this way subtly distanced from the ideal storyline of studying abroad that is promoted by Chinese state policy, which is unsurprising if read keeping in mind Yan Yunxiang’s diagnosis that we are witnessing the individualisation of Chinese society (Yan 2009).

Of more immediate concern, however, are the other ways in which the students dissociated from what they presented as the gen-

eral picture. Only one informant, Gao Hongzhen, directly identified with the purpose of going abroad as a way to add to her personal résumé. It had been a future plan of hers to do a master's degree in the US, but she had second thoughts. The opportunity costs of studying abroad, as she put it, in the vocabulary of finance, were simply too high when compared with the amassing of connections that an internship in China would offer. She bluntly called the popular trope of broadening one's horizons while abroad "big, but empty talk" (大而空话, *da er kong hua*). In this, Hongzhen was the exception.

The phrase "to broaden my horizons" (开阔/开拓视野, *kaikuo/kaituo shiye*) was ubiquitous when my other informants explained their motives to go abroad. And it was usually followed by a disavowal of the "general picture": while most students go abroad only to get a diploma, I am going to broaden my horizons. I will treat this statement with less cynicism than did Hongzhen. Instead, I will make two observations on why it is important. First, several of my informants held that they had undergone profound personal maturation during their stay abroad, and based on my experiences with them, I am inclined to agree. Li Zhenyuan, for example, struck me as a different person in December than the person I had met in July. Her comportment was calmer, her speech more self-assured. She had changed in a socially recognisable way. Second, the fact that virtually everyone I spoke to employed this phrase pointed to a broader desire to uncover alternatives to the temporal mode of ceaseless striving.

For the exchange students, the very choice of applying to Aarhus University was in two ways at odds with the ideal of accruing expert academic competences abroad. For one, Aarhus University does not possess the global recognition of a number of well-known, particularly American and British universities. Chinese people do not immediately associate the name of this institution with elite academic standards, and the students accordingly gave other reasons for applying to Aarhus University. That it appeared in the top 100 in some university-ranking tables, but was generally unknown to Chinese students, was strategically important. My informants surmised that there would be less competition in the application process, but that the school would still offer access to relatively high academic standards. The choice of Aarhus was a realistic compromise between their ambitions and their view of the competition.

Impressions of Denmark, of Scandinavia, and of Europe in general played an equally important part in their choice of destination. Denmark was associated with welfare and social equality, a healthy and green environment, and a happy, affluent population (as they had seen it reported in the OECD's global happiness surveys). Life was expected to be more relaxed and less competitive in Europe than in either China or the United States. And the high satisfaction with life in Denmark was understood in connection with these supposed socio-cultural differences. Denmark was an attractive choice to the students because of a set of imagined qualities of the social, cultural, and natural environment that did not really speak to optimising their competitive edge.

It is no surprise that students who chose to apply to study in Scandinavia should present Europe as more attractive than the United States. But the terms of the contrast are of interest, particularly as the same terms often appeared when they compared Scandinavia to China. Compared to China, the tempo of life in Scandinavia was expected to be slower, it was thought there would be less societal pressure and that competition would be less intense, and Scandinavian people were expected to be more carefully fostering enjoyable lives. With this in mind, my exchange student informants as well as, to some extent, the master's students can be said to have been preparing themselves to digress from the straight road of progress. Most of the exchange students purposely chose only the minimum number of required courses during their stay in Aarhus, and spent their holidays travelling across Europe. And so the horizon metaphor of studying abroad shows its relevance. It is impossible to digress if you can see only straight ahead.

Responding to Not-Yet-Purposeful Time

Empty Space

When I discussed with the exchange students what kind of impressions their life abroad had left on them, they raised the topic of inhabiting a new environment in both the physical and the experiential sense. If the environments of Beijing and Shanghai, as suggested in the introduction, can be characterised as oversaturated, the relocation to Aarhus involved the emptying out and opening up of their life

environment. In tandem with this, time was experienced as slowing down.

For example, He Fei, a 20-year-old student from Shanghai Jiao-tong University, pointed out the differences in terms of population density: “The contrast with China is huge. It is not crowded here at all, so I feel quite relaxed” (Anonymous 6 2013). Li Zhenyuan brought up the same contrast when she compared the scenic spots in the area to those of Beijing:

There are basically no people. Whether you go to a museum or to some scenic place, there will be few people, so you can enjoy the open space around you. You can go about it very attentively as there will not be anyone pushing you ahead. It will not be noisy, either. (Anonymous 4b 2013)

Lin Yuhua, similarly, brought up the connection between the socio-spatial environment and temporal experience when I asked her what kind of impression her stay had left upon her. She told me that she felt the rhythm of life was much slower:

Everything is slower, including studying and socialising. Everything feels as if it takes place in a slower rhythm. When I speak with people it is slow because my English is not that good, and when I read articles it is also slow. When Danish people interact with me, they also speak slowly. (Anonymous 7 2013)

I asked her whether this was because she was a foreigner, and she agreed, before elaborating further:

Moreover, it is people here in general – when I see people on the street, they are also quite leisurely, not hurried or impatient. So I feel my entire person has calmed down (感觉整个人是沉下来的, *ganjue zhengge ren shi chenxialaide*). (Anonymous 7 2013)

Few, if any, of my informants had ever lived on their own before, and this represented a monumental change for Yuhua:

It is not like the collective life space of a Chinese dormitory, where you do everything together, and you are four people sleeping together as well. You simply have no private space. I have never had that. In China you do not have this kind of space. (Anonymous 7 2013)

She felt she inhabited her life environment in a new, less inhibited way:

Let me give you an example: in a Chinese university dorm, you cannot do whatever you feel like. As a very simple example, you cannot just casually change your clothes. You have to go to your bunk bed and close the drapes before doing so. This is very simple, but it has to do with the way you are familiar with your own body, right? Here in Aarhus it is very simple: you have a room, and if you are the only one in the room, you feel unrestrained. You can do whatever you feel like doing. In Beijing, I have never experienced this way of living. (Anonymous 7 2013)

It was not, she explained, that she felt that her roommates had been actively watching her. Still, their presence had profoundly influenced her life: “If there are people listening to everything you say and do, you will definitely be self-aware of your every word and action” (Anonymous 7 2013).

Calming Down

A typical phrase used by my informants when speaking of life abroad was “calming down” (沉下来, *chen xialai*). It was used as the counterpoint to the “restlessness” (*fuzao*) discussed above. When I asked Yuhua what she meant by calming down, she again connected the slowing of time to her new socio-spatial environment:

It means “more peaceful.” It means that you have plenty of time to think about things. I feel this has to do with living on my own because I have spent the past five years in a shared environment. You would very rarely sit on your own and reflect. This kind of time was very limited, but here there is plenty of time for this. (Anonymous 7 2013)

For Yuhua, the coincidence of empty time and empty space came to mean time and space available for self-reflection. I asked her if this way of life did not make her feel lonely, and she told me she occasionally did, “but sometimes I think that going a day without speaking makes me feel quite happy” (Anonymous 7 2013).

Yuhua’s fondness for solitude was especially pronounced, and my informants, of course, engaged in many social activities. They attended classes. They regularly cooked dinners with – and travelled across Europe in – smaller groups of (predominantly) Chinese students. Social intercourse with the local population was generally considered difficult because of language barriers, and only one of the exchange students, Ma Mingzhou, could be said to have entered into

a wider circle of Danish friends. The Danes were more often a topic of conversation among the exchange students than party to a conversation with them. My reason for pointing this out is not to argue that no cultural interchange occurred, but rather to argue that, to most of my informants, the novel temporal experience of their lives abroad set more in motion in terms of personal reflection and change than did conversations with locals.

My informants found themselves with an unusual amount of time on their hands. Moreover, they found themselves inhabiting an expanse of time that was not already saturated with a specifically valued purpose, but remained open to different potential uses. The students faced few expectations as to how they ought to spend this time, and, in this sense, much time abroad was experienced as empty – and therefore available time. This is what I mean when I claim they inhabited a horizon of “not-yet-purposeful” time. And this was experienced as strikingly different from the temporal mode of ceaseless striving discussed above.

At this point, it is useful to contrast the creative potential I claim for not-yet-purposeful time with Bourdieu’s somewhat disparaging view of “free time” in the sense of time that is divested of our everyday preoccupations with “things that need to be done.” For Bourdieu, free time did not make for a more direct – because “openly attentive” – experience of the world. He regarded it, rather, as somewhat artificial because of its detachment from the predominant temporal mode of already being invested in and preoccupied by the things of the world – meaning, protention (Bourdieu 2000: 224). Below, I highlight a different facet of not-yet-purposeful time – namely, that this distance from everyday preoccupations is exactly what allows for a creative rearrangement of one’s purposes and “things that need to be done.”

Not-Yet-Purposeful Time

Above, we have seen informants bring out the phenomenological link between the saturation of space with motion, sound, and commotion, and the experience of urgency (cf. Connerton 2009; Sloterdijk 2014: 955–956). If this relationship holds at the level of sensory experience, Xu Pengfei instead pointed to the relationship between temporality and socio-cultural engagements. In the first few weeks of her stay in Aarhus, she had felt alienated:

When I had just arrived there were some days when I felt that *this was not my life*, that I was just a transient. It was a kind of feeling that whatever I saw was all “other people’s business,” it had nothing to do with me. (Anonymous 2 2013)

This account is highly significant when read with Bourdieu’s central thesis on temporality in mind: “Practice is not *in* time but *makes* time (human time, as opposed to biological or astronomical time)” (Bourdieu 2000: 206). The less comprehensible, in linguistic and cultural terms, the goings-on in one’s socio-cultural environment are, and the less they impinge upon one’s life with the force of necessity, the more likely they are to be passed over, with Pengfei’s phrase, as “other people’s business.” And when the socio-cultural environment inspires fewer concerns – fewer “things that need to be done” – human time slows down.

My exchange student informants’ position as socio-cultural outsiders was conducive to the slowing of time for three reasons. They were, first, removed from the concerns of parents and peers, and from PRC cultural conventions regarding how one is expected to go about advancing. Second, many of the goings-on in their new environment were not readily comprehensible to them and therefore did not readily invite their engagement. Third, these goings-on rarely impinged upon them with the force of necessity, since neither their personal safety nor their financial security was ever at risk.

Calming down follows this decrease in concerns, but so do, potentially, boredom and feelings of futility. Empty time, in this sense, demands a response from the individual to be filled with meaning and purpose. This demand would be impossible to circumvent indefinitely, but the internet, of course, offers up abundant distraction, and the knowledge of having a specific return date, likewise, makes it possible to “bracket off” time abroad as just so many purposeless days. However, no such direct dismissal of the foreign experience could be said to be the case for any of my informants.

Tang Xiaoli and Gao Hongzhen were perhaps the least able or willing to respond in an existentially favourable way to their new conditions. For example, Xiaoli, during her first few weeks in Aarhus, experienced the place as desolate. When I asked in the second round of interviews what kind of influence the students thought their stays abroad would exert on their futures, she was ultimately the only student who stated that her stay would enhance her personal résumé.

She hereby established the significance of her stay abroad, at least partly, within the parameters of the temporal sequence of advancing.

Gao Hongzhen, for her part, was ambivalent about the provincality of Denmark (and most of Europe for that matter) when compared to Shanghai. This was palpable in a story she chose to tell me, when I asked her whether her impression of the West had changed during her stay. “Here is something we Chinese students make fun of,” she told me:

I heard this story from a Danish fellow student: There was a young man from the Danish countryside – I cannot remember where. When he got into Aarhus University, he was very happy and said, “I will finally leave my village and enter a big vibrant city full of people.” Later on he went on a trip to Shanghai, just for fun, and then, in our railway station – in Shanghai South Station – he was totally overwhelmed. The place was just too big, there were too many people. And he was shocked out of his wits and took hundreds of photos of the place. This is really funny to us Chinese students, because to us, Shanghai South Station is a very dirty and disorderly place (脏乱差的地方, *zangluancha de difang*). (Anonymous 8 2013)

It is the note of disbelief that makes this story humorous: Can you believe that anyone would consider Aarhus a busy place full of people? No, Shanghai South Station, as the story’s protagonist discovers, is a truly busy place. Besides driving home the point that social density is relative, there is a hint of metropolitan condescension towards the provincial in the story. And yet the truly metropolitan locality is also judged as lacking.

The Chinese students sharing the story need not have been to Shanghai South Station to understand it. It is sufficient that you know of the life environment of a busy Chinese metropolis in general for you to visualise a huge space densely packed with people in motion when listening to the story. I suggest we may therefore read “Shanghai South Station” as an index of the oversaturation of the life environment that is characteristic of much of urban China. With this reading, we see that the story does not so much claim the superiority of the metropolis as it simply reinstates its inevitable realism. The story suggests the drag of realism from an accustomed life environment: this is our railway station, this is our world.

This interpretation is consistent with Hongzhen’s argument on another occasion, when she described to me how outlandish the way

young people in Aarhus spent their time seemed to her. In Shanghai, the time she spent with friends was usually time “on the way to something else.” It was not like in Aarhus, where she had seen people spend whole afternoons drinking coffee. If she were to do that, she told me, her heart would not feel at ease since this time could have been spent more productively. I cannot help but point out how this echoes Weber’s depiction of the man filled by the spirit of capitalism, for whom business with its continuous work has become a necessary part of life (Weber 2002: 32). The unhappy tone of Weber’s depiction of the capitalist spirit was also present in Hongzhen’s narrative. Her account spoke to the “objective necessity” rather than the “ethical superiority” of making the most of time, as she finished by saying that everybody wants a relaxing life, but this is just not possible. The comfort and slow pace of life that she perceived among young people in Aarhus, while attractive, seemed impossible to integrate into a viable vision of her personal future.

Reworking the Purposeful

It was a common claim of my informants that they had become more independent by living abroad. They had all proved adaptable to a new environment, honed their English skills, become better at socialising with strangers, and managed to individually organise their lives. But personal maturation, to some, implied more than these useful skills. To Xu Pengfei and Li Zhenyuan, it meant rearranging their values and purposes in life.

Zhenyuan told me in our second discussion that she had not really been earnest in her studies since her main reason for going had not been to study, but to broaden her horizons. And even though the stay had lasted only a few months, she claimed it had profoundly influenced her:

I really think the influence is huge in relation to my life, my value outlook, my perception of things. My life has probably been more influenced by the few months here than it would have been by living several years in China. (Anonymous 4b 2013)

When I asked her to explain how her thoughts about life had changed, she immediately explained it in terms of a reaction against the temporal mode of life as a student in the Chinese context:

I feel that I cherish life more. I have become better at enjoying life. Formerly, in China, you would unwittingly feel restless and anxious because competition is really intense. There is a lot of stress. Sometimes you, yourself, would make great efforts, and sometimes you would be pushed to go forward. If you did not keep up, you would fall behind because everyone is rushing forwards. So you would blindly expend an excessive amount of energy on completing the next goal, the one after that, and the one after that. In this process you are very rarely able to come to a rest, to slow down, to look around you and enjoy life. After I came here, I realised that life is not a process of mutual competition about who reaches the next step first. You should cherish each period in your life. (Anonymous 4b 2013)

Xu Pengfei, similarly, explained her self-development in terms of taking upon herself a new temporal mode of being: “I feel I am more inclined to slow down my pace, to pursue some joy in life, or more quality in life” (Anonymous 2 2013). When I asked her what she meant by pursuing quality in life, her reply also evinced a rejection of having to constantly strive to reach the next goal:

I think I used to live too hurriedly. It was as if your entire life revolved around different, constantly changing issues. I am now more willing to think of each thing as an integral constituent of life – I will arrange each part, and together they will make up my entire life. I will perhaps have work, studies, friends, leisure activities, and time to myself. These things all have their own rhythm, and put together they make up a life. Life should not be thought of only as “having to finish this or that thing”; it should not be lived in a day-to-day fashion like that. (Anonymous 2 2013)

The central message in both accounts was existential. The good life could not be singularly oriented towards future goals. It was rather one in which you were present in the present, responsive to the situations you found yourself in and the people you found yourself with.

I experienced the changes that Zhenyuan and Pengfei had undergone as maturation when we spoke in December. And I argue that these changes were set in motion in response to their changing temporal conditions. It was through the descent into not-yet-purposeful time that they were able to rework what purposeful existence meant. Pengfei’s account of inhabiting her new environment suggested an existential dialectic that was simultaneously a story of “acclimatisation.” It first seemed to her as if her life abroad was not her life. Soon

afterward, there was a period in which everything had the charm of novelty, and in which the openness of space (such as empty lawns, wide beaches, and clear skies) made her especially happy. Then she was bored and depressed for a while,

but after that I found that I increasingly liked living here. This is to say, that I knew what its beautiful dimensions were, and what its boring dimensions were. And then I thought, “Now that I know all this, I am able to take it in,” now I am more willing to *inhabit this place and live here* (而且我更愿意容身其中过生活, *erqie wo geng yuanyi rongshen qizhong guo shenghuo*), and not just be a spectator. (Anonymous 2 2013)

In Hirokazu Miyazaki’s ethnography mentioned in the above, the Tokyo businessman Tada has different and shifting dreams of how he might achieve an end to work. In almost tautological terms, Miyazaki puts it this way: “Tada imagined an exit from work, and the possibility of imagining such an exit was predicated on the possibility of seeing an end to his work” (Miyazaki 2006: 159). In January 2014, my exchange student–informants returned to China, and this, among other things, meant having to once more face the pressures and competition involved in getting ahead. In this sense, they faced a challenge similar to Tada’s: that of imagining a way out of an accustomed mode of living.

How could someone like Zhenyuan preserve her newfound dedication to another, slower mode of being? In her first account, she had specifically stated that while she was eager to slow down, her objective conditions did not permit this. Similarly, Gao Hongzhen had put it realistically, saying that everybody wants a relaxing life, but that this is just not possible. With the excerpt from Miyazaki in mind, I argue that my informants’ different responses to their changing temporal conditions had to do with whether they were able and willing to imagine a future for themselves in which they would not need to take part in the temporal mode of ceaseless striving. Hongzhen did not share anything like this with me, but Zhenyuan did. Her reflections were, in fact, quite radical considering the typical moral-geographical imagination (Liu 2000; Johnston 2013):

Before I went abroad, I could not consider returning to my native place, the small town I am from. I felt that there would be no prospects in that. That is, not having a career in a big city like Beijing, but staying in a small town, living life in a slower rhythm. I used to

dislike that idea, but I have changed. In my eyes, Beijing and Shanghai – places like that – used to be big cities. And they definitely are, but they do not appear so big in my heart any longer. I feel that they are only places fit for struggling, not for living. Actually, it is also a very good decision to return to live in a small city like my native place. (Anonymous 4b 2013)

Concluding Reflection: *Ren tai duo* and the Temporality of the Present Human Condition

In these concluding remarks, I briefly reflect upon the above discussion in light of the present global paradigm of economic growth, competition, and scarcity. To do so, I turn first to Thomas Hylland Eriksen and a quote from the late Claude Lévi-Strauss that Eriksen has used to set the stage for his current work on overheating as a social phenomenon. *Le monde est trop plein* – “The world is too full” – is what Lévi-Strauss told Nicolas Sarkozy when he was paid a visit by the former French president on his 100th birthday in December 2008. Eriksen reflects that Lévi-Strauss presumably meant that the world has become overfilled with humans and their activities:

At the time of his birth in 1908, the planet was inhabited by a grand total of 1.7 billion persons; global population now stands at 6.5 billion. (Eriksen 2009: 9–10)

The sense that the world is too full is not foreign to China. It is officially established in family-planning policy (Kipnis 2006) and repeated with every use of the set phrase *ren tai duo*. As a guest in China, you may sometimes come across uses of *ren tai duo* in which its explanatory powers seem utterly strained or overly convenient. However, there is a healthy materialist realism at the core of this notion that is at odds with contemporary commitments to indefinite growth. Each additional person on a planet with limited resources is not simply a prospective supplier of surplus value, but a definite strain on the reproductive capacities of the natural environment. In the contemporary, globally capitalist world – and paradigmatically so in China – tremendous socio-economic disparities add to this logic, so that not only are resources limited, they are distributed and consumed in extremely uneven proportions.

With this socio-economic context in mind, let me reiterate my argument. I have argued that attractive employment is treated as a

scarce resource by aspiring young Chinese. I suggested that we may discern a culturally idealised temporal arrangement of how one is expected to go about advancing that comes to act as a reference point in individual reflection. I called this the temporal sequence of advancing and argued that we may add “study abroad” as one more step to this sequence.

By way of my informant accounts, I identified *fuzhao*, restlessness, as the downside to this ethics of striving. I showed that my informants’ experience of time was strikingly different in the foreign context, and argued that their relocation to Aarhus was experienced as the emptying out and opening up of their life environment. This was partly because of the different socio-spatial quality of this new environment, partly because of their socio-cultural position as outsiders, and partly because of their planned digression and the empty time this left them. This new horizon of not-yet-purposeful time, in turn, both enabled and demanded a response from the students for it to be filled with meaning and purpose. For those who were able and willing to imagine a future in which they would not need to take part in the temporal mode of ceaseless striving, this set in motion potentially monumental personal change.

My primary analytical purpose has been to explicate *fuzhao* as the emotional downside to the temporal mode of striving, the downside to the pursuit of a future self, projected ahead of oneself. In several cases, my informants raised the issue that the objective conditions of societal pressure and interpersonal competition did not permit you to slow down but caused you to constantly pursue the next goal. There is a profound dilemma to this unhappiness, as the necessity of getting ahead is true to the extent that achieving certain personally and culturally valued goals are regarded as necessary for the good life. When a society is highly stratified in terms of resources and social recognition, Bourdieu argued, it appears to the individual as “a signposted universe, full of injunctions and prohibitions, signs of appropriation and exclusion, obligatory routes and impassable barriers” (Bourdieu 2000: 225). What I have called the temporal sequence of advancing appears, exactly, as one such “obligatory route.”

Moreover, a specific temporal anxiety identified by my informants while abroad was that what appeared as a route to an end goal threatened to, instead, turn into a constant temporal mode of striving. The problem, as described by Friedman, Liu Xin, and Miyazaki is that

this mode of temporal being, the continuous accumulation of self, becomes so central to the striving individual that “getting out” becomes unthinkable as each transient goal and each layer of stress is continuously replaced by another. On the other hand, the socio-economic conditions of contemporary China are such that falling behind may mean falling down a long way in terms of both access to resources and command over one’s life.

Connerton observes that a central facet of contemporary capitalism that sets it apart from earlier modern models of labour organisation is the spread of the temporary contract. The casualisation of labour began with blue-collar jobs, but has since extended into many white-collar sectors (Connerton 2009: 71–73; Standing 2011: 55–62). This observation holds within and beyond China, and this is of crucial theoretical significance in regards to how we should understand the temporality of the present human condition. If it is the case, as Bourdieu argued (2000: 222–224), that stable employment is the primary source of self-assurance regarding the future, the casualisation of labour implies that this temporal assurance is no longer the norm. This also suggests that the predominance of the temporal mode of protection is gradually being displaced. The temporal anxieties of aspiring young Chinese illustrate this. Their anxieties do not belong to the temporal mode of protection, but to the temporality of self-projection and ceaseless striving.

Lévi-Strauss’s observation is useful to show that Chinese elite students’ temporal experience can be understood as a particularly pronounced inflection of a temporal condition that grows increasingly global in tandem with the intensification of competition over scarce resources. An exchange stay abroad offers an opportunity for self-augmentation for middle-class students with parents who can afford, and are willing to support, their stay. This is an offer of a temporary individual respite from the temporal mode of striving, but also, perhaps, a vantage point from which to rethink the commitment to continual competition and growth that is currently fulfilling Lévi-Strauss’s melancholy vision of the world as overly full.

References

- Adam, Barbara (2006), Time, in: *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23, 119–138.
 Anonymous 1 (2013), pseudonym Tang Xiaoli, interview, 23-year old student from Fudan University, Shanghai, 15 July.

- Anonymous 2 (2013), pseudonym Xu Pengfei, interview, master student from China University of Political Science and Law, Aarhus, 29 November.
- Anonymous 3 (2013), pseudonym Ma Mingzhou, interview, 27-year old master student from Fudan University, Aarhus, 11 December.
- Anonymous 4a (2013), pseudonym Li Zhenyuan, interview, master student from China University of Political Science and Law, Beijing, 5 July.
- Anonymous 4b (2013), Aarhus, 29 November.
- Anonymous 5 (2013), pseudonym Liu Yingqi, interview, 25-year old master student from China University of Geosciences, Beijing, 21 June.
- Anonymous 6 (2013), pseudonym He Fei, interview, 20-year old student from Shanghai Jiaotong University, Aarhus, 4 December.
- Anonymous 7 (2013), pseudonym Lin Yuhua, interview, 23-year old student from Beijing University, Aarhus, 28 November.
- Anonymous 8 (2013), pseudonym Gao Hongzhen, interview, 20-year old student from Fudan University, Aarhus, 13 December.
- Aronsson, Peter (2004), *Historiebruk: At använda det förflutna (History-use: Using That Which has Passed)*, Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Beck, Ulrich (1992), *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London: Sage Publications.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (2000), Social Being, Time and the Sense of Existence, in: Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 206–245.
- Connerton, Paul (2009), *How Modernity Forgets*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cwerner, Saulo (2001), The Times of Migration, in: *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27, 1, 7–36.
- Dirlik, Arif (1996), Reversals, Ironies, Hegemonies: Notes on the Contemporary Historiography of Modern China, in: *Modern China*, 22, 3, 243–284.
- Eriksen, Thomas H. (2009), Living in an Overheated World: Otherness as a Universal Condition, in: *Acta Historica Universitatis Klajpedensis XIX, Studia Anthropologica III*, 9–24.
- Fong, Vanessa (2011), *Paradise Redefined: Transnational Chinese Students and the Quest for Flexible Citizenship in the Developed World*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- Fong, Vanessa (2004), *Only Hope: Coming of Age under China's One-Child Policy*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Friedman, Jonathan (1994), *Cultural Identity and Global Process*, London: Sage Publications.
- Hansen, Anders S. (2013), Purity and Corruption: Chinese Communist Party Applicants and the Problem of Evil, in: *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*, 78, 1, 47–74.
- Hansen, Anders S. (2011), Past and Present Pasts: Historical Labours in Modern China, in: *Memory Studies*, 4, 4, 360–369.
- Johnston, James (2013), Filial Paths and the Ordinary Ethics of Movement, in: Charles Stafford (ed.), *Ordinary Ethics in China*, London: Bloomsbury, 45–65.
- Kipnis, Andrew (2011), *Governing Educational Desire: Culture, Politics, and Schooling in China*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kipnis, Andrew (2006), Suzhi: A Keyword Approach, in: *China Quarterly*, 186, 295–313.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson (1980), *Metaphors we Live by*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Ling, Minhua (2015), Bad Students go to Vocational Schools!, in: *The China Journal*, 73, 108–131.
- Liu, Fengshu (2008), Young-adult Only-children and Intergenerational Relationships in China, in: *Young: Nordic Journal of Youth Research*, 16, 4, 409–430.
- Liu, Xin (2002), *The Otherness of Self: A Genealogy of the Self in Contemporary China*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Liu, Xin (2000), *In One's Own Shadow: An Ethnographic Account of the Condition of Post-Reform Rural China*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Miyazaki, Hirokazu (2006), Economy of Dreams: Hope in Global Capitalism and Its Critiques, in: *Cultural Anthropology*, 21, 2, 147–172.
- Munn, Nancy D. (1992), The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay, in: *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 21, 93–123.
- Rose, Nikolas (1998), *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sloterdijk, Peter (2014), *Spheres II: Globes*, Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e).

- Stafford, Charles (2013), Ordinary Ethics in China Today, in: Charles Stafford (ed.), *Ordinary Ethics in China*, London: Bloomsbury, 3–28.
- Standing, Guy (2011), *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, London: Bloomsbury.
- Thøgersen, Stig (2012), Chinese Students' Great Expectations: Prospective Pre-School Teachers on the Move, in: *Learning and Teaching*, 5, 3, 75–93.
- Weber, Max (2002), *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism and Other Writings*, London: Penguin books.
- Woronov, Terry E. (2011), Learning to Serve: Urban Youth, Vocational Schools and New Class Formations in China, in: *The China Journal*, 66, 77–99.
- Yan, Yunxiang (2013), The Drive for Success and the Ethics of the Striving Individual, in: Charles Stafford (ed.), *Ordinary Ethics in China*, London: Bloomsbury, 263–291.
- Yan, Yunxiang (2009), *The Individualization of Chinese Society*, London: Bloomsbury.

Contents

Going Out: The Lives of Chinese Students Abroad

Introduction

- Anders Sybrandt HANSEN and Stig THØGERSEN
The Anthropology of Chinese Transnational
Educational Migration 3

Research Articles

- Cora Lingling XU
When the Hong Kong Dream Meets the Anti-
Mainlandisation Discourse: Mainland Chinese Students
in Hong Kong 15
- **Anders Sybrandt HANSEN**
**The Temporal Experience of Chinese Students
Abroad and the Present Human Condition 49**
- Anni KAJANUS
Overthrowing the First Mountain: Chinese Student-
Migrants and the Geography of Power 79
- Stig THØGERSEN
“I will change things in my own small way”: Chinese
Overseas Students, “Western” Values, and Institutional
Reform 103
- Jamie COATES
“Unseeing” Chinese Students in Japan: Understanding
Educationally Channelled Migrant Experiences 125
- Yajing CHEN and Heidi ROSS
“Creating a Home away from Home”: Chinese Under-
graduate Student Enclaves in US Higher Education 155
- Herby LAI
Engagement and Reflexivity: Approaches to Chinese–
Japanese Political Relations by Chinese Students in
Japan 183

Contributors

213